

# 5 Legal PR Trends that Will Shape 2018

Much of what happened to the media in 2017 is likely to continue to affect public relations during the coming year. To save you time, I've done some looking around at the key trends and predictions from other PR thought leaders in multiple industries targeting both businesses and consumers, because good ideas come from all corners. These five trends also jive with our own experiences at Jaffe. The focus here is on a handful of developments that we expect to have the most impact and/or be the most relevant to legal marketers and PR managers. With a nod to budget constraints, I'm also looking mainly at broad trends that can inform tactics without breaking the marketing bank.



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## Thought leadership – it's not just for law firm leaders and practice heads anymore

More law firms are buying into the notion that promoting and leveraging the leadership of a broad swath of attorneys – partners and associates – in multiple practice areas, instead of just the top leadership and rainmakers, is a prudent strategy for establishing depth of law firm leadership. It also protects against disruptive departures of key leaders from a firm.

From a tactical standpoint, that means more attorneys at all levels building up their [personal brands](#) by writing and commenting on legal practice-specific issues and topics, and disseminating that content via client alerts, newsletters, white papers, webinars, etc., as well as sharing via social media, including blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn, or perhaps aggregators such as JD Supra, the *National Law Review* or Lexology. Think [thought leadership marketing](#) on steroids!

## “Owning” media channels to reach audiences effectively and solidify a firm’s reputation

As the proliferation of online media channels continues (it's still growing, folks), some predict that consumers will grow increasingly tired of shopping around for content and will look to get as much of their news and information as possible from a small number of outlets. Now is the time for law firms to clearly identify where they want to appear and make sure they're building a footprint in those spaces. Figure out or do a refresh on where competitor law firms and their attorneys are appearing, and make sure you're also getting a piece of that landscape. Don't let competitors hog the bandwidth.

Making sure your firm's good news and thought leadership are well-represented in targeted media outlets also is great for inoculating against bad news from a crisis that can quickly erode trust in a law firm's brand. The smart law firms also are investing more in their own, controllable content channels. These include news pages on websites, blogs and social media accounts.

## Managing through the media crises on facts

I've written in the past about the ding that the media has taken in the last year (in large part due to the president's assault). What was true at the [beginning of 2017](#) is still a trend today. Alleged "fake news" is still a thing, and the media is hypersensitive to credibility challenges. While they're working hard to ensure the trust of their audiences, newsrooms are continuing to constrict, and there are fewer legitimate journalists on the job. At the same time, traditional media are becoming (at least somewhat) less relevant as so many other opportunities exist for disseminating content.

On the other hand, there still is incredible value to the third-party validation that results from earned placements with influential and high-profile media outlets.

What this all means is we, the PR professionals, have to work extra hard:

- Get the facts straight (fewer journalists have increasing pressure to deliver content, so fact-checking sometimes takes a hit);
- Avoid hyperbole (the examples from the world of politics over the past year demonstrate that exaggerations and made up "facts" do not bode well for one's credibility);
- Educate and serve (fewer reporters are covering larger beats and unfamiliar topics, so we have to be wiser about how to tell our law firms' stories and make sure to go the extra distance to help explain complicated matters, even if we think reporters should know their stuff);
- Identify and target only the best and most-desirable media outlets (which subjectively varies from attorney to attorney, firm to firm and matter to matter); and
- Constantly look for new and innovative channels for getting law firms' messages across.

## Is paid media gaining traction?

It's almost never a first choice and sometimes it's not a consideration at all – but [paid media](#) may be on the rise as a legitimate avenue for effectively targeting audiences with controlled messages. It seemed as if every week last year, some media outlet turned its website or a component of its website into a new revenue stream – typically by charging a fee for posting announcements that previously were free or by moving content behind a pay wall. I've seen it happen already in 2018 as well.

The audience continues to splinter, and traditional media outlets are desperate for cash to stay afloat. Even social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are turning out to be "party poopers" with attempts to separate users' messages from media and brand content, and integrating more pay-to-play options. Unfortunately, this all means fewer media outlets available for truly earned placements. Although many of us PR purists still resist this movement, the fact is, advertising and paid placements soon may be the only way to reach readers of certain publications.

## Forget the previous trend – it's all about earned media

No, I'm not following the lead of some politicians and immediately contradicting myself in

the same breath. Those who closely follow the marketing biz see that more agencies are investing greater resources in traditional PR efforts, including media relations, which has always been a cornerstone of Jaffe's work with lawyers and law firms. Earned media – the byproduct of these efforts – is becoming more valuable and highly desirable, partially because the third-party endorsement and trust that earned media employs has renewed cachet in the age of "fake news."

Audience fragmentation is also continuing to chip away at response rates for paid media, namely advertising, helping to make earned media once again the "belle of the ball." The media footprint is growing with boundless online outlets, yet (as noted earlier) newsroom staffs are continuing to shrink, so journalists and web programmers have less time to determine what's worthy to publish. The key to success in this arena is to deliver the best sources and best content to editors who are looking to fill space, and to fully repurpose that content to maximize its marketing value.

Want other suggestions for how to take advantage of the top PR trends predicted for 2018? Contact me, [Randy Labuzinski](mailto:rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com), at [rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com](mailto:rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com).