

The Long and Short of Shortening Law Firm Names

A law firm is a business. A business is built on a brand that appeals to your market sector. Having a short name makes it easier to build brand recognition. Look at companies like Dunkin' Donuts (now Dunkin'), Huffington Post (now HuffPost), Kentucky Fried Chicken (now KFC) and – while this was awhile back – Apple Computer (now Apple). These might be consumer-oriented businesses, but the principle is still the same for law firms.

Shakespeare said, "Brevity is the soul of wit." It's also the essence of memorability. A short name gets noticed and allows you to strengthen your law firm's long-term branding strategy.

You may be convinced that shortening your law firm's name is a good strategic move, but the road to get there is unlikely to be smooth. If only you could wave a magic wand and have key partners agree with the decision. Or state some key facts that would save the hours of debate with those attorneys whose names will be dropped. Unfortunately, there is no direct roadmap for this process, but here are some tips for getting the process moving and using your lawyerly powers of persuasion to build some consensus around your [law firm's brand](#).

Start Where You Are

Chances are that your staff and clients already refer to the firm in some kind of shorthand version of its full name. Think of this as brand perception and use it to benefit your marketing efforts. You can have a short name for brand purposes while still retaining a full legal name for official documents. As an example, despite being commonly referred to by its branded name, Pillsbury, the firm Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP retains its longer legal name.

When you broach the idea of shortening the firm's name by using its internal shorthand, you start the process with a brand that has already been established in the minds of key stakeholders who need convincing. Moving the process further will depend on your firm's circumstances and, unfortunately, personalities.

Understanding motivation is important for your approach. With a younger firm, founders are still heavily involved and want the recognition of being named partners. In a more established firm, named partners may no longer be around to fight about letterhead, but the debate could be more about history.

It's critical to remember the numerous marketing and branding advantages of a shorter firm name. A shorter name makes for improved logo designs and visuals in marketing collateral. It makes building slogans, [taglines](#), advertising and marketing campaigns



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easier. It gives attorneys and employees a simpler, more memorable name when discussing your law firm in the community, or recommending you to potential clients. As a whole, a shorter name helps create a stronger, more consistent brand identity for your law firm.

Just make sure to consider the ethical rules that may apply to your firm's official name, as well as any newly shortened or branded names you may use.

Do a Brand Assessment

Rebranding can be a difficult process. Repositioning your firm's identity in your community is often a long-term effort, especially if you have already built a strong reputation. That is why it is important to include a brand assessment early in any rebranding process.

A brand assessment involves interviewing people at all levels in the firm, from the support staff to a mix of associates and partners, as well as clients and vendors. Ask everyone to speak candidly about their perception of your firm's purpose, core values, culture and overall business goals. What are the key characteristics that make your firm what it is, and what makes your firm stand out?

These responses should create a picture about how your firm is viewed both externally and internally. It's a way to understand your firm's identity – its brand. From here, you can determine how your name fits the brand and whether it should change.

Rebranding Challenges

Should you decide to move forward with a shorter firm name, be aware of all the places you need to make a change. Your firm name and the logo are floating out there with numerous sponsorships, ad placements and directory listings. Make sure you update your directory listings throughout the internet and all web properties, because your name, address and phone consistency are very important for SEO and online visibility. Internally, you will need to update your logo on letterhead, signage, marketing materials (including business cards) and style guide to solidify the new brand. You [law firm's style guide](#) is important in making sure that every person in the firm knows how to use the new firm name and brand. Celebrate the change and include everyone in the firm as part of the process.

And don't forget PR! You'll want to do press releases to general, trade, legal and association outlets; website announcements; client alerts and personal messages; and maybe even a "new name" party.

Some people might see shortened names as a branding trend, but having a shortened law firm name has emerged as one of the top ways to build your firm's brand identity – and the new name will carry the firm into the future. If you don't think it is the right time to tackle the process, or not the right move for your firm, consider the long-term benefits of a shortened name and how it affects your firm's recognition in the business community. A shorter name can bring growth to your law firm.

Has your firm recently gone through the process of settling on one name, or are you trying to convince the firm's partnership it's time to choose the front name? Feel free to leave a comment below, or connect with me, Alan E. Singles, at asingles@jaffepr.com.