

Amazon + Whole Foods = A Lesson in Law Firm Mergers

As I was unloading Whole Foods grocery bags from my car on a recent Friday afternoon, I received a news alert that Amazon, another of my favorite retailers, had announced it was purchasing Whole Foods.

Admittedly, I thought the purchase was baffling. The two retailers have very different cultures. Whole Foods promotes healthy and local, while Amazon is an advocate of all things automated. The two dynamics seemed at odds, made even more odd by the accusations against Amazon for its “bruising employee conditions.” Other questions ensued and were covered extensively by the media: When would the acquisition be effective? Would this mean that Amazon products would be available for pick-up at Whole Foods? Would Whole Foods groceries be available for delivery? How quickly could the groceries be delivered? Is the retail world as we know it changing forever?

As I unpacked my overpriced groceries, I started thinking about law firm mergers and how the Amazon acquisition related to my work as a legal marketer. As legal marketing professionals, we frequently promote mergers and acquisitions, either between two law firms or on behalf of a client. While this mammoth acquisition is in the retail space, it provides lessons that we can apply to our work for law firms.

Announcing a Law Firm Merger

When making a merger public, taking the time to prepare a strategy beforehand will ensure a much smoother announcement. Law firm mergers are most successful when marketers and other stakeholders are brought to the table *before* the merger officially occurs.

Phase I – Strategy

Assessing Culture: Are there sensitivities to be addressed? Are there cultural issues to reconcile, such as those between Whole Foods and Amazon?

Key Messages: What are the core reasons why this merger is advantageous that the public will want to know? What questions will firm employees and staff have? What will clients want to know? Although all the information you need may not already be known or developed, start thinking of the questions to ask so you are able to continuously update your stakeholders.

Updating Visual Identity: You will need to consider how the merger will be **branded**, and this is a momentous task. First item on the list is the logo and graphics. Are you creating a new one or using the original firm’s logo? Consider all of the firm’s printed materials:



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business cards, brochures, stationery, pens, giveaways. Go through and [create a checklist of everything that has to be updated](#) and then create a strategy and assign tasks accordingly. Give the tagline the same careful consideration.

Website: Once you sort out the firm's logo and tagline, the law firm's website will have to be considered. Are you merging into one website and migrating content ([bios](#), expanded practice group descriptions, etc.), or are you planning to build a new website? Keep in mind that creating a website takes time and a lot of planning, so create a strategy that fits the merged firm's goals and objectives.

Announcement Materials: Consider whether you need to create a Q&A document that can be shared with reporters or that spokespeople can refer to. Figure out whether you will need photographs or infographics, and plan accordingly.

Delivery: How will you deliver the news? Is a press release enough, or should you consider other vehicles, such as videos or memes? Will you be using social media? If the firm has a blog, how will it be used as a vehicle for delivering the news?

Phase II – Implementation

Press release: Finalizing a firm press release with plenty of time for key stakeholders to approve will ensure a much easier announcement day. Consider internal and external stakeholders, and determine whether you need two sets of announcements.

Media and Delivery: Whom will you target with the merger news? Who will serve as the spokesperson? Will there be multiple spokespeople? Will they be taking interviews? Have they been media trained?

Social Media: Be sure to promote the merger on social media.

This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to managing a law firm merger. The acquisition of Whole Foods was likely in the works for some time (in other news, there are rumors of [Amazon acquiring Nordstrom](#)), even if the announcement appeared to come out of the blue.

If you have big news on the horizon and need assistance with building a strategy, please contact me, [Stephanie Holtzman](#), at sholtzman@jaffepr.com.