

# Law Firm Inc.

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MARKETING |  MERGERS

## GAINING AWARENESS & ACCEPTANCE OF A FIRM'S NEW NAME

By Patricia Thorp

Law firm mergers raise several branding issues that managing partners must tackle. One that is often overlooked is how to communicate the firm's post-merger name most effectively — in order to ensure that it is both widely known and well received.

Using the right tactics, managing partners and marketing executives can achieve these goals. They can capitalize on the goodwill that each firm brought to the table in the merger or acquisition, and build upon their combined strength. When announcing a name change, firm leaders must consider four key audiences: internal stakeholders such as partners and associates, existing clients of both firms, potential clients and referral sources.

### Internal stakeholders

Announcing the post-merger name to partners and associates in person promotes more goodwill than doing so via e-mail or memos. A face-to-face dialogue provides an opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns and helps establish buy-in. Depending on the firm's culture, it can also host an internal event — whether a conference call, a business planning session or a reception — that provides lawyers from both firms with a chance to build relationships. This tactic is particularly useful for lawyers who will be in the same practice groups or who will have the opportunity to refer business to one another.

### Clients

Communicating with existing clients and potential clients calls for a more long-term, concerted effort. To support

basic activities such as replacing or revising signage, letterhead, brochures and Web sites, the firm can implement visibility initiatives such as advertising, public relations and direct mail.

Several program elements will produce good results, including current communications that both firms already have in place: e-newsletters, monthly letters to clients, case updates, the Web site. All of these tools can be considered the first line of communication. Using them will prove to be cost-effective, because, presumably, each firm's current clients are already accustomed to reading them.

In addition, the firm could introduce a new client communication, such as an

online newsletter, that reports the merger and name change along with other firm information. This can help convey how clients will benefit from the firm's expanded scope of services.

Direct mail is another proven way to capture the attention of current and potential clients. To make the greatest impact, a direct mail campaign should consist of at least three mailings. The


first can be a simple announcement card; the second, a letter about new services; and the third, a brochure that helps to cement the firm's new image.

### Referral sources

Advertising and public relations can round out the communications plan. In addition to sending information about the merger to the media, the firm's public relations counselors can encourage reporters to cover the firm and its lawyers in more depth. For advertising, an announcement format — similar to a tombstone ad — could help gain visibility for the firm. Other tried-and-true marketing activities that work well include educational seminars and co-marketed events. Ultimately, all of these marketing activities work to build the reputation of the firm: building awareness to help generate potential referrals.

Finally, marketing executives can survey all of the audiences to learn how well the post-merger messages were

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received and evaluate the effectiveness of the communications program. When executed flawlessly, a solid communications program can make the difference in the firm's ability to retain lawyers and existing clients and acquire new ones after a merger. 

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