

Predictions for PR Trends in 2022

2021. Another year almost in the books, and a quite eventful one, at that. With a relative lull in frenzied public relations and marketing activity for many law firms during the holiday season, now is a great time to take stock of some PR and marketing predictions for 2022 and how they could affect law firms and lawyers in the coming year. It's a useful exercise not only to help understand what may be coming, but also to underscore discussions about where to apply resources — both human and financial — to support elevating [law firm brands](#) and the reputations of attorneys in the best and most effective ways.

Consider — high-fiving — these five potential PR trends for law firms in 2022.

Embrace Virtual Interviews

During the COVID-19 pandemic, live, in-person events were mostly cancelled or postponed. These included retreats, conferences and seminars, some client meetings, etc. And those that were deemed critical were relegated to virtual productions. I say relegated, because it was by default. However, some [gatherings online](#) have proven to be as effective as, or even more than, face-to-face meetings, particularly when it comes to engaging with media. For example, many reporters don't have the time or motivation to schedule a lot of face-to-face meetings with attorneys, but it's been quite easy to jump on a Zoom call, which has led to more face-to-face discussions for attorneys with reporters than before the pandemic, when a quick phone call or email exchange would have sufficed.

These virtual meetings are likely to stick around after the pandemic because they work well for all parties. Attorneys and media becoming more accustomed to virtual discussions has led to more face time and better relationship-building, which helps members of the media become more comfortable with attorneys as sources for their reporting, and helps attorneys build communication skills that foster better interviews. With the floodgates opened, opportunities for online meetings and events could further change and enhance how we execute PR and [position attorneys for media opportunities](#).

Make More Attorney Spokespeople — Broadcast-ready

Speaking of virtual meetings, the time is now when more [attorneys need to be camera-ready](#), so to speak — that is, prepared to appear on a Zoom interview, podcast or any type of video production at a moment's notice. Nearly gone are the days of throwing an attorney to the media wolves because they are a knowledgeable source, and crossing your fingers that they also will be an effective communicator. Law firms will need to put more emphasis on preparing their attorneys — media-training them for interviews, podcasts, webinars, etc., as well as educating them about technology and set-up; wardrobe and appearance (especially while working from home); and communication



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skills, including integrating key messages, body language, etc.

Counterbalance the “Fake News” Impact

The unfortunate and often erroneous labeling of “fake news” that has consumed certain segments of the political arena in the last few years has had a legitimate impact on public perceptions of news vs. non-news and fact vs. fiction. Recent surveys have found that a high number of respondents have trouble distinguishing facts from fiction, or real news from actual fake news. This muddying tactic and the accompanying spread of misinformation could, logically, affect buyers of legal services who may view all marketing with a higher level of skepticism in this new era. It’s more important than ever to be transparent in all communications, and always provide verifiable fact-based information along with accurate storytelling about the activities and successes of law firms and attorneys.

One possible tactic for boosting credibility is to ramp up the use of testimonials, which can demonstrate to clients that a firm and attorney are trustworthy and competent. Sometimes attorneys ask clients directly for testimonials, or the requests can come from the law firm or a third party on behalf of the firm. Whatever the tactics for soliciting testimonials, those that are attributed to a named person or company are best for ensuring credibility, but anonymous reviews sometimes are the only option. Testimonials should be integrated into marketing vehicles, such as a law firm’s website, and via social media channels such as LinkedIn or Facebook. It’s also important to continuously solicit and refresh testimonials so the reviews are timely and reflective of a long track record of praiseworthy client service.

Get to Know Journalists

Reporters changing beats and moving to new media outlets is nothing new. But with the continued shrinking of outlet staffs and long-time publications going out of business, the impermanence of reporters invested in a particular coverage area or beat is becoming more pronounced.

This trend also is ushering increasingly young reporters through the door who are far from experts on the subjects they cover. To get the best and most accurate coverage, PR pros should spend more time [getting to know these new journalists](#) and helping to educate them about legal industry issues and topics. On the simplest level, this is relationship-building 101. But try digging deeper. Understand their preferred methods of communication, what times and days they are most reachable, when they plan stories, and where they seek information and story ideas, as well as more personal matters such as what their interests are and what their pet peeves are in working with sources. You only have to deep dive with a small handful of reporters to build a good roster of “go-to” media. They also should receive special consideration in news tips, exclusives and offers of interviews. The goal is for those reporters to treat your law firm and attorneys as primary sources when they need quotes or background for a story.

Let the Press Release Evolve

With the proliferation of news and news sources, along with increasing competition for bandwidth in print and online news pages, the [press release](#) may soon experience a long-overdue reinvention. While it's true that a traditional press release still serves a vital need by providing important facts about a news item or event, it could use a refresh.

For example, with video continuing to evolve and expand into the digital and social media spaces, a video press release may find a niche with business audiences as a more effective and engaging way to tell a story while also sharing important news. Video press releases could be particularly effective for law firms striving for ways to differentiate themselves.

Another alternative could be a virtual briefing (in keeping with media and attorneys' growing comfort with online forums). This could entail personal invitations to select media to join an online briefing with a firm spokesperson about news, such as a new lateral hire or new leadership. With alternatives to traditional press releases, at the very least, something that looks different or functions in a new and vibrant way could help a firm gain greater exposure than it would otherwise.

Have some other ideas about what are likely to be 2022 PR trends for law firms and lawyers, or need suggestions for how to plan accordingly? Comment below or email Randy Labuzinski at rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com.