

I Don't Get It. Do You?

by [Thorne](#)

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If you're familiar with great big law firms and their attorneys, I've got a good question for you.

Before I get to it, a little story:

Nearly 10 years ago, the dot-com boom went bust, and many of us found ourselves stranded. There were few jobs, and gazillions of candidates for the few jobs there were. Some of us went from having extravagant incomes, to hardly an at all — certainly not enough to live well in San Francisco.

Work would return; for sure; it would. But I wondered, “What if high tech goes haywire again? I need Option B.”

My Option B was the legal market, and for a good number of good reasons. Among them was that all the big firms had web sites and they were using them to publish lots of promotional materials. In addition to the sites themselves, there were client alerts, seminar materials, PowerPoint presentations, business proposals, news announcements and press releases, . . . lots and lots of stuff.

It struck me like this: *attorneys are authors and law firms are publishers.*

Eureka!

The legal market would be my Option B. If high tech stalled ever again, I'd be set, because great big law firms — as concerned as they are about appearances and as reliant as they are becoming on modern forms of communication — so obviously lacked not only skilled and experienced editors, but artists and designers as well.

As more modern forms of communication matured, so would the demand for people like me.

I started working Option B, and it was easy at first. After a few calls, I wound up working on a big project for a big firm in San Francisco.

After that, I came up with a little system to identify great clients with fat wallets and lots of work. I'd just visit the web sites of big firms, identify those that really needed an editor, contact the marketing director, introduce myself, and offer the assistance of a skilled and experienced editor.

It would be so easy, I thought.

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But it wasn't.

Oh, it was real easy to find fat wallets with lots of work to do.

Let me give you one good example.

Visit [the web site of Kenyon & Kenyon](#) and poke around a while. (Ignore the site's appearance, and focus on the copy.)

Some examples of what you might find:

"Internet and information technology has affected the daily lives of all of us. Whether a young start-up company with nothing but an idea or an established multinational powerhouse, each new innovation brings with it tremendous potential rewards, but also hides risks for the unwary."

Here's a line from the firm's recruiting material:

"The firm seeks candidates with excellent written and interpersonal skills"

Here's the firm's claim to be the bestest there is:

"The firm is equipped with the most preeminent intellectual property litigation group in the country."

Note: the copy at the site is very much the same today as it was years ago.

Well . . . I contacted the firm's head of marketing, introduced myself, told her what I did, and offered my assistance.

But she wasn't interested — not one bit.

So . . . I did what any reasonable person would do. I contacted the attorneys at Kenyon & Kenyon. Surely they would care that the firm's promotional materials portrayed the firm as one where writing skills weren't important, the claim to a *commitment to excellence* was blatantly bogus, and sloppy work was not only acceptable, but just the thing to impress potential clients.

Guess what? They weren't interested either (except for the **bestest there is** claim).

Wow!

Most big-firm attorneys care a lot about appearances. With few exceptions, they take pride in their personas: fancy shoes and expensive suits, stylists and manicurists, big houses and limousines.

Ditto for their big firms: fancy offices on the top floor, expensive artwork in the halls, and giant conference tables made of mahogany.

If attorneys care so much about how they appear **in person**, why are some so careless about how they appear **in print**?

I don't get it.

So here's my question: if big firm attorneys care so much about their personal appearance, if they understand the power of first impressions, if they want to be seen as careful, not careless, and their success is a function of their mastery of words, why are some so hasty with them — both ***In Print*** and ***On Line***?

I don't get it.

Do you?

*Mister Thorne is a freelance editor in San Francisco. Skilled and experienced, he does for an attorney's appearance **in print** what a stylist does for that attorney's appearance **in person**.*

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