

The Public Relations Campaign

The need to have a well thought out plan for Public Relations and community involvement is no longer restricted to large firms with hefty budgets. Even small and mid-sized firms stand to benefit enormously when they increase their profile in the community and gain exposure to potential clients and referral sources.

Take the small firm attorney in upstate New York who focuses his practice on Estate Planning and Elder Law. Recently, he was asked to join the board of the local Alzheimer's Association. Not only is he passionate about the fund-raising work done by the association, it constantly puts him in front of his target market. His desire to give back to the community is satisfied, and his position exposes him to people who need his expertise.

This article will be the first in a series of three which will attempt to explain the art of public relations. In the first article we'll explore one of the easiest pieces of the PR puzzle -- community relations. In the next we'll discuss how to effectively use a Press Release and develop reporters to increase your media presence, and finally we'll talk about how to have the press seek *your* opinions.

It's important to understand what public relations, or "PR," means. In relationship to your firm, it is the ability to increase Top-of-Mind awareness (TOMA) within your targeted community and generate a positive public image for the firm using print, radio, T.V. or community events.

The *non-media* related activities which we'll discuss here, include becoming an active, high-profile member of your community. Sponsoring local events such as concerts or contests, for example, or volunteering for a community cause. Fundraising efforts for charity, participating in committees and being a board

member are also tried and true ways to gain more exposure. These activities and associations present a positive picture of you as a supporter of the community in contrast to paid promotional activities that are only law firm or practice-related.

Most of your PR efforts should be aimed at cultivating more desirable referral sources while others should focus on increasing your contact with potential clients. It is essential that you understand who your targeted market is, what journals they read, what they care about, where they go for information.

We work with a real property attorney in Florida who works primarily with high net worth buyers in a popular seaside community. He joined not only the country club in his area but also accepted a position on the local hospital board. Both positioned him to be in contact with doctors, hospital administrators, golf-fanatics, retirees and corporate executives – all potential clients.

Typically, attorneys are welcome additions to any board they join. If you are interested in joining a local board, casually inquire with friends, family, partners and referral sources that are active in the community. Very often one of them will be on a board, or know of a board seeking new members. They can then submit your name for consideration.

If joining a board isn't for you, there are many alternatives. Another one of our clients who is very charitable by nature, partners with a local organization that funds scholarships for children. Another attorney sponsors a Bike Safety Day in which he and his team join with a charity and pass out helmets to needy children. There are endless opportunities out there – you just have to find those that work for you and your firm.

To get started, read through the sample goals below and ask yourself what kind of PR objectives you could formulate to support the growth of your practice and attract good clients:

This year, each partner will join the board of a community or charity organization.

This year, our firm will sponsor two tables at the annual Cancer Society Dinner and invite twenty select clients and referral sources to join us

Whatever you and your firm decide to take on in the way of community or charity events, make it something you can be authentically excited about. You'll be energized by participating in causes you truly support and drained by those you don't.

Once you find something that you think will be a good fit, join a committee, offer to sponsor an event or raise money. Make a small investment of time and money to test the waters and evaluate whether or not you've found a good cause. We think you'll find that doing good will not only benefit the community, your firm will benefit as well.