

Law Firm Mergers: 7 Tips to Ensure Smooth Communications

Law firm mergers present incredible opportunities for firms to grow their client base, and expand practice group coverage and geographic footprint. But a merger also comes with its own challenges – combining cultures, defining new roles, sorting out physical locations, rebranding and properly developing and communicating the right messages to internal and external audiences.

2018 has been a busy year for mergers, and there is no reason to think the market will slow down. As of Oct. 1, there had been 56 law firm mergers in the U.S. this year, which is one-third more than the average number of mergers for the same period over the past 10 years. This statistic comes from Fairfax Associates, a Washington, D.C., consulting firm that helps law offices navigate the merging process.

As a law firm communications professional, a lot of the preparation and execution of the merger communications plans will fall on your shoulders. While there will be a lot of work to do, don't panic. The following tips will help get you organized.

Pre-merger considerations

- **Determine the reasons for the merger and key messages to communicate.** Why the merger? What is the vision? Where do you want the firm to be in five, 10, 20 years, and will the merger help achieve these goals?

This messaging will be central to how you position the merger, both internally and externally. Internal stakeholders will need to have as great a sense – if not greater – of the long-term, post-merger plan. And this is will evolve into how the merged firm goes to market.

- **Determine the key client benefits offered by the merger.** What are the combined strengths of the new firm? How will these strengths benefit the clients? Be sure that you consider any counter-messages or negative impact of the merger. How will you respond to them?
- **If the merger does not move forward, how will you communicate that outcome to avoid negative speculation?** How will you ensure your clients that any organizational turmoil due to the failed merger will not affect client service?

Because mergers are usually completed in phases, the merger is not likely to have been approved right when you announce the news. If it fails, be honest as to the reason why. Sometimes firm cultures do not align. At other times, the leaders have different visions for the future. Whatever the reason, being honest and straightforward will ensure less speculation. That will allow both firms to continue on and get back to business as usual.



**Stephanie Kantor
Holtzman**

Vice President
Public Relations
240.381.5382
sholtzman@jaffepr.com

- **Leaks can derail merger plans.** Be sure that only key internal stakeholders are aware of the plans for as long as possible. Once you begin sharing the news with a broader internal audience, have all of your key messages and a press release ready to go. What are your contingency plans if the media leak specific details of the merger before the firm is ready to release information? How will you deal with leaks to the media if merger negotiations fail?

Post-merger considerations

- Are you planning to issue a press release announcing that the merger is complete? Many firms send a release to key reporters just to let them know that the ink has dried and all systems are a “go.” However, it is important to manage the expectations of internal stakeholders. If a media outlet has covered a merger extensively, then they probably will not cover much about its finalization. Still, it is worth getting the word out and continuing to build rapport with reporters.
- Are you planning to co-brand or rebrand your marketing collateral? Create a new logo? Apply an existing logo from one of the firms to both firms? Website, bios, printed collateral, business cards and even signage are among the many items that will have to be updated. Be sure to make a very detailed list of all the moving pieces to ensure that nothing is missed.
- Are you planning any special events to introduce the “new firm” to external audiences? If so, plan the event far enough in advance to have the new branding in place.

Working on a law firm merger requires coordinating a lot of elements. If your firm is considering such a complex plan and you need assistance with creating a media strategy, contact me at sholtzman@jaffepr.com.