

# Overcoming a Marketing Roadblock: What Can Go Wrong and 4 Tips for Better Results

Lessons for Professional Services Firms, Part 3

This series focuses on **challenges inherent to marketing a professional service** such as law, accounting, finance, medicine or dentistry. We've discussed some of the **roadblocks** to getting a marketing or public relations campaign underway, and solutions for removing common obstacles. In this post, we get more granular about the "I've tried marketing, and it has never worked" roadblock, and focus on figuring out why someone would make this statement.

Maybe you have heard someone claiming that PR has never worked for your firm. If you had asked why, you might have learned that the topic being pitched, although persuasive or interesting, was not delivered correctly or to the best audience for earning editorial coverage. From your professional perspective, you can see why that PR campaign failed to yield positive results.

As we've shared in prior posts, an effective public relations campaign requires advance planning to determine:

- The message to be communicated ("We just won a significant construction case")
- The objective to be met (earned media coverage in legal, business and trade outlets)
- The target audience who should receive the message (executives and GCs in the construction industry who are prospects or referral sources)

## Let's consider how a PR campaign could fail.

A law firm wins a hotly contested construction case late on a Thursday afternoon. The court distributes its public decision to the attorneys via email notification. Everyone in the office celebrates on Friday— it's been a long case with a lot at stake.

- After enjoying the weekend, everyone is back on Monday, and after a meeting that afternoon, the firm starts to write a press release for internal review and approvals. By Friday, a three-page release has been approved.
- Its content touts the victory, quotes the firm's managing partner and provides a sentence about the firm with a link to the firm's home page.
- The release lists the firm's general phone number and info@ email as the media contact.
- The firm distributes the release at 3 p.m. that Friday afternoon to a media list of contacts pulled the day before from a handful of websites, including general info email



**Liz Bard Lindley**  
Senior Vice President  
Public Relations  
917.455.1798  
llindley@jaffepr.com

addresses at some of the media outlets.

The lawyers anticipate coverage “everywhere” and fast, since the case is so significant to them. No interview requests come in right away, so by 6 p.m., the attorneys call it a day and head home.

On Monday, when the winning lawyers arrive at work, they are clearly disappointed that the case wasn’t picked up by any news outlets over the weekend. Their frustration grows more throughout the week as no journalists call them with questions about the case.

The case is now two weeks in the past, there are no news mentions of the firm’s success and the lawyers are involved in new work. Life goes on at the law firm.

Down the road, when one of the lawyers on this case is asked about doing a media outreach campaign for the next big case, the lawyer will say, “No. I tried PR. It just didn’t work.”

## What went wrong?

### 1. Timing

If the case was truly significant or unique in some way, the law firm should have been better prepared to announce the verdict immediately, or first thing the following morning, but not a week later – and certainly not on a Friday afternoon.

### 2. Media List

A court case moves slowly, which means that the firm had plenty of time before the decision to create a draft press release and a well-researched media list that would reach targeted media outlets and specific reporters who cover construction law and the business issues in dispute. Those selected reporters, in turn, would be the appropriate writers to share the news with their readers, who would have already been qualified as target audiences for new business development by the firm. (Ah, the feeling of opportunities about to happen!) Instead,

- The press release was sent to publishers or to general inbox emails; whatever contact information that was most easily found on the web.
- The right reporters were not on the list and did not receive the release.
- The lack of specificity of the outreach indicated that the firm was not familiar with an outlet’s readership, its coverage needs, or its staff and their respective beats. As a result, those recipients maybe read a few lines and then deleted the release.

(Ugh – the sound of a delete key erasing the possibility of any opportunity happening.)

### 3. Content of the Press Release

The release ran for three single-spaced pages, which is unnecessarily long. The information of most relevance should have been contained within two double-spaced pages at the most (500 words).

The court’s decision was not attached to or hyperlinked in the release, which goes against the best practice of providing journalists with what they need to fully understand the

story.

The release was purely self-congratulatory, quoting only the managing partner, who was not even involved in the case.

The release failed to offer or quote any of the attorneys who worked on the case, or the victorious client, to comment on the impact of the case, not only in the field of construction, but more widely to other areas of finance and business.

The announcement itself was stale – based on news that happened more than a week before. Journalists don't like that.

#### **4. Contact Information**

Even if any journalists had been interested in the release, they would have had trouble getting a firm representative on the phone for an interview request because the media contact was just the general phone number and email for the firm.

## **Don't Fret! Take Another Chance to Get it Right**

My [last post](#) recommended that the in-house marketer overcome this particular roadblock of "I've tried marketing; it just doesn't work" by explaining the value of PR and marketing campaigns, and the patience often required to see results. My colleague explains the [importance of managing expectations](#). That advice is still good, but using the above scenario as our example, it will take more than reassurance and time to overcome this obstacle.

This roadblock can be removed by preparing in advance for the next firm announcement and following best practices for media outreach, which will then increase the chances of earning editorial coverage (quotes in articles and opportunities to write bylined articles) and show that marketing does in fact work.

## **Tips for Success**

In summary, follow these tips and your next outreach initiative should be successful enough to prove the value of media outreach and overcome the "it just doesn't work" roadblock.

### **1. Plan Content for the Press Release**

If your firm is in the midst of a big case, start early with what you'll need for PR. Draft a skeleton one- to two-page press release, starting with naming the firm's contact for media relations, a draft headline and a firm boilerplate, along with a boilerplate about the client's business, so you only need to fill in the blanks with quotes and details from the case and the decision.

Jot down the potential spokespeople from your law firm and from the client's business who will be quoted and/or available to the press for comment about the case. Get ahead of the game by checking the spelling of names and appropriate titles.

Consider in advance the message you want to communicate if the firm wins. The firm can

be proud but not so self-congratulatory that the self-praise overshadows the importance of the case. Maybe the message reinforces the credibility of the practice group and its lawyers. Maybe it shows a new approach in court or the development of a new rule of law. Maybe it highlights the firm's value to an industry or a region.

## **2. Develop the Media List Early, and Include the Right Contacts**

Start your research on publications, and specific reporters and editors, early by reading everything you can about each outlet's profile, readership descriptions and reporters' past coverage. This knowledge will indicate whether your announcement will be relevant to their readers and compelling to the selected reporters, and will confirm that you have identified the right outlets: those that will reach the firm's target audience for new business development.

## **3. Pay Attention to Timing and Get the Content Approved Quickly**

As the case progresses, ask the lawyers if they anticipate a decision soon. As soon as the case ends and the decision has been made available, fill in the gaps in the press release, and alert the lawyers that you will need them to review and edit it soon.

Draft quotes from the lawyers and the client to show the significance of the case and its impact on the industry or other businesses. Hyperlink to the decision and include any formal information including the court name and case docket number, and the judges' names. (Remember, your job is to help reporters understand the story and the issues and provide them with everything they will need.)

Obtain the client's approval of the quote and release, and then request final approval from the firm as quickly as possible. Aim to distribute the release that day or the following morning while the story is fresh. When distributing the pitch, indicate to the journalists who at the firm or the client's company is available for comment.

## **4. Be Available and Respond Promptly to Queries**

The media contact named in the release must be available by phone and email to [field queries and requests for interviews](#). Likewise, the attorneys have to be prepared for and available to do phone interviews, or to answer interview questions by email if that is a reporter's preference.

By having a system in place and following its process from early preparation to thorough research while adhering to best practices, you will set yourself up to earn positive media coverage of your firm's next announcement.

Stay tuned for a future post about leveraging a victory to gain visibility through media interviews, bylined article placements, speaking opportunities and social media engagement, which when integrated with a [strong business development plan](#), can lead to greater brand awareness for your firm.

Do you have questions or need help with crafting a plan to get your press release noticed? Contact me at [llindley@jaffepr.com](mailto:llindley@jaffepr.com).

