

# SurreyLawyer

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## There's more to life than a press release...

*What do you consider to be good public relations? A press release a month? A couple of articles on the website? Congratulations, you are doing the same as all your serious competitors. So what about competitive advantage?*

Let's think of PR as being about communications, simply reaching out, talking to people. You're doing it all the time and it is intrinsic to all your client dealings and business development activity. So firstly you should do it smartly and consistently (reputation management) and secondly, you could

use it to get ahead of the game (promotional activity). So how?

A communications plan involving all your key fee earners and staff will link your strategic business goals with your marketing communications activity, from media to web site to face to face. A plan

would consist of the following steps:

The starting point would be your business plan; what services you are providing, or plan to, who to and your billing breakdown between those services. By also talking to key partners, management and some clients (yes, client feedback can be scary but it's

## There's more to life... (continued)

invaluable) you would find out what makes you stand out from your competitors. This is what you should build on.

From this you draw out your key messages. Four or five simple descriptors and selling points. These might differ slightly for different audiences.

Then describe your audiences, current and aspirational. Who are they and where are they? What are they looking for in a law firm, can you provide it and how do you tell them you've got it?

What channels will reach these audiences? If you serve both corporate and private client these will be quite different and it goes beyond the media. We now have the Internet and websites, email and text messaging, as well as the 'traditional' mass media and postal mailings. Which suit your audiences, your personality (text messaging, for instance, would be very low down

the scale, until today's teenagers become tomorrow's corporate hot shots!) and your budget?

Then match this with activity; as you're beginning to see, this goes beyond the odd press release. Successful promotional activity for law firms includes sponsorship, awards, research and surveys (including email communities), media promotions and linking face to face activity, such as seminars and entertaining, with media or surveys, or turning them into a branded series. Media relations should be professional and imaginative. Crisis planning would save you a lot of panic, and possibly your reputation, in the event of a problem.

After all this excitement, (well, I think it is), comes the sobering aspect of resourcing: the budget and the abilities. Planning is vital to this, so no more booking advertising space because the salesperson was persuasive or dumping the charity donation into the marketing budget.

Abilities are key; set a manageable level of activity for your marketing team rather than overload them. Ensure a balance of experience and continuous professional development for them too. What is the role of fee earners? Give the key lawyers a personal marketing plan and ensure they are trained to achieve it. Unless you are a big firm you probably won't benefit from an external PR retainer, but project work can be usefully resourced outside.

Then don't forget evaluation; build in measurement at the planning stage so that you can see what works and the level of contribution of each activity.

And don't forget, enjoy it, at the end of the day it's all about people.

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