

Getting Routine Law Firm News Published Still Delivers Value, Requires Savvy PR Know-How and Determination

How many times over the past 12 to 24 months have you clicked to read an online story or mention of your law firm or firm's attorneys, only to be blocked by the dreaded subscription paywall? Where once you could freely roam the online pages of a newspaper or magazine, now you either have limited access to content or must pay a fee to read everything on a site. And the trend is only going to spread.

One [study](#) found that 76 percent of surveyed editors, CEOs and digital content leaders said that driving digital subscriptions is an important or very important revenue focus, ahead of both display and native advertising. That's a reverse from what the same survey found three years ago. The push toward digital subscriptions and other forms of reader payment is in full force.

At the same time that publishers are increasingly charging readers to view content, you're probably finding fewer and fewer media sites willing to publish your news for free or, in some cases, at all.

I mention all of this as a backdrop to a discussion of the value that can be derived from even the most-routine media placement of law firm news such as lateral and other attorney moves, firm and attorney accolades and appointments, and other achievements. With challenges and roadblocks going up almost daily to deter you from getting any news published by credible media sites, and then seen as seamlessly as possible by your target audience, why in the world would you not take advantage of every conceivable opportunity to get your press releases and announcements published and posted for free?

While some law firm marketers resign themselves to the belief that this type of news is not significant enough to garner media coverage, they are often mistaken. The opportunities are out there and sometimes it just requires a little media savvy and extra legwork to get the news published. At the very least, this type of exposure helps to raise a firm's and its attorneys' profiles in a controlled, positive manner. It also communicates to potential laterals and other hires that a firm is active and transparent in its recruiting, as well as committed to spotlighting its talent and the achievements of its attorneys.

Sharing a little news goes a long way

For starters, a firm should use its website to post most announcements about accolades, achievements and appointments, as well as share the news with clients and other key constituents via its social media channels, especially LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. These announcements should include those related to the firm and those from outside



Randy Labuzinski

Vice President
Public Relations

773.405.7583

rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com

organizations and media entities. This includes, of course, promoting law firm and attorney rankings and awards; new certifications and other professional designations that lend to increased credibility for a firm or attorney; awards and recognitions from media organizations and other outside entities; and appointments to internal and external boards, foundations, and other groups that communicate an attorney's leadership in an area of law or business.

Next, share the news with traditional media – ideally in the form of a traditional press release – including business reporters and editors at local newspapers; local business publications; and local, regional and national legal publications. It's best to cultivate relationships with these key contacts to know how the best way to get these announcements covered, but when the pathway is unclear, it's best to target legal affairs reporters, legal editors and business editors as the gatekeepers.

For some national legal publications, the onus is on the firm/publicist to do the heavy lifting to get the news published. For example, outlets such as *Attorney at Law* and *General Counsel* magazines post articles about these types of announcements derived from user-generated submissions via the outlets' websites. If you don't do the legwork to submit the content properly, the editors are likely to overlook it.

Some local legal and bar publications also require readers to submit their news via online forms on dedicated web pages. For example, the Tennessee Bar Association stopped publishing accolades and other such announcements in its bar journal a couple of years ago and now posts user-generated announcements about bar members in an online "Success!" section only.

It's also smart to keep a lookout for opportunities to disseminate your routine news via certain regional business publications and local newspapers that actually still want to engage and promote their business communities. For example, the regional business media outlet *Citybiz* publishes press releases about news for the regions it serves (for a nominal fee). Also, although they are a dying breed, some newspapers (such as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) will publish reader-submitted press releases for no cost.

Keep these additional best practices in mind for getting the most mileage out of press releases about routine firm and attorney announcements:

- Make your press releases as complete and factual as possible by not leaving out critical pieces of information that might land your announcement in the proverbial circular file. According to a recent Pew Research Center *State of the News Media* fact sheet, the number of reporters, editors, photographers, or film and video editors and operators in the newspaper industry fell 12 percent from 2019 to 2020 and is down 57 percent from 2004. That means there are fewer journalists gathering news these days, so making them do extra work to obtain all the facts will certainly hamper your news placement success rate.
- Include a photo of an attorney whenever possible – whether offering it to editors via email, or uploading it via online submission portals. A photo could increase the likelihood of publication of a news item or help secure prime or top-of-section placement for your news.
- Don't let your announcements get lost in the shuffle. Follow up with editors and

reporters if your news doesn't show up online where you expect it to appear within a reasonable time frame. But also keep in mind that it can take months for items to be placed in many bar journals that publish on monthly or bi-monthly schedules.

- Send to major national legal publications. Some will publish routine news, although never all of it and not all the time, while others will not at all, but it's still a good practice, even if only to keep leading industry reporters up to date about the comings and goings of attorneys and how they are staying engaged with their clients and other industry thought leaders. This also can keep your attorneys and firm top of mind when those reporters are looking for sources.
- In addition to the local newspapers, business journals and legal publications, send these announcement press releases to trade publications for an attorney's niche practice or industry area. Trade journals are often more interested than legal and business publications in tracking the comings and goings of, and announcements from, major industry players.
- Finally, don't forget about sending announcements to alumni departments at attorneys' law schools and undergrad institutions. Most publish magazines and/or online "class notes" sections that are ideal forums for career updates.

This article originally appeared in the August 2021 issue of ALM's Marketing the Law Firm.