

How to Make PR Simple, Convenient and Unintimidating for Lawyers

Top tips for public relations success in law firms

Lawyers are extremely busy people. The legal field is demanding and stressful, with much at stake in every matter. In addition to solving clients' most challenging problems, lawyers are faced with increasing billing expectations while trying to balance pro bono initiatives, continuing education requirements, leadership commitments and more. In light of this juggling act, it's understandable that a lawyer's public relations efforts may fall to the bottom of the priority list.

Most lawyers agree that PR is essential in today's competitive arena – it plays an invaluable role in helping to establish credibility, develop relationships and generate business – yet many struggle to find the time or consider PR to be altogether daunting.

Thankfully, there are straightforward and painless ways for lawyers to weave PR activities into their normal routines. Here are some tried-and-true tips that can pave the way to PR success and make it less intimidating for attorneys.

- **Know what resources are available.** This is a crucial starting point for any PR initiative. At some law firms, lawyers are entirely unaware of the great resources available to them. Does the firm have a library department that can assist with research needs for an article? Is there someone in the marketing department who can ghostwrite and edit articles or blog posts, and vet speaking opportunities? Perhaps there is a willing and capable associate who can do the initial legwork in response to a PR opportunity. Whatever the case, it helps to know, consider and use all available resources.
- **Attend/offer media training.** Sometimes lawyers shy away from interview opportunities due to lack of experience or uncertainty about how an interview will be conducted, what quotes might be used, etc. A brief media training session or mock interview is a great way to put a lawyer at ease. Training will address what reporters are seeking in an interview, how to handle difficult questions, on-the-record vs. off-the-record interviews and more. If media trainings are not available in-house, many consultants and agencies offer this service.
- **Repurpose existing content.** Lawyers often have rich content right at their fingertips and don't even realize it. In PR, there's rarely a need to reinvent the wheel. Materials that were created for another purpose, such as a CLE presentation, client alert, case study or blog post, can be modified and reused for a variety of means. Once the initial effort has been made, it's good business to maximize those materials to whatever extent possible.
- **Co-author an article with a client.** Co-authoring an article for publication serves multiple purposes: It provides visibility for both the client and the lawyer, helps to further cement a client relationship, and cuts the article workload in half. This tactic may not work with every client but is worth considering on a case-by-case basis as byline opportunities



**Bethany (Early)
Chieffallo**

Vice President
Public Relations
724.944.2458
bchieffallo@jaffepr.com

arise.

- **Identify preferred PR activities.** Some lawyers love to write and have no trouble tackling an article. Others would much rather speak to a reporter in person or on the phone. Some only have interest in speaking engagements. Before embarking on a PR journey, identify the activity that is most favorable and conducive to the lawyer's schedule and interest.
- **Identify and communicate distinguishing topics.** The news cycle moves quickly, and opportunities too often fall through the cracks because an appropriate and relevant topic was not communicated. Further, there is nothing worse or less effective than a generic media pitch. The more direction and information a lawyer can provide about comfortable speaking/writing topics in his or her realm of practice, the better.
- **Monitor and flag where competitors are being quoted and published.** This is an easy way to establish a list of media outlets for targeting and helps lawyers to keep a pulse on what competitors are doing. It also provides a good frame of reference for marketing/communications personnel as they scan for PR opportunities for the firm. Seeing what others are doing in PR can even motivate some attorneys to match or surpass competitors' activities.
- **Offer a first draft of interview responses.** When interviews are conducted via email, or in the case of written Q&A opportunities, marketing/communications personnel can assist by writing an initial draft of responses. While the first draft may require a considerable amount of fine-tuning, it provides the lawyer with a concrete starting point.
- **Tout the good news.** When it comes to honors and achievements, lawyers should not be shy about sharing! Lawyers would be wise to let marketing department representatives, practice heads, colleagues and their alma maters know about their latest professional and civic successes so these can be celebrated and highlighted. Each hard-earned success helps to elevate a lawyer's profile, enhances credibility and reflects well on the law firm. This also goes for firm-wide recognitions. When a firm wins an award, hosts a worthwhile event or makes great strides in the civic realm, it's generally worth media outreach.
- **Identify specific cases and rulings for commenting.** Clients rightfully expect their legal counsel to be aware of regulatory changes and precedents that will affect their businesses. Because case monitoring should already be a habit, lawyers can easily use this to achieve PR goals. When rulings and opinions are announced, opportunities to provide media with commentary or articles on the impact of the ruling will be plentiful.
- **Don't be afraid to say "no."** Keep in mind that not all PR opportunities will be a good fit or smart use of a lawyer's time. It's okay for marketing/communications personnel to tell lawyers "no" and vice versa. If the opportunity doesn't align with a lawyer's practice or the firm's goals, or is not with a desirable outlet, it's perfectly fine to decline.
- **Remember that PR is personal and wide-ranging.** There is no one winning formula for a firm or lawyer. The best results come from personal goals and determination.

PR for lawyers doesn't have to be complicated, overwhelming or time-consuming. It usually boils down to some planning and preparation, savvy marketing personnel, smart use of resources, teamwork, and an awareness of the many different PR opportunities that are available. The media consider lawyers to be a valuable resource, since attorneys and firms can offer intelligent, respected perspectives on some of today's hottest news topics.

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