

HEADLINE AND SUBHEAD:

BRANDING 201

You've determined your firm needs to refresh its brand or develop a new one. What do you do now?

INTRO TEXT:

In the previous issue of *Legal Management News*, our "Branding 101" article explored the basics of branding. Now that you know what branding is—articulating the personality of your firm in a way that clients will remember—it's time to dig in your spurs and get to work. Here's how to get the job done.

CONVINCING THE JURY

Convincing any group of people that change is necessary is no piece of cake. In the law field, it's even more challenging—attorneys examine every angle, ask every question. They also tend to measure the day in five-minute billable chunks, so setting time aside for the branding process might seem like an impossible task.

"Given the attorneys' workloads, it was sometimes a challenge to coordinate meetings to review the project," said Wendy Hughson, chief marketing officer for Miller Nash LLP in Portland, Oregon. "It was also a challenge to manage expectations regarding how quickly things would be developed."

Chances are, you'll run into similar obstacles. But if your firm has ever struggled to distinguish itself from the competition or maintain a steady work-flow, the benefits of branding should inspire you to prevail.

To launch the process, Miller Nash "discussed the importance of the project, the goals and expected outcomes" with their attorneys, said Hughson. "We knew it was important to have an inclusive process, so we created an advisory board to help implement the process and identified ambassadors and champions to share the enthusiasm and knowledge."

BUILD YOUR CASE

Getting buy-in from your attorneys helps create a sense of ownership over the final product and ensures support for its implementation. Here are four ways easy ways to introduce your attorneys to the concept of branding and secure their support.

1) Circulate articles about branding. You know your attorneys—the more information, the better. Do your research online or tap into our network to collect information and articles from third party sources.

2) Find out what your competitors are up to. Pull together samples of your competitor's marketing tools, especially those firms that have developed a distinct brand. Find out what kind of results these "branded" firms are enjoying (or not enjoying) as a result of their new brand.

3) Discuss the benefits. Meet with your partners to discuss how developing a distinct brand is an investment that will pay off... how a strong brand makes you more recognizable no matter where your name or message is seen...and helps reduce costs by establishing brand standards.

4) Audit your materials. Place all of your marketing pieces side-by-side. Compare them on their own—and next to those of your competitors. This will help your attorneys visually see the flaws (or strengths!) of your brand. Point out how the colors, font treatment, graphic style and copy tone are or are not consistent and distinct. Decide whether each piece looks like it comes from a different company. Is the only common denominator a logo pasted here and there? Do your clients have a clear picture of what you stand for and what you represent? Would they pick you out from the crowd? Is there a common message that weaves throughout every communication?

TAKE THE STAND

Once you have the “ok” from your attorneys, identify what, if any, outside resources you might need to get the branding project off the ground. Some firms simply consult with branding experts. Others, like Miller Nash, go through an extensive interview process and hire a partner.

“We talked with seven different agencies, personally interviewed six, and received proposals from five,” said Hughson. “It was particularly important to us to hire an agency where we knew the agency principal would be a good fit with our advisory board of attorneys and staff.”

Consider what you can complete in house and what you hope to accomplish. Keep in mind that while your budget will impact your decision, branding is a long-term investment. Its expense can be amortized out over a 3 to 5 year period. You may want to pull a portion of your budget from the next three years to allocate it to the up front development of the brand. Then choose one of the following options:

Attend a workshop. Feel like you still don’t have a good grip on what the branding process might entail? Not sure what to do next? By attending a workshop or seminar, you’ll gain a better understanding of branding and how it applies to your firm. Search the web (try keywords like “branding workshops in Oregon”) and see which one best fills your gaps. Be sure and include key decision makers as well as marketing staff in the training, as it will help to align everyone into a common vision.

Partner with a branding firm. This is the most comprehensive branding method. A branding firm can help facilitate the process with your staff, handle research with both clients and staff, develop your brand standards and graphic elements, write a marketing plan, design marketing tools and/or templates you can use in-house. These experts often identify long-term marketing strategies, as well as advertising and printing efficiencies, that help offset the cost of their contract. And by having an outside point of view plus depth of experience in branding, they will facilitate development and can advise and guide the process if there are internal challenges to the direction.

Hire a designer. If you have already developed a brand, including logo, messaging, colors, fonts, copy tone, you could hire a design firm or freelance designer to develop marketing tools. This approach is generally less expensive but requires more of your time—you must provide more art direction and oversight in order to maintain the integrity and consistent application of your brand. You will need to

designate someone on the marketing team to be the brand steward in order to maintain the all important consistency that will add power to your brand program.

Bring in a consultant. Sometimes firms have some of the brand elements already but they aren't sure what to do next. Or they really need someone to take a look at where they are and where they'd like to go and make some recommendations. Whether it's working one-on-one with you or leading a strategy meeting with your attorneys, consultants can often be the expert voice you need to launch your branding development. They will bring in points of view from other firms and other businesses that will help you to gain a fresh perspective on the overall style, message and persona that's appropriate to the long-term positioning of your firm.

SIDEBAR:

Benefits highlights

You saw them once before in *Branding 101*, but it's worth revisiting the benefits of branding again—and sharing them with your attorneys. Branding can...

- **Make you more recognizable.** A good brand differentiates your firm and services visually and conceptually from the competition, making you more recognizable wherever your name is seen.
- **Reduce costs.** By establishing brand standards, you don't have to "reinvent the wheel" each time a new communication or marketing piece is created. You can use specific elements repeatedly and repurpose them for different applications.
- **Define most effective tools.** Branding narrows your focus and helps you identify where to communicate with your audiences and what types of tool will best resonate with them. By examining what you are doing now to communicate, then applying the brand, you will also leverage the overall brand program and enhance the effectiveness of what you're doing now.

DROPQUOTE:

Once you have the "ok" from your attorneys, identify what outside resources you might need to get the branding project off the ground.

JENNIFER'S BYLINE

Jennifer Larsen Morrow is president and owner of Creative Company Inc., a strategic business branding company based out of McMinnville, Oregon. For more than 28 years, she has successfully partnered with clients across the West Coast to apply the principles of branding to marketing programs, from identity development to implementation into ongoing communications. For more information about branding and branding workshops, email her at jlorrow@creativeco.com or visit www.creativeco.com.