

# The Legal **PR GUIDE**

Produced by the PRCA  
in collaboration with Byfield Consultancy



# About this guide

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The PRCA is the world's largest PR professional body, there to raise standards in PR and communications, providing members with industry data, facilitating the sharing of communications best practice, and creating networking opportunities.

The PRCA Legal Group was created in October 2017 to champion legal PR as a growing and maturing discipline within the broader remit of corporate PR.

By launching the group, we wanted to create a platform for learning and development, sharing ideas amongst established and aspiring legal PR professionals, at all levels of their careers. We also wanted to create a useful networking environment where legal PRs could meet colleagues and peers at various stages in their careers.

Over the last two years, we've held a number of training and networking events. And as the group's chairman, I've been greatly encouraged by the interest thus far and I'm excited for the future of the Legal PR Group. We have had fantastic support from a committee of talented and experienced PR practitioners who have helped to bring this guide to life.

Intended as a reference point for anyone who's interested in legal PR, this guide aims to build a foundation for bigger, greater things, not just within the Legal Group, but also for the specialist and developing area of legal PR as a whole.

There's work to do. We would like to see more engagement from in-house law firm PR practitioners, particularly at junior and mid-level. We also want to keep raising the profile of the in-house PR as an integral member of the management teams within law firms and as a key custodian of law firm reputations.

I'd like to thank Richard Gerrard, Director of Business Development and Marketing at Carter-Ruck, who has played an instrumental role in putting the guide together and who will be taking on the mantle of Chair of the PRCA Legal Group for the next two years.

I'd also like to thank the contributors – a number of highly experienced PR professionals – all of whom have taken time out of busy schedules to contribute to this important endeavour.

I am very grateful to the PRCA for recognising legal PR as an important branch of the wider PR family and for encouraging and supporting me in forming the Legal PR Group. Particular thanks go to Isobel Arrowsmith and Anna Green at the PRCA for the important role they have played in helping to organise our events and in the creation of the PRCA Legal PR Guide.

My hope is that this guide stimulates discussion as the legal PR industry continues to develop.

**Gus Sellitto CMPRCA**  
**Co-founder and Managing Director**  
**Byfield Consultancy**



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# Chapter 1

## Law Firms and Public Relations: an Overview

*by Gus Sellitto CMPRCA  
Managing Director  
Byfield Consultancy*

It's hard to reconcile the face of legal PR today with how it all began. The relaxation of rules allowing lawyers to advertise in the '80s and the ongoing deregulation that allowed the profession's development also paved the way for significant changes in PR and communications for the legal industry.

When I started my career in legal PR over 20 years ago, in-house legal PR practitioners were rare. Only a handful of law firms had in-house PRs, PR managers or directors. Today, walk into any Top 100 law firm and you will find an internal PR function.

In many top-tier law firms, the PR function will be made up of senior legal professionals who have a seat at the Management table, alongside key boardroom decision-makers.

How has all this happened?

Laws on legal sector advertising were relaxed in 1986 which meant that, for the first time, law firms were able to gain greater visibility in the marketplace. Naturally, the ability to promote themselves has meant law firms thinking more and more about PR.

Legal PR is a branch of consumer and corporate PR in that it touches on every area of professional and business life. Given the types of issues the wider sector to which it belongs deals with daily, legal PR could be viewed as a niche and specialist area of PR. But it is one that reaches into a vast array of different news outlets and publications.

The evolution of law firm communications opened the door further to PR in 2007, when a suite of new legislation was brought about by the Legal Services Act. Deregulation, especially law firms' new ability to float on the stock market and the possibility for the emergence of alternative business structures, has led to increased competition across the board. Gone are the days of the law firm as, first and foremost, a law firm; all law firms are businesses now.

Since long before 2007, legal services have had to evolve with the times. Just as the commercial world has been scrambling to keep up with the increasing inter-connectedness of economies in the era of globalisation and the acceleration of a new arena of possibilities wrought by new technologies, law firms have had to race to keep abreast with the

**1986**  
LAWS ON LEGAL  
SECTOR ADVERTISING  
WERE RELAXED



**2007**  
LEGAL SERVICES ACT  
BRINGS ABOUT  
NEW LEGISLATION

changes in legislation these paradigmatic shifts have caused.

Law firms have become increasingly international in their outlook, as reflected by their global clients, by the many cross-jurisdiction mergers as well as global alliances that have been formed in recent years.

And over the last 10 years, the nature of this race has fundamentally changed. It's not just that competition has risen. Now, with alternative business structures, competitors come in many shapes and sizes.

Notably, the Big Four's presence continues to press on the perimeter of the legal sector, ramping up the pace at which law firms invest in innovation, incubators and legal tech solutions.

So what does all this mean for legal PR?

Essentially, law firms are becoming more brand conscious and investing more in profile raising activities to grow their reputations and gain attention among the audiences that matter to them.

Law firms' cultures are having to change as expectations of younger generations and clients change. Millennials have held to account the cultures of law firms, prompting new, widespread reviews of behavioural ethics, especially in terms of diversity and inclusion. All types of organisations have had to ensure all other organisations they work with match their values, to avoid reputational damage.

To understand their brands, law firms have had to revisit the indivisible fundamentals of what makes their profiles and reputations what they are: their people, their clients and client service and their expertise. And by extension, their financial strengths, CSR policies, lateral hires, and rankings.

And so the legal PR's role still fundamentally revolves around media relations — getting your firm into the *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, targeting legal journalists on key titles, making opportunities out of personal finance and weekend media — but it's increasingly bringing into the mix content as a tool for raising the online presences of firms.

The PR world has expanded beyond media relations. Indeed, PRs now use digital, social media and content to secure opportunities for publication and broadcast as well as amplify key messages. And legal PRs are investing more and more time in thought leadership, for example large-scale reports on areas affecting law firm clients, to cement their lawyers as experts.

To use this expanded set of media well, the legal PR must have a certain combination of skills and qualities, including a keen interest in current affairs, an awareness of the issues affecting all types of commercial organisation and a readiness to translate today's issues into opportunities for legal commentary that are mutually beneficial for lawyers who want to promote their expertise and journalists who want to add clarity to stories.

Legal PRs must also be fully synchronised with the debates and trends in the legal sector and the macro level of the political process, which ultimately affects the laws with which we must comply in business and personal life. Then the opportunities really begin to make themselves



known. Not just in newspapers, trade and legal publications, but also via national TV and radio.

And, ultimately, as reputation comes up the agenda of law firms, the PR's role is not just about gaining positive news coverage: law firms have brand identities which they must live and breathe, and when things go wrong, the legal PR must be there to work on mitigating impact to their firm's reputation.

The legal PR must be the firm's first point of contact in a crisis: they must be able to work closely with the firm's management and key spokespeople within the firm to orchestrate a careful, timely and effective response to issues and crises as they emerge.

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It is within the context of these developments, then, that the role of the legal PR has become as nuanced, and as challenging, as it has. But just as this new practice's inherent peculiarities make it what it is, they also define its necessity.

The PRCA Legal PR Guide equips you with the essential knowledge for you to become a better PR in an ever-changing industry – from how to create effective thought leadership to how to measure success, and from how to work with legal journalists to how to manage a crisis.

Its contributors include directors of business development and senior marketing and communications specialists at leading UK law firms, legal editors at national newspapers and partners.

The advice and insights within the pages that follow are steeped in hands-on experience at the top of our industry, conveniently collected so that you can make the most of the opportunities (and confront the challenges) that lie ahead.

# Chapter 2

## Brand Awareness

by *Elliot Moss MPRCA*

*Partner and Director of Business Development  
Mishcon de Reya*

Growing the business. It's why we all do what we do. Whatever business we are in. So if you're more concerned with PR or Brand than this, then there's no need to read on. Congratulations, you've just won back the next few minutes of your life enabling you to focus on the full range of fully cooked, minute by minute distractions that are on offer 24/7: the news on your BBC app, your *The Times* or *Financial Times* app, *The Lawyer* or *Legal Week*, the latest big thing on social media about "The Things We Think but Don't Usually Say Out Loud", rolling Sky news, rolling radio news and so on. You know the drill. Always on, never relax, comb for opportunities and track down potential problems. However, that which you consume may well, I fear, consume your business if you're not careful.

We need to step back and take a breath.

A confession: I am not a PR expert. I have never been trained in PR nor studied it. I dealt with it as Managing Director of Leagas Delaney the communications agency between 2005 and 2009. It was both stressful and exhilarating. And since joining Mishcon de Reya in 2009 as Director of Business Development, I have been where the buck stops with regard to our reputation. So I have added 10 years more experience dealing with it – or rather working with far better qualified and experienced practitioners who deal with it.

I trust my instincts a little bit more than I did then, although the curse of knowing a little also means I need to question them on a case by case more than daily basis too. If you've seen the Asif Kapadia film *Diego Maradona*, I am more Diego than Maradona on this front (if you haven't, I recommend that you do). Diego is the hard-working, humble and slightly insecure young man. He trains hard and has doubts. Maradona conversely is God's chosen,



brash, confident, strong and has gifts that defy belief. So, truthfully, I know what I don't know. This has been useful.

The primary utility of this is that I have focused on what I do know well: growing a business and understanding how "brand" is a significant lever of growth. In practice this means ensuring that your business and everyone in it understands what brand means and why there is value in having a positioning predicated on what genuinely makes you different and competitive. Why it's important to know what you stand for and what you don't, what your values are and what they are not, what you care about, what your personality as a business is, and what, if you only had a few words to use, you would say defines you.

Businesses are collections of people delivering services and/or products. How best can you represent this to yourselves internally – and it is critical you do this – as well as externally, so that you have the best chance of commercial success? Developing a deep understanding of your brand means working with brand strategy experts. It means spending time talking to senior and junior people in your business, lawyers and business professionals alike. It means talking to clients, reviewing the competition, and distilling what drives the management's vision of where their business is going. Do this with experts and you will succeed. Don't and you won't.

If you follow this approach, take a few months to do it properly. Invest in the process both from a financial and time perspective. If you do, the journey will be as important as the destination. You have to continuously remind everyone why you are doing this: it's all about growth, top and bottom line. Don't take my word for it: on average brand value accounts for about 20% of the total market capitalisation of businesses according to an analysis of data from all the major brand valuation companies. But establishing your brand's essence is just the first of a number of steps. The next one is to be clear what your key messages are on a practice level, a group level and a firm wide level. They need to be complementary.

Your next task is to agree a house view on how you respond to the inevitable unwanted or potentially damaging comments that will come your way: which ones will you ignore, which ones will you deal with, will you be defensive or offensive, will you involve the lawyers with publications? You can only deal with these issues in the heat of the moment if your brand fundamentals are in place. If they aren't then you will need to spend huge amounts of time dealing with each crisis. And if you're doing that then the chances are you are not properly protecting or enhancing the reputation of your brand and business.

When the heat is on you need PR experts working very closely with the relevant people in the business. Your compliance team will be an integral part of this in a way they may not have been a few years ago. The regulatory environment has changed so you need to be joined up. You might employ external PR expertise too on a case by case basis – we do because we appreciate a second dispassionate opinion: sometimes it's hard not to get protective and emotional when outside forces are attacking you. My advice on this front: don't fall into this trap; no good will come of it.

If you and your business is prepared and you have a wide collective understanding internally of what your brand stands for, then you have given your business the best chance of success. But if you want exponential growth then there is one more critical step to take: help convince your business that brand reputation is the responsibility of everyone in the firm, especially the fee-earners.

Your brand is your service delivery. It starts with clients and how you treat them: great legal advice, personal ownership of the relationship, consistent delivery across the business. Your brand is also your network of connections and referrers – they will either advocate for you or not. Treat them as you would your clients. See them regularly, add value to them and their roles.

Finally, your brand is also the focus of your PR team. If they achieve both positive awareness and adeptly manage negative publicity, then they have helped grow the reputation of the business. But they can't do it on their own. Growing the business: it's why we all do what we do. After all: "It's business. But it's personal."

# Chapter 3

## Media Relations: How do you do it?

*by Georgina Bennett-Warner*  
*Communications Manager*  
*BCLP*

The world of legal PR and the way in which we interact with the press have changed significantly over the years. But there is one principle which has remained a constant.

The clue is in the title; relationships are key.

Two relationships are important when ensuring that your lawyers are regularly placed in the press. The relationship that the law firm PR creates and maintains with the press and that which each chosen lawyer maintains with their own press contacts. A decade ago, the onus was on PR professionals to build up relationships and be a sound piece for their lawyers. Now, however, times have changed and our role is moving more and more towards coaching, support and advising on how lawyers can build those relationships alone.

Lawyers, a naturally cautious bunch, largely see the advantage of getting to know the press. But they are often concerned about things going wrong, content being taken out of context and bringing their firm into disrepute. This means that they look to PR professionals to brief them on how to go about speaking to the media.

A fundamental part of our role as legal PRs is facilitating introductions between lawyers and journalists; it is so important to make sure that key lawyers within your firm are known to relevant members of the press. Setting up face-to-face meetings works well and having enough confidence in your coaching to be able to offer to accompany your lawyer can often help, too. But you can still be pleased if your lawyer decides to go alone. This may feel risky (and frankly it will be up to you to make sure that your lawyer is ready for that) but the value that a journalist will get out of an 'off-the-record meeting' with a lawyer without a PR present is far higher than it is if they feel like every move is being watched.

Importantly, it also means that the two parties have the opportunity to make a professional connection. The next time the journalist in question needs comment, they will go to that lawyer.

Making sure that your lawyers are ready for this step is vital and can be done by establishing some golden rules. For instance, one golden rule is to remember always that if you don't want to see it in the press, don't say it. Nothing is ever truly off the record and if your lawyers can remember that then they will quickly learn how to navigate difficult questions.

This tactic must be matched with effective pitching and research by the PR team. A question that should always be asked by a PR when considering how to approach the national press is 'Why?'.

For example:

- Why are we approaching this publication?
- Why are we approaching this journalist?
- Why have we decided to pitch this particular story?
- Why would a journalist be interested?

If you struggle to answer any of these questions, you may have difficulty achieving the desired result.

The value of comment is always challenging to measure. The advent of social media and the effect that it has had on the news in general means that comment is often very quickly questioned and often torn apart. Backing up any comment made with stats or evidence will ensure that your lawyers are considered credible to the journalist and can often be extremely helpful to the piece as a whole. You should also be creative with every media opportunity. Try to tie in the comment with a well-placed blog on your website to go out after the article goes live or a mini social media campaign discussing the issue in further detail. Create further debate and conversation around the topic and it will hold interest. If you are able to keep the conversation going, then you will continue to lead the narrative.

The legal press has always had a significant role to play within the industry and further afield. It is not uncommon for the nationals to find stories through legal publications like *Legal Business*, *The Lawyer* and *Legal Week*, and many business journalists start their careers there.

Many will dismiss the 'trade press' but these publications are very well read by partners and they get significant access to the C-suite of most top law firms. If anything, these publications have only become more aggressive in their pursuit of news. They are generally competitive with each other and there should be a concerted effort made not to play favourites and to treat each publication equally. Whilst there is still a hunger for news stories, there is also a move towards longer-form features examining either areas of practice, individual firms or the industry as a whole. These are great opportunities to build profiles amongst your peers and your inclusion will be helped by the relationship that you have built with the publications. In short, to ignore this strand of the press is a mistake.

A well-thought-out law firm PR strategy will dedicate a whole section to relationship building with the legal media. Special attention needs to be paid to the type of content that you take to them. The journalists working in the legal press have always had significant knowledge not just of the law but of the business of law. They know the market extremely well and unlike a lot of the nationals, have a lot of historical knowledge. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that pitch opportunities are taken seriously. Make sure that your lawyers are prepared to be grilled on their financial results, their competitors and their own

standing within the market. The superstar partner who left for a rival six months ago will be mentioned, as will poor financial results after the acquisition of a team in Europe. It is a very different scenario to speaking to journalists at the nationals who will most likely be more interested in the legal ramifications of any given story.

Getting to know the editors of each publication and the journalists who cover you is also advisable. In your PR plan, you should have touchpoints for the editors to meet with your senior management once a year, as well as meetings set up for the journalists with key partners across the firm. This way they get a real idea of how the firm works, what kind of personality it has and where its ambitions lie and vice versa!

It is also beneficial for the PR professional to try to build a relationship with members of the legal press. The journalists will often go directly to the comms team – particularly before they know a firm well – to confirm that they are reaching out to the right people. It is always a good idea to meet them to get an idea of what they are working on and what they would like to learn about the firm.

Media relations is an enjoyable part of being a legal PR. Through teaching your lawyers how to build positive relationships with journalists, maintaining yours and making sure that you consider what journalists are looking for when pitching, you can see your hard work come to fruition. Thanks to thought leadership and social media we can also now build on the conversations being had with the press ensuring that we keep the profile of our law firms and lawyers high.

# Chapter 3a

## How to Write a Bylined Article

by *Antonia Welch MPRCA*  
*Communications Consultant*  
*WelchPR*

An authored or bylined article may not always be the most glamorous deliverable when it comes to legal PR but it is often the most effective tool available to enhance the profile of an individual lawyer or their team.

A good bylined article in the right title draws attention to issues relevant to the lawyer's practice area, showcasing the author as a thought leader and enhancing their credibility in the market.

There are opportunities for lawyers and other professionals to write for top nationals such as *The Times* and the *Financial Times* competition for commissions will be fierce. Probably the easiest way to secure a first commission is to focus on the sectors in which the law firm operates and to target the trade press for each specific sector. An advantage of this is that it will reach the key target audience: existing and potential clients.

With an enormous range of niche titles, the UK B2B press is amongst the most sophisticated in the world. It gives plenty of opportunities for PR-savvy lawyers and their advisers to secure commissions. For example, a law firm construction team would almost certainly look to target *Building* and *Construction News*, both of which boast massive circulations and are hugely influential in their sector.

Once target publications have been identified, the next step would be to pitch appropriate themes with a *brief* synopsis to the commissioning editor. Ideally, these themes will have some kind of topical news hook. For example, they might involve an impending piece of legislation or a case that sets a precedent. Another common approach is to present a common or emerging problem confronting the lawyer's client base and provide a solution.

Editors of leading trades may be inundated with pitches so a good tactic can be to invite a target editor to meet one or two partners or associates over coffee. Putting a face to a name can be helpful, and editors are generally more receptive to pitches from professionals they have met. It is also worth remembering that although few titles will hold contributors to a licensing agreement, there is an unwritten rule that an article will be provided on an exclusive basis.



Once a commission is secured, here are five simple tips to make sure the article is a good read:

### Use accessible language

As detail-focused people, this is where lawyers can become a little unstuck. Complex legal jargon must be avoided so if an article is technical, strip it back. If the author is not hugely familiar with the title he is writing for, provide one or two recent articles to help provide a guide to the style and tone of the publication. Ideally, any piece should be pithy and sharp.

### Use specific examples

If possible, set out statistics to back up a statement and give one or two anecdotes to bring the argument to life. For example, if the article is about businesses not complying with new employment legislation, then try to track down hard numbers to help the reader visualise the scale of the problem; if there are any businesses in particular known to have not complied with the legislation, use this as gleaming detail to get the reader hooked.



## Have an opinion

Lawyers are trained to sit on the fence. But in the world of bylined articles, while impartiality is sometimes required, it's perfectly ok to be opinionated. Opinions make articles more engaging. And if, for example, you have secured an op-ed article for your lawyer, an opinion will be essential, so make sure the author knows how to approach the article.

## Repost and repurpose the article

Articles get further reach if you share them via your firm's, and (if he or she has one) the partner's social media channels. So make sure when your bylined article is published you seize the opportunity to amplify their work.

In addition, subject to the copyright policy of the trade publication, repurposing a bylined article can be a great way to maximise the utility of an article and boost the content on your firm's website.

Once you've secured permission from the editor, republish your article on the firm website and share it again on social media.

## Follow up with future pitches

Editors are people. Collaborating to produce a first bylined article with an editor should be seen as the start of a relationship. You're more likely to be able to secure second, third, and fourth bylined articles with editors whom you've worked with previously. So after you produce your first bylined article for a trade publication, it's good to build on the relationship by following up with additional pitches so your lawyer can gain further opportunities to share their expertise with existing and potential clients.

Compared to giving a reporter comment on a breaking news story, which may never get picked up, it can be worth pointing out to lawyers that an article on a topical issue provides a much more targeted approach to PR. Word count guides for leading trades are usually only around 600-800 words, hardly onerous for a clever lawyer. It would be highly unusual for an editor not to honour a commission, so coverage is almost guaranteed. Seeing their name in print can be a huge boost for an individual lawyer and it can pay dividends by positioning them as prominent experts in their field.

Antonia Welch MPRCA is a freelance PR specialising in the legal sector.

For more information, see [www.welchpr.co.uk](http://www.welchpr.co.uk)

# Chapter 3b

## How to Work with Legal Journalists

*Interview by Byfield Consultancy*

As a legal PR, contacting journalists can feel a bit like shooting arrows in the dark. Pitching to get your partners in key publications can mean bursts of emails that gain no response. Distributing press releases can yield very little traction. Journalists most often won't have time to give detailed feedback on why you didn't make the cut.

So what do legal journalists (really) want from legal PRs?

Here to answer some key questions of legal PRs are:

- Jonathan Ames, Legal Editor at *The Times*
- Catherine Baksi, Freelance Legal Journalist
- James Booth, Legal Reporter at *CityAM*
- Edward Fennell, Freelance Legal Journalist at *The Times*
- Eduardo Reyes, Features Editor at the *Law Society Gazette*
- Rose Walker, News Editor at *Legal Week*

### What makes you choose one lawyer's quote over another's?

#### Jonathan Ames

Quality of the quote first. "This is an outrage and the world is going to spin off its axis as a result..." goes in the copy, whereas "On balance, the legal position is that it is a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and of course it could be a little bit of the other..." does not go in the copy.

Then prominence of the lawyer. Sadly the legal profession stubbornly maintains a class structure of partners on top and solicitors and associates below and QCs, senior-juniors, juniors and pupils. Partner department heads and QCs are more likely to be quoted, but junior types will be quoted if they comply to rule one above.

#### Catherine Baksi

For news stories, I am looking for fast, pithy, insightful, quotable comments – that move the story on by telling readers the likely impact or wider significance of a case or event. For features, I want pretty much the same thing, although there is more scope to explore wider issues, but the quotes should still be focused and succinct. I am always keen to get ideas for features, which might be around trends, new areas of work, changes to law and practice, diversity or education and training initiatives, as well as any scandals for news, so do get in touch.

**James Booth**

Punchy, to the point and presenting an original or interesting viewpoint. The best sources understand this and also understand the need to try and make their point in an interesting and colourful way. Think images, metaphors, something that is going to jump off the page. What I do not want is a heavily caveated, dry, legal opinion.

**Edward Fennell**

Because most of my articles are “features” rather than news I am aiming to present a rounded account of an event or a development. So I’ll be searching for a series of different takes or points of view on the issue. What always counts though is the telling insight or the striking turn of phrase which is delivered with a sense of authority. If several people have said the same thing or presented a similar analysis then, frankly, I’ll select the person who said it in the most interesting way. So it’s the person who comes up with an original viewpoint or the most graphic way of describing it whose name is likely to end up in the paper. Bear in mind though that journalism is a rough old trade and sometimes for chance reasons of time or space or sub-editor’s whim one commentator will feature large and another not.

**Eduardo Reyes**

Obviously an existing reputation is helpful, but above that timeliness and clarity. If they have advance knowledge that, say, a judgment that will attract wide interest is about to come out, a lawyer who gives me the heads up on that will likely get quoted. If I go looking for a comment, clear contact details that work.

**Rose Walker**

Colour. Lawyers aren’t always known for their creativity, so when someone puts a different spin on a situation or uses a good anecdote – anything to make it stand out – that’s very useful. And be candid! Tell me what you really feel.

**What’s your number-one tip for someone starting in legal PR (in terms of dealing with press)?****Jonathan Ames**

Avoid marketing and PR bollocks talk. Tell the story straight, ie, this is a good tale because this will happen or won’t happen. And as mentioned don’t pitch stories to a publication that are not right for it; know your audience.

### **Catherine Baksi**

Familiarise yourself with the publications that you want to pitch to and know what makes a story for them. Find out the press deadlines and the best times to call with a story. When you are pitching by email, put the sexiest top line, telling the journalist what it is about in the subject line, so we have an idea of what it's about before we open the email, and briefly flesh it out in the body of the email – putting the most interesting point first.

### **James Booth**

PR, like journalism, is a relationships game. If I know you I am far more likely to read your email properly or take your call. Don't hide behind email, pick up the phone and introduce yourself.

### **Edward Fennell**

Understand the context in which the journalist is operating. What is the thrust, scope and audience of that publication? What kind of articles does that particular journalist write? There is, frankly, nothing more irritating than being approached by a legal PR on a scatter-gun basis.

Depending on the publication deadlines can be crucial. For a weekly journalist (as I am) it is no good approaching with a story one hour after my deadline for the week has passed. Get to know the nuts and bolts of how the journalist works.

### **Eduardo Reyes**

Read it! Understand the different sections, check who covers what, and take time to understand the topics.

### **Rose Walker**

Read the main publications and get to know what they all specifically tend to cover. The more relevant you can make a pitch to my publication, the better. Introduce yourself – please don't call me and just launch into a pitch without telling me who you are – and aim to build a genuine rapport. It will pay off long term.

## **What is your biggest bugbear among things legal PRs do?**

### **Jonathan Ames**

Jargon is rampant and getting worse. Don't "reach out with an opportunity" as that prompts me hit the delete button without hesitation. Do not insist that you have to sit in with lawyers while they are interviewed. These people are all adults on massive wages – if they can't deal with a reporter's questions without having their hand held, then they shouldn't be put up to speak in the first place.

Do not try to insist on quote approval or review. We won't do it – there isn't time... and see earlier point about these people being highly paid adult professionals. If they don't want to see their words published, they should keep schtum.

### **Catherine Baksi**

Emails and press releases littered with meaningless phrases and jargon are unhelpful; always to use plain English that conveys simply and clearly the story you are putting across. Sending out press releases and then having no one around who is able to answer questions about it is unhelpful, given the pace at which we have to turn stories round. If you are inviting us to an event that is being held under the Chatham rule, please let us know that in advance. It doesn't mean we won't come, but it is helpful if we know in advance.

### **James Booth**

Be on the ball and try and think originally. It feels like some PRs get to work, have a flick through the papers and then email asking if you would like a comment on X story. The problem is, that is yesterday's story. I want to know what tomorrow's story is. And if you can help with that you are much more likely to get something into the paper.

### **Edward Fennell**

Responding to a request for an interviewee by saying they are confident they have someone and then either not delivering or by the individual being not as expert as claimed. The role of the PR is, in my view, to act as the good-faith intermediary between journalist and authoritative commentator. That requires judgement on both availability and expertise of the person concerned. Over-promising what can be delivered is always to be avoided.

### **Eduardo Reyes**

I realise clients can be obnoxious and demanding, but the stress of dealing with them shouldn't show through when you're dealing with the press. If a PR has overpromised to win a client, that's their problem, not mine!

### **Rose Walker**

There are several. Not being fair. I expect PRs to be honest with me and I will do so with them. Calling me if I have phoned a lawyer – if I wanted to speak to you, I would have phoned you and not them. And finally doubting my integrity. I work hard to be as honest and open as possible – I'm not trying to trick you. I appreciate you have a stressful job too. Let's work together to make each other's lives a bit easier!

## What's the greatest factor that determines whether or not you'll run a story?

### Jonathan Ames

Not my decision on the news front. Ask the news desk. In my experience they are keen on stories about animals and sex – and if you can combine the two all the better.

### Catherine Baksi

It sounds obvious, but a story must be new, interesting and relevant to the publication. The news editors ultimately decide which stories are published, but if you help the journalist get the best stories, with the most authoritative quotes, that fit the publication, that's half the battle. Timing can be key – if there's a fresh angle to a big story that's always good and bear in mind the quieter times in the year, like the summer and Christmas when there will be fewer stories from parliament or the courts – it's a good opportunity to pitch quirky ideas.

### James Booth

A former news editor used to say: "It's the news, not the olds". I want to be pitched stories that are new, fresh and interesting, not some stale old press release that has been knocking around for a week or has already appeared elsewhere.

### Edward Fennell

For my feature stories it is very rare – but not impossible – for me to follow up on a suggestion for a PR. I am driven by the wider business news agenda – that's what shapes my selection. Topicality and freshness. I am then looking for experts to comment on it.

For the micro-stories in my Legal Diary I am looking for something which is a bit unusual and can be explained simply in 120 words. I have four slots (usually) and ideally they will all be different. both from each other and from what appeared the previous week. So it can be a matter of luck.

### Eduardo Reyes

Does it have novelty or controversy? And will/should my target audience be interested in it?

### Rose Walker

How easily accessible is the information I need? The best emails I receive about deals a firm has worked on, for example, include the team of lawyers that worked on it, and any other law firms that were involved. How relevant is it? Deal news should be sent the day the deal is in the wider press, ideally. Don't send it to me when the deal has closed. We will not run it.

## What's the one thing you wish more legal PRs understood about being a legal journalist?

### Jonathan Ames

I want to speak to senior experts at their firms who will not faff about with caveats but give me a decent story and some good quotes. I don't want to go for coffee mornings for a general chat that just makes some new partner feel important. If I go to a meeting I want for there to be at least the whiff of a story.

### Catherine Baksi

In the era of social media and 24-hour news, journalists have to turn stories round very quickly and work at a fast pace. We get many emails every day and it is easy to miss things. The easier that you can make it for us to sell your story to the news desk, the more likely it is to get published. If you've got a great story, do pick up the 'phone and give us a call.

### James Booth

Time, time, time. It is endlessly frustrating when you call a PR with a request then chase them up and they have clearly not done anything to move things forward. If you can help, great - try and deliver as quickly as possible. If you can't, that is fine. I would rather know quickly and then go elsewhere.

The other issue is PRs being overly by the book. Someone who is willing to go off record and brief out stories is infinitely more preferable to deal with than a robotic statement-issuer.

### Edward Fennell

Time and space is tight. Unless the story is really quite exceptional please do NOT pick up the phone and speak to me.

### Eduardo Reyes

For professional publications, we're not a poor relation of the regular press – we often cover things first, and the resource we have to focus on the legal sector is often much greater.

### Rose Walker

I will try my absolute best to be reasonable and give you sensible deadlines, for example. I want to work with you from a position of trust and honesty. If you respect me, I'll respect you. I also don't mind being chased – as a news editor I'm juggling a lot and some things slip my mind. But if I tell you I'll get back to you if I think something's interesting then I will. Don't phone me again if I don't!



# Chapter 4

## Litigation PR

*by Gus Sellitto CMPRCA  
Managing Director  
Byfield Consultancy*

Reporting on court cases has long been a mainstay for journalists generating good copy for stories. But nowadays, reporting takes place in an environment of 24-hour news, increasing public scrutiny on companies and individuals, and everyone having a means of sharing information publicly at their fingertips.

Litigation PR is a specialist branch of legal PR, all about managing the reputation of a client – company or individual – through the litigation process. Before the claim is issued, before it reaches court (in the event it does) and through the timeline of the court process. And then managing the PR when the case closes.

There are different rules covering court reporting around criminal and civil cases and for the purposes of this article, I focus only on litigation PR in relation to civil cases.

Any individual or company involved in a dispute should be thinking carefully about how the case is going to impact their reputation – because it will impact their reputation.

Moreover, you and your client should consider carefully what your overall aim is in engaging litigation PR in the first place. For instance, is your aim to maintain a dignified silence? Is it simply to rebut the aggressive stance advanced by your opponent, or to discredit your opponent? Is it to pressure your opponent to settle a claim before it reaches court? Or is it to raise awareness among others that they have a recourse to justice?

Taking a reactive stance to litigation PR simply doesn't work; you need to have a strategy in place. For instance, anticipating when and how you might be attacked by the other side, what your key rebuttals are and how you would respond if allegations were being made about you that were not true. The better planned in relation to thinking carefully about pre-trial, through-trial and post-trial in litigation PR you are, the better your outcome in terms of media and public perception will be.

You also need to consider your client's perceived identity in terms of the media and, by extension, the public. Are they the David or the Goliath? The nasty bank or the victimised family? Or are they a global corporate who until now have enjoyed an unblemished record of wholesome brand values, but whose reputation could be severely tarnished by the litigation in front of them.

In some cases, your starting point can define the overall effect on your reputation. Being fully conscious of where your client currently stands will enable you to better predict the initial challenges you might face with PR. The reason to do this is simple: you can win your case in the court of law,

but lose your case in the court of public opinion. For example, if Sir Philip Green was involved in a court battle against one of his business interests now, furore around recent #MeToo allegations made against him and his controversial use of NDAs would make any positive PR for him challenging. How much public sympathy would he really get, despite the strength of his legal case?

This means taking into account where your client is in the eyes of the media and the public as soon as you're called in.

These considerations ultimately lead us to a point of caution: your litigation PR strategy can only ever be as good as the legal case which underlines it. An aggressive PR strategy cannot make up for the pitfalls of what is essentially a weak case. Take the example of Stella English, a former winner of *The Apprentice* who lost a claim in an employment tribunal against Lord Alan Sugar. English had brought a fiery PR campaign against Lord Sugar, but Lord Sugar strongly rebutted and used the media in his defence. The tribunal resulted in a unanimous ruling in Lord Sugar's favour. And it was later reported by the tabloids that the claimant lost a very high-profile job as a result of the media she had courted, which painted her as a troublesome employee throughout the tribunal.

Yes, litigation PR can be a tool to put pressure on the other side; a tool where embarrassing incidents unrelated to the court case are brought into the public domain. Yes, you can use litigation PR to gain influence amongst key stakeholders, including the media, politicians and other social influencers. But ultimately, the court decides on the legal facts and merits of the case before it.

So what does it take to manage litigation PR effectively?

Here are my tips for implementing a proactive strategy from start to finish.



## Pre-trial: Build a narrative

### Invite journalists on key trial dates

There will be peaks and troughs of when the press are going to be interested in reporting the case, so think tactically: plot on a timeline key dates of when you should be getting press interest to bolster your arguments. For instance, you should invite journalists to the opening pleadings, when the witness statements are sworn in, to give them an overall picture of the dispute. Or you could use the highly pressured situation of when the opponents are under cross-examination by your legal team to again generate media interest and increase chances that more public scrutiny centres on your opponent than it does your client.

### Take the pulse on your client's and your opponent's reputations

Just as you check your own media perception, do the same for your opponent. Look at who's involved, what their backgrounds are, what their reputations are, whether they've been involved with anything else controversial outside the litigation. An awareness of this, in tandem with knowledge of your own perception, will help you predict how different publications will report your case and the additional reputational pressure points you can squeeze your opponents on as part of your offensive strategy.

### Make sure you know the court rules

You need to be fully appraised as a litigation PR. A key rule of engagement is knowing when you can start to speak about the case to the media in a meaningful way. Most national newspaper journalists will rely on the Particulars of Claim being made publicly available way before any physical court date, which, as a litigation PR practitioner, allows you to start building a public narrative around your client's case.

Flouting these rules could land you and your client in contempt of court, which has very serious ramifications. But an acute awareness of the status of legal documents and information and knowledge of when they can and can't be discussed are essential apparatus in the armoury of the litigation PR. Make sure you follow the rules of engagement.

### Plan your strategy around the facts

Ally your litigation PR narrative to legal documents and be sure you know where the strengths and weaknesses of your case are. To build a compelling litigation PR strategy, you have to centre on the facts of the case and take a forensic eye to its weaknesses that could be exposed by the other side.

### Build a suite of documents

Assemble your documents so that everyone's on the same page. These should include: Q&As, scenario planning, a timeline of the court hearing dates and witness timetable and lists of journalists who would be interested in the case.

## Through-trial: Be tactical

### Lead the news on the case

Take all opportunities to distribute factual information about the case. For example, after they become public, release court documents accompanied with your narrative on what the documents show. This will help details of the case that you want to emerge make it into public consciousness.

### Know the rules of engagement

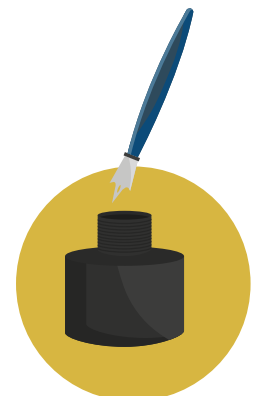
Litigation PR should never be thought of as a tool to circumvent the court process. Judges look very poorly on that. So no matter what the other side might throw at yours, you must tread within the lines.

### Delegate spokespeople for your client

This will also help you shield your client's reputation, create a sense of power and coordination around the case, as well as limit association between key company actors and the case itself.

### Ensure the continuity of business-as-usual PR

Litigation PR, without the attendant 'business as usual' PR, can consume the agenda of a business's public profile. It's therefore important that not all news about your client revolves around the case. Use PR on non-case related matters to ensure stakeholders know about your broader good news.



## Think beyond the end of the case

What is the narrative you want to build if you win the case? What is it if you lose? Will there be an appeal? Remember that even if you win the case, it's still not necessarily a victory from a reputational standpoint. You'll need to think about how your client's reputation will be affected in the long-run and start working out your strategy for repair.



## Post-trial: Rebuild

This is where the law stops and the PR starts. How much work your client has to do ultimately depends on how the litigation PR was conducted throughout the case, and its outcome. At this stage, it's good to assess your position and the reputation rebuild work that is required to re-establish your position to where it was before the litigation event.

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Litigation has the potential to cause serious damage to companies' and individuals' reputations, regardless of the outcome of the case. But having a strategy in place for the communications around a dispute is an essential part of preventing (unnecessary) reputational damage and, if used effectively, can be a key lever for advancing your position in a litigation scenario.

# Chapter 5

## Law Firm Mergers

by Lydia Rochelle MPRCA  
Head of Marketing  
Fieldfisher

Law firm merger activity has increased massively in the last five years. Firms merge for a variety of reasons such as for growth, strategic development of a geographical location and the need for more resource.

The extent to which you, as a legal PR, are involved in the overall project will depend on the size of your firm. During my time at Fieldfisher, I have been involved in four mergers, each with their own unique challenges. When I had my first ever merger I remember thinking, “Great, I’ll write a press release” and thought that would be the end. I had done plenty of press releases and knew the media landscape well.

How naive I was.

There is so much more involved. And as a communications professional, your responsibility may cover the entire marketing and communications mix around a merger. This chapter will outline things to consider in a merger, potential risks that may arise and how you can mitigate those risks, the impact of internal communications and how to optimise coverage of the merger.

In an ideal world, you would have at least a couple of months’ notice (if not more) of an impending merger. However, as in all things in law firms, sometimes you have a few weeks and if that is the case you will still need to deliver a campaign that delivers impact and success.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER

#### CLARIFY YOUR ROLE

It is important to clarify early on what role you and your team are playing. Is it purely media relations or does it take on a broader marketing role? Who has responsibility for brand integration, internal communications (for both parties)? Who is responsible for the website changes? Who has responsibility for social media? Will you be involved in project management?

#### INTERNATIONAL OR DOMESTIC

Different audiences require different messages and the media may have a different approach to what you are used to. If it is an international merger, you may also have to consider needing translation of the press release and potentially support in-country to assist with media support there.

#### EXTERNAL SUPPORT

It is important to consider the use of external support, potentially even just for advice. Most major firms will do this in-house as they will have enough resources. However, if you are a smaller firm and have not got a lot of media relations experience then working with an agency who has a lot of experience doing these types of projects would be beneficial. They will have the experience to talk you through the process and can work as a press office if your team is not big enough or does not have a lot of media experience.

#### THE TYPE OF MERGER

What type of merger is it? Is your firm the larger or smaller firm? If you are the larger firm, you will be dedicating the overall messaging; however, from an integration perspective it is important to consider both firms and what the messaging will mean to the smaller firm. From an integration and internal communications perspective, it’s important that the messaging is positive for both parties.

#### CREATIVITY

Can you play with how you do the announcement? It is less likely in mergers but more and more we are seeing firms using video and infographics to launch other corporate communications. Do not be afraid to think about how you might be able to utilise different tactics to support your launch.

**LEAKS**

This is a perpetual problem for any law firm merger and can be the reason why some teams find out later in the day that a merger is in the pipeline. The idea being that the more people who know, the greater the risk of leaks.

As soon as you are aware, you must prepare for risks and have media statements prepared in advance of the official go live date. This will mean that you are not on the backfoot if the media approaches you before go live and you can control the message around the merger, rather than having the leak or press set the agenda.

**INTEGRATION**

Any merger will take time and is not something that is going to happen overnight. It's important to ensure that you have buy in on both sides about the merger. This may mean giving the new offices time to merge into the full brand. On the other hand, some may want to be on brand from day one and it is important to have all collateral ready for go live date.

Internal communications around it is key and it is important to run a campaign after you go live to ensure that your new colleagues feel involved and buy in to the firm's values and brand.

**REDUNDANCIES**

Professor Scott Moeller of Cass Business School and author of *Surviving M&A* (Scott Moeller, 2009) states that one in eight people on average is made redundant after a merger. Hopefully you won't have to face this but depending on the size of the merger you may do. This is clearly an emotional time. Again, preparing statements in advance of the redundancy process will help to mitigate being on the backfoot. Ensure that all statements are reviewed and approved by the HR department and your General Counsel or legal advisor to ensure that anything said is appropriate and in line with the process.

**TOP TIPS**

Write a checklist of all areas of communications that need to be covered; media relations, internal communications, social media and digital.



Liaise with all areas of your business services to ensure a clear plan of project management. This will also clarify if there are risks e.g. potential redundancies.



Prepare media statements before the go live date.



Consider external agencies for either external advice or international knowledge and experience.



Don't forget the importance of post-go live follow up internally.

**REFERENCES**

Scott Moeller, *Surviving M&A: Make the Most of Your Company Being Acquired* (Wiley 2009).

# Chapter 6

## Crisis Management

*by Samantha Mangwana*  
*Legal Consultant*  
*Shine Lawyers*

As an employment lawyer, I've experienced first-hand how issues and crises can cause serious reputational damage. I've dealt with numerous cases in which there is a potential for events to spiral out of control and create widespread controversy. This includes acting in high-profile employment tribunal cases, whistleblowing allegations, #MeToo cases, and other incidents of major impropriety that have resulted in front-page news headlines.

I've also been on the receiving end of law firm announcements that have directly impacted my colleagues, such as office closures and mass redundancies. Here, I've learned important insights about the need for careful internal communications and the language, tone and style of such communications.

A crisis can shine the spotlight on any organisation. But the glare of that spotlight can be greatly intensified when a law firm is involved in a crisis that features alleged misuse of the law, as ultimately we as lawyers are there to advise clients how to stay within the law. Over recent years we have seen a number of law firms, with established reputations for advising clients, find themselves accused of unlawful sexual harassment by their own staff.

The media landscape has also changed. Social media has played its part in facilitating the 24-hour news cycle, and communications are fraught with potential escalation and backlash. So when issues and crises emerge in law firms, the PR response must rest on solid legal ground or it risks being called out pretty swiftly on digital and social media. This is why in any crisis situation the legal and PR strategy must be finely balanced to ensure that it is coordinated and that information is disclosed appropriately according to the timeline of the crisis.

It is the potential severity of these types of issues that have meant that, over the course of my career as a lawyer, I've worked very closely alongside PR specialists. Here are my tips for managing both law firm crises and law firm client crises.

### **Assemble a crisis management team**

Many law firms and organisations now have crisis management teams to assess both live and potential dangers to their businesses. These teams should gather regularly to assess issues affecting their organisations and how those issues could develop over time into crises. Crisis management teams should comprise a representative mix of those individuals who can advise and respond to crisis situations, depending on the size and scope of the organisation. In a law firm, this



would include the firm's management team, appropriate department heads, HR, compliance and risk and, importantly, a senior member of the PR team.

### Have a plan and protocols in place

Protocols and planning materials should include stakeholder mapping for all internal and external audiences affected by the crisis including staff, clients, suppliers, the media and regulators. Your plan should rehearse how the crisis could develop over time, including preparing answers to questions key stakeholders might ask, scenario plans and communications that can be sent out, proactively or reactively, depending on the timeline of the crisis and what you can and can't say from a confidentiality and legal perspective. Where appropriate, involve direct line managers to ensure that they are fully aware of the line of response to direct questions from their staff.

Map out scenarios to get a sense of what could arise in the course of the crisis. For example, what will your crisis management team's response be if there's a leak to the media? How would you respond to anonymous rumours about your firm on social media? Careful responses can be prepared and law firms should involve their in-house PR teams as early in the crisis as possible.



Identify and train your spokespeople and establish a chain of command for dealing with internal and external inquiries in the event of a crisis. This should include a switchboard policy with clear instructions on who to escalate the inquiry to. The internal PR team should be at the heart of this process, engaging external crisis management PR support where required.

### **Ensure your spokesperson is fully briefed on all the details, before any media questioning**

Taking the example of a #MeToo allegation, the legal press will want to know about the firm-wide policies that were in place at the time the allegations were made and how those policies have developed over time. For instance, the procedures, staff training, whistleblowing policies and compliance protocols. If your spokesperson doesn't know about the relevant internal mechanisms, make sure they do.



### **Respect the legal status of the crisis**

If your crisis involves allegations that are being investigated and live or potential litigation, you need to be very careful about the information you use to develop your comms response. You'll have to work closely with your lawyers to determine how much you can say, how much you can legally disclose and when you can disclose key information. Often, there is a 'communications tension' in crisis communications, with the legal team being cautious about disclosing sensitive information that could

point to liability or potentially breach confidence, and the PR team who are more concerned about the organisation communicating openly in order to appear transparent and preserve its reputation. This sensitivity needs to be finely balanced in every crisis situation, depending on its nature and how much attention it's attracting. All internal and external communications should be approved by the relevant member of your crisis management team. If you speak to the media, it's important to have a paper trail.

### **Know when to prompt widespread cultural change in your business, and be the catalyst of that change**

Crises can also present an opportunity for law firms and organisations to look at their cultures and to test whether they are in line with the bigger picture of their overall brands. Firms can take a positive stance in communicating how they are adapting their cultures to deal with issues that could damage their reputations, or turn into crises. Take the example of how Deloitte responded to the #MeToo movement. The firm's chief executive confirmed reports that the firm had fired 20 partners in the UK in recent years due to misconduct, in doing so delivering a robust message that it would not accept such behaviour from staff in the future.

It's important to know when the scale of a situation is such that firm-wide, cultural change is needed.



## **Tailor your responses around the likely emotive responses of various stakeholders**

I've worked at firms when very emotive incidents have taken place. It was my first day on a training contract in a law firm when it was announced that the firm was to make significant redundancies. People were crying in the corridors.

The firm had made the announcement the same day as reporting the news to a legal media title, which had covered the news favourably from the firm's perspective, focusing on the rationale for having to make the cuts, but with little regard to how the affected staff felt.

Learning that you're going to be made redundant is always going to be difficult but this example serves to show how important timing and delivery of difficult news is. It also highlights that internal communications are just as important as external communications in issues and crisis PR.

## **Don't let the crisis turn into a PR crisis**

Crises can be dormant volcanoes and risks of amplification via traditional and social media need to be considered at all stages of an issue or crisis. Otherwise, there's a real risk of the crisis becoming a PR crisis that can cause enduring damage to a firm's reputation, long after the event has passed. This is where careful consideration of "reputation rebuild PR" is important, so as to isolate as much as possible the crisis incident from the "business as usual" corporate communications.

In the social media age, issues and crises require careful management to ensure reputations are preserved. I hope these tips help legal PRs save valuable time if and when your firm faces such challenges.

# Chapter 7

## Training Lawyers

*by Abi Donald*  
*Head of Coaching*  
*Vox Media*

“What if I don’t know the answer? I’ll look like an idiot.” One of the most common fears lawyers I coach tell me about is being put under pressure in an interview and failing, thus ruining their reputation and perhaps that of their firm. At the other end of the spectrum is the frequent query from a PR: “He thinks he knows everything and doesn’t need help”, the lawyer whose confidence is itself a risk.

Of course, there are risks in media engagement, but we know there are huge benefits, too. What coaching does is manage those risks. We need our spokespeople to understand where the potholes are and how to navigate them, elegantly and confidently.

This chapter explores how to guide your spokespeople and help them speak with impact on behalf of your firm.



## Media engagement is a transaction

There is no point in engaging with the media unless we are going to get something out of it. And that doesn't mean mentioning the name of your law firm 10 times during the course of the interview – do that and you'll never be asked back. Of course, we engage with the media to raise the firm's profile. But we should be more strategic than that and our spokespeople need to know what that strategy is because that will inform their responses. We need to make the transaction a "win, win". We need to ensure the journalist gets good useable content which also benefits us.

## Who's in control?

The problem is your lawyers, your spokespeople, know too much (and they won't mind you telling them that). And there is a risk attached to that. They will often find it difficult not to answer all the journalist's questions. After all, that is what they have been trained to do when speaking to clients. We have to show them that just because they know the answer to a question or have an opinion on it doesn't mean they have to share it.

A journalist has an agenda. In order to keep their job, they need their by-line in print: they need their content to cut through a fairly ruthless and competitive process; they need the best story they can get. To do that, they may try to draw your lawyer on areas that weren't agreed in the briefing. They may try to get them to give their *personal* opinion. They may try to put words into their mouth so they get a better quote. They may ask them about internal issues in the firm or ask them to comment on a related issue which is current in the news.

Journalists do this not because they are bad people but because they are doing their job – getting the best story they can. I find that a lawyer's instinct is to answer these questions to be helpful. We need to show lawyers that they don't have to and in fact, in many cases, they shouldn't. If they answer all the journalist's question, they are leaving it to the journalist to decide what the story is and perhaps that doesn't serve our agenda or the agenda of the firm. Your lawyers need to know they are in control and to do this they need to have prepared what they want this interview to be about and the content they need to deliver. Leave it down to the journalist and the interview could be about anything and everything.

## Making compelling content

I'm often asked why a particular lawyer is always appearing in the press, often by a disgruntled client who feels they are better placed and more knowledgeable to comment. The answer is usually, that the lawyer in question understands what the journalist needs: content, good content. That lawyer may also have had a coffee with that journalist or may respond to media opportunities quicker (the news machine travels fast). When I was a programme editor in broadcast I would often try and shake up the list of contributors instead of getting 'the same old faces'.

Try as I might, the problem I had was ‘the same old faces’ would come up with the goods and give much more interesting and unusual content that would resonate with my viewers, so once again they would appear on the programme.

‘Good content’ is, of course, subjective but a good contributor knows the audience and knows how to make their content clear and accessible. They know how to deliver content which is quotable and memorable.

When engaging with the media as a contributor in a thematic piece your lawyers need to think carefully about the key thoughts and ideas they want to convey, or as we would say the messages. What are the interesting ideas we have which contribute to the debate? This is often an issue for lawyers because their response might be that they are conflicted in some way, or they don’t want to upset certain stakeholders, regulators or clients. Another issue they may raise is that the subject is too complicated, and they don’t want to reduce it to a “soundbite”. My answer is that you can always find a way through. With careful preparation you will find you can say something that furthers the conversation that doesn’t present any risk to you or the firm. It takes work; it’s more difficult to distil complex ideas so that they are accessible, but it is possible. Don’t accept that initial push back from a lawyer.

So, the first step is creating the messages but crucially it’s about how lawyers illustrate those messages that will make your lawyers good spokespeople. It is the examples or evidence they use to support the messages which will make those messages memorable and quotable. Good evidence will also allow your spokespeople to show how your firm is meeting these challenges (without it being too salesy). It will be the proof point that gives that lawyer and your firm credibility.

Since all a journalist is interested in is good content they can use, your lawyers can ensure their key content is likely to be quoted or used by making the examples that support the key messages the most compelling thing they say. They should use stories, observations or metaphors to ‘bring their messages to life’. This is the most difficult part of their preparation – finding the right example to illustrate a point. But they do need to prepare. They don’t want to be making this stuff up on the spot; that really does present risk. These examples also allow the lawyer to show their emotional commitment. There’s nothing better than a story to show people what makes you and your firm tick.

## Staying in control

The areas your lawyers will be commenting on fall into two categories: the first and most common is as an expert contributing to a debate, and the second is when senior partners are asked to comment on the firm’s strategy or an aspect of it. The preparation for both is the same: decide on the messaging and find interesting ways to evidence it.

The first case is the most comfortable for a lawyer. They should take confidence that as an expert they are able to guide the journalist to what is and what isn’t relevant.

In answer to the question, ‘What if I don’t know the answer?’ my response is:

1. Answer the question letting the journalist know that this isn’t something you have to deal with, or that it isn’t your area of expertise, or that it isn’t something you see much of and then
2. ‘Bridge’ to one of your key prepared messages that you can evidence with interesting content.

A journalist will allow your spokesperson to move the conversation on to their “safe ground” because they know more than the journalist does. If this happens in broadcast remember the journalist doesn’t want to make your lawyer look a fool – after all, they have invited them on to comment.

When talking about the firm itself they do have to answer or acknowledge the question that has been asked but that doesn’t mean they have to leave it there. They can also then use the question as a platform to deliver their content. Doing this authentically takes practice.

Lawyers undergo years of training to be ‘active’ listeners and answer their clients’ questions precisely and accurately. They often reflect their clients’ language in their answer to prove they have heard them properly. This is totally the wrong tactic with journalists. A journalist knows that a lawyer will do this so they will often use words in their question in order to get the lawyer to repeat it and create a better headline. You stay in control by taking the essence of the question and answering that in your own words.

We need to prepare for the more left-field questions or ‘predictable negatives’ as I describe them. Even in a thematic piece the journalist may ask questions about the firm, especially in times of transformation. Indeed, they may ask ‘off-topic’ questions, which we need to prepare for to either be able to draw a boundary around them or have good authentic responses that we can then bridge away from.

The lawyers who come to me are either scared of being ‘trapped’ by a journalist and saying the wrong thing, or they are overly confident. My job, like yours, is to read the room and see what is needed. Sometimes I’m sharing the techniques to boost confidence and equip lawyers with the skills to have a healthy relationship with the media. For others I am showing them what can happen when we fail to take a journalist seriously. Either way, the outcome is the same: making sure you have the spokespeople you need to do your job effectively.



# Chapter 8

## Thought Leadership and Legal PR

*by Richard Gerrard CMPRCA*

*Director of Business Development and Marketing*

*Carter-Ruck*

Today law firms of every type are using content marketing to demonstrate their expertise to clients and work referrers. As part of that approach, thought leadership has become popular.

### **Content marketing and thought leadership**

In general, *content marketing* centres on producing, publishing and sharing ideas to a targeted audience. It can be digital or hard copy, written, verbal or even pictorial. It will be relevant and will help the client. It should improve their opinion of the firm and increase the likelihood of profitable instructions.

Thought leadership is a sub-category of content marketing. It goes beyond technical or strictly legal knowledge and demonstrates your insight into the wider world in which clients operate.

This can include the commercial, political, economic or cultural context in which clients devise their strategies, plan their lives and make their buying decisions.

A traditional piece of legal content marketing might be a briefing note or seminar by specialist lawyers, giving clients a detailed update on changes to the law, like tax or dispute resolution.

By contrast, material on a wider topic like “Can Business Survive a No Deal Brexit?”, “What Does AI Mean for Manufacturing?” or “The Future of World Trade” would qualify not just as content marketing but also as thought leadership, addressing strategic questions your client may be thinking about at board level. Thought leadership offers insights into the great issues that are on your clients’ minds – positioning your firm as their natural choice for help and advice in these and related areas.

### **Why choose thought leadership?**

Done well, thought leadership has many advantages for a law firm trying to stand out in a crowded market.

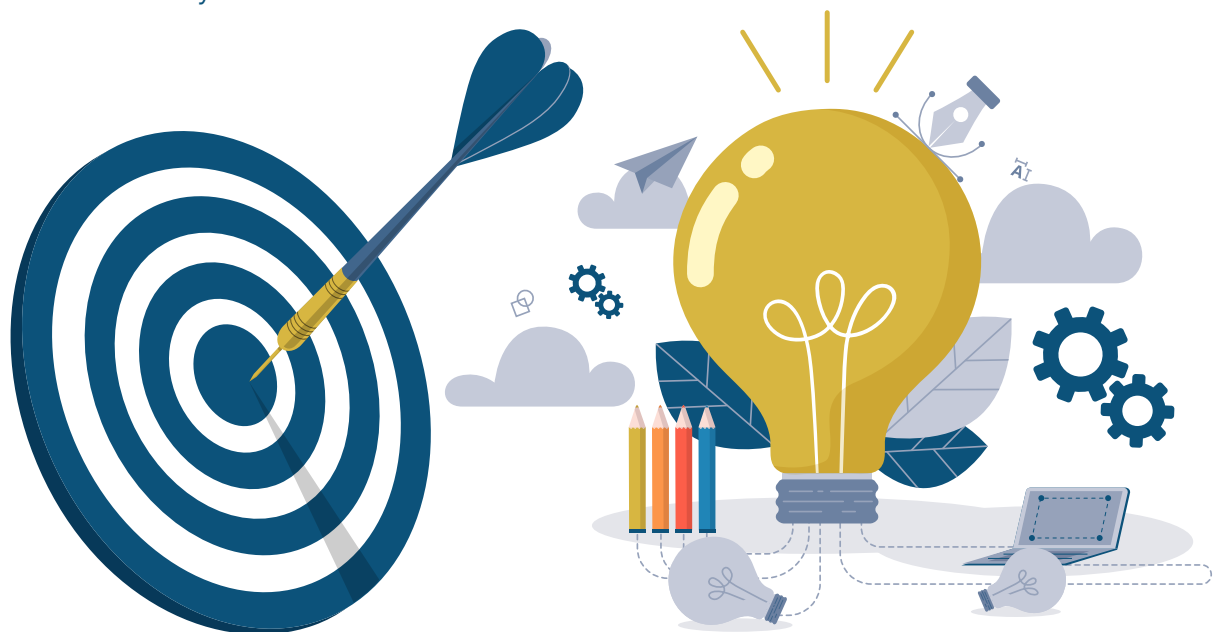
First, you show your client that you are more than mere black letter lawyers. Your people demonstrate that they grasp the big picture and are therefore more likely to give practical advice.

Second, if you can deliver content from prestigious third parties alongside your lawyers, you prove your firm's relevance and your connections to the people that shape the market. How much more impressive will it be to a client if they see their lawyer speaking on a video debate or podcast or writing in a report alongside a senior industry figure, academic, lawmaker or celebrity?

Finally, it can help your client contacts personally. If through your thought leadership the General Counsel of a company gains new talking points for conversations with their board, they will value your material, and will see their relationship with your firm in a new and even more positive light.

### Where to start

When considering a thought leadership initiative, you need to perform two distinct but closely related exercises:



1. *Identify* the big issues that your target audience (and competitors) are thinking about by reading client websites, studying national, trade and business press, reading academic studies or – if you have the budget – conducting market research. Trust your own creative and strategic thinking: use your imagination to devise exciting new angles.
2. *Unlock* the intellect, enthusiasm and creativity of your lawyers and other experts, to deliver compelling answers and insights to those issues. Work with your lawyers to identify well-qualified, recognised authorities that you might be able to involve. Come up with original combinations of people and insights.

Take time to think about the context of your firm's practices. Your competition lawyers will work in a context shaped by economic theory. Your tax lawyers will be closely concerned with the international public policy debates shaping tax reform. Your real estate and planning teams will be engaged in debates on environmental regulation, the shifting shape of retail and the future of the city. And so on. These are all opportunities to take the discussion forward, beyond legal technicalities, in an arresting and relevant way.

This is also the time to start thinking about how the final product might look. What format or channel is best suited to its message? Be imaginative and consider landing pages rich with interactive content in different formats. Consider videos, infographics and podcasts.

Use short and long reads.

Don't forget some people still like hard copy. And of course events can be powerful: think about round tables, conferences, debates and smaller dinners.

### **Where does PR come in?**

This can depend on your goal. Are you seeking coverage in the press or broadcast media, to drive new enquiries or name recognition? Or do you have a more limited audience, aiming for rich conversations to deepen long-term relationships?

Make sure you factor your PR plan in at the outset, when you are setting your goals for the whole campaign.

If coverage is one of the main aims, ensure your PR team is involved as early as possible. There are few things more frustrating – and less efficient – than a PR team being presented with a fully worked out thought leadership initiative which has already been devised and executed by a separate marketing or BD team, and being told simply to “get some coverage” for it.

As the PR team, you will know if a topic has already been done (or done to death), and if your competitors have covered it. You will advise the business on how to frame an issue to secure coverage, and how it will play on the news, features and business pages. You will know which journalists to approach and in what order. You will be able to manage expectations: insights that work well for client conversations may not secure column inches in the *Financial Times*.

### **Differentiate your thought leadership**

You will want to make sure your insights are sharply differentiated from competitor materials. How can you do that?

One way is to express a very clear and distinct point of view. But this can be hard to achieve in a conservative profession like law. Lawyers naturally value accuracy above originality. Many conversations between marketers and lawyers can founder if this tension goes unacknowledged.

But there are other ways of differentiating your thought leadership.

For example, you can:

- Invest in original up-to-date design or an interesting or contemporary mix of channels
- Adopt a unique visual or writing style
- Bring them out more frequently or on a different timetable to your competitors

On the subject of topics: how to select them? You will want to be original and 'stretch the envelope' beyond narrow legal questions into wider political or business issues. But how far should you go?

Don't be afraid to brainstorm possibilities and take options to your partners. If nothing lights them up, you haven't stretched far enough. But if they are not comfortable taking a topic to clients, you may have gone too far.

Knowledge of PR can help you judge how issues are playing in the market and in the media.

## Research and surveys

One way to get a unique insight that you own is to commission research or a survey. If you can think of an original theme relevant to your clients and services you may have a winner.

Survey results can secure wide media coverage. And – Holy Grail of Holy Grails – they can be repeated annually for consistent on-diary coverage.

Some topics have been overdone. Unless you are one of the largest corporate law firms in the world, an annual M&A survey of FTSE100 General Counsel is not going to cut through (even if you can even get the over-surveyed GCs to respond in the first place). Look for other options. Talk to your partners: you'd be surprised how creative they can be.

If you do create a survey, you'll need a strong media plan. Consider lining up an exclusive with a friendly reporter on a broadsheet or TV news show or, if the results are startling, consider a press conference or client presentation as well as a press release.

Survey design is a science of its own, and the conduct of a high volume of outbound calls is almost always beyond in-house marketing teams: so remember you will likely need external help. Many research agencies will also have facility to help you interpret and present the results, working with your design team where necessary.

## Key factors for success

Make sure you have agreed with senior management exactly what success should look like.

If you are promoting a commoditised service, for example through an online sales channel, then measure new instructions or fees. If on the other hand the goal is enriching existing relationships, agree a target for client meetings about your thought leadership. You could identify a core group of partners and ask each to name three people they'd like to talk to. Then measure that.

Roll out is critical. The whole process should be seen as a staircase of developing activity – not a cliff edge everyone falls off once the product is live.

Build momentum by structuring the messages: one key message can be followed up with many subsidiary messages.

Be sure to build in an effective social media campaign, with shareable material each of your fee-earners can deliver to their connections. Create videos, graphics and chunkable content for multiple shares.

The PR team and your lawyers will need to be aligned. Work on that. If you want your partners to roll out your thought leadership and take it to clients, be sure you have effective internal launch materials, 'how to' guides, briefing sessions and speaking notes.

How much you devote to internal alignment will depend on the size of your firm and your budget. But one thing is true for all firms. The more effort you put into galvanising your people, the more you will get out of the exercise. After all, thought leadership is about unlocking the collective genius of your lawyers, and you can't do that without their commitment.

# Chapter 9

## Law Firms and Social Media

*by Barney O’Kelly*

*Founder and Managing Director*

*Hagen Communications*

It is unsurprising law firms have often struggled with social media. They are, by nature, largely conservative and risk averse and they are understandably cautious about their reputations (after people and premises, reputation is a firm’s most valuable asset). For many lawyers the risks are very apparent; the opportunities far less so.

However, social media can be an extremely effective tool for both law firms and lawyers. And, as communications professionals working in the sector, you have an important role to play in ensuring your firm is using social media effectively and appropriately.

### **No right answer**

There is no right answer when it comes to using social media. Any approach should be developed in a manner that is consistent with a firm’s culture, understands the reputational challenges to which it might be exposed and designed to align with the firm’s wider communications, marketing and business development strategy.

In this chapter, I will outline some important concepts to consider when developing and/or delivering a social media programme for a law firm – starting with the basics.

### **Hygiene factors**

Getting the basics right (the hygiene factors) is critical. Doing so will provide a solid foundation and enable you to explore more creative approaches to the use of social media across your firm.

### **Listening**

What is already being said about your firm? Are there any conversations that highlight a reputational issue? Which conversations should your firm be participating in?

These are important questions and some research is recommended before you wade into social media. There are many tools available that can help you make sense of the world of social media. These can be used to monitor conversations and issues and give you a good understanding of the conversations relevant to your firm. Picking the right tool depends on a range of factors such as budget, the range of conversations you wish to monitor, how detailed an understanding you want to develop of your online stakeholders, and how well-positioned your organisation is to engage in online dialogue.

## Guidance, not policy

Views differ as to whether a business needs a separate social media policy. Ours, at Hagen Comms, is that it's not really necessary. Your firm will have a number of policies to ensure its reputation is protected and to set behavioural standards and expectations; yet another one is really going to make very little difference.

Instead, I recommend developing a clear set of guidelines. These will reflect the standards your firm expects of its people and they have the added advantage of helping people understand how to use social media safely; protecting them and your firm. Combined with personal brand training and reverse mentoring, these can be an effective way to enhance the way your firm uses social media platforms (more on those later).

## Safeguarding your brand

Whether or not you intend to actively use them, it is advisable to secure certain social channels for your firm. Some channels, such as LinkedIn, exercise their own controls over who can create a presence representing a brand. Others are less stringent. This gives scope for mischief or, worse, outright harm to your firm's brand.

With this in mind, it is sensible to own the Twitter handles relevant to your firm, its practices, its sectors and its campaigns. I also recommend securing any variations on your name in much the same way you would with your web domains. This also has the advantage of you being able to control which social channels your firm is using and preventing the creation of ineffective social channels spun up in a moment of enthusiasm by well-meaning colleagues.

## Building on the basics

Once you have the fundamentals sorted you can start thinking about how to use social media to best effect. Typically, this will require closer working with marketing and BD colleagues to complement their activities and create the environment and opportunities for your firm to win work.

## Strategic alignment and tone

Most firms have adopted 'safe' approaches to using social media. Updates on various activities – often events or award wins (“We are thrilled/proud/delighted...”) – and latest ‘thought leadership’. What is often missing is a clear and distinct tone of voice and alignment with the firm's proposition and strategic focus.

Developing a distinct voice for your firm and sharing content that highlights its strengths and supports its strategic positioning will increase the impact of your social media activities.

## Relinquish (some) control

As a discipline PR has, at times, struggled with social media. It cuts through the control PRs have traditionally enjoyed and has tended to present more problems than solutions. This has led to many risk-based, control-oriented approaches to social. However, in expertise-driven businesses like law firms, where relationships with clients and building personal brands are vital, social media can be a very useful tool. But this means encouraging and training partners and associates to take more responsibility for their own social presences. This can be done in a number of ways, including personal brand workshops, reverse mentoring programmes (using more socially-savvy people from across the firm to help more seasoned campaigners get to grips with social).

## Creating advocacy

Building a comprehensive network across your firm can be very powerful. Not only does the personal profile of individual lawyers lead to greater connectivity with clients, but it also creates a multitude of communication channels through their personal profiles. These can be used as another distribution mechanism for brand building content (ie advocacy). Typically, this is now done using a software platform to curate and distribute content. At its most simple this can look too orchestrated for some. I would recommend using technology to create a repository of strategically aligned material that can be shared by lawyers with clients as and when required.

This approach was born out of the tech sector (where it is often referred to as 'social selling'). It can be highly effective at engaging clients, sharing content and building brand awareness among core audiences.

## The role of PR

Ownership of social media can be a hotly contested issue; does it 'belong' to PR, digital, or marketing? Regardless, PR has to be involved in shaping guidance, developing content and ensuring what the firm shares on social media is done thoughtfully and with sensitivity to the wider news context for both your firm and your sector. If not, the risk of something going wrong increases and, ultimately, will only make your job harder in the long run.



# Chapter 10

## Gaining Buy-in

*by Kim Tasso*  
*Founder and Principal Consultant*  
*RedStarKim*

In the legal sector, buy-in generally refers to lawyers' agreement to support a decision. But actually in media relations we need more than buy-in from our lawyers – we need them to be actively engaged in the process, constantly identifying story ideas and regularly contributing high-quality content.

As a PR professional you understand the power and value of media relations. But your lawyers will need some education and persuasion. Gaining buy-in from the lawyers is one of the biggest challenges you will face. But be reassured, just about everyone who works in legal marketing faces the same challenges – you are not alone!

There are many tools at your disposal which I have used during 30 years of working in the legal profession. You could argue that achieving buy-in is simply the application of expert consultative selling skills to the internal audience.

I developed the 7P model which is an integral part of the buy-in and stakeholder management courses I run regularly for the Professional Marketing Forum.

Here are some insights that tackle both the rational and emotional aspects of achieving lawyer buy-in.

### Psychology

Let's start with psychology. More precisely, with empathy. You need to put yourself in the shoes of the lawyer and see media relations from his or her point of view.

Lawyers are often not familiar with media relations or they are used to adopting a crisis management approach when protecting their clients. So you will have to educate them on the role of proactive media relations and manage their expectations. Explaining the editor's right to control content is a frequent requirement.

Lawyers are risk-averse so putting themselves out there for the public and their peers to scrutinise isn't comfortable. The risk of being called out on something they might get wrong always outweighs the upside of potential positive coverage. There's also a sort of humility in the legal profession's culture which suggests that it's not quite right to blow your own trumpet or hold yourself out as an expert – especially if they are commenting in an area where the law hasn't been tested in the Courts.

So learn more about the individual lawyers. Understand their different personalities and motivations. Listen to their ideas (often these will be your ideas reflected back at you – the sleeper effect – but you know you’re winning when they consider your ideas as theirs!). Listen to their concerns. Support them as they step tentatively outside of their comfort zone. Adapt your style and approach to the different lawyer personalities. And reassure them about how you will minimise the risks.

There’s a natural human tendency to value what they have – their hard-won reputation – and avoid its loss far more than any potential gain. So tailor your communications accordingly.



## People

The key to achieving buy-in is having a strong relationship with the lawyers. Your confidence, impact and expertise will be important in winning trust. However, you need to spend time away from your desk, phone and screen to interact in real-time with lawyers to really cement relationships. Recent research from Harvard Business Review also shows that people are 34-times more likely to agree to a request for help if you make it face-to-face.<sup>1</sup>

Ensure you use pull rather than push communications – don’t tell them what to do as that is sure to generate resistance. Ask the right questions so that they come to the right conclusion all by themselves.

Not all lawyers are the same. Some have more power and influence than others. Target your activity at those lawyers who are respected by others and have great writing skills or front-of-camera presence. Segment your internal audience and target your media relations activity to win over the supporters and early adopters and avoid the dinosaurs. You can leverage the competitive spirit and in-group bias by identifying which lawyers to work with initially – to get the others to follow suit.

## **Process & Precision**

Lawyers love process. So show them a clear process. If they are new to media relations you will need to break things down into small, specific steps. Help them understand exactly what they need to do – and what your contribution will be. Be precise in what will happen and when. Remove as much uncertainty as you can.

Lawyers like precision – particularly with language. If you edit a lawyer's copy make sure you don't inadvertently alter the legal meaning. You may not consider a minor typo to be important, but for a lawyer this is where they will focus. Lawyers are trained to find the tiny error in large documents so to retain credibility, be obsessive in your proof reading.

## **Plan**

A key method of achieving buy-in is to align your goals with those of the lawyer – and they may be quite different. So it's back to the importance of empathy and really understanding what motivates each lawyer.

Often lawyers see communications activities as ad-hoc activities in isolation. Show them a plan with clear objectives (this helps manage expectations too), the target audience and the various campaign components and how media relations is an integral and important role.

But remember that planning isn't a forte for lawyers – so keep any shared plans brief. And ideally involve the lawyers in building the plan so that they see it as their plan rather than yours. That way you build in engagement from the outset rather than having to achieve buy-in at the end.

The plan should also show that you have all eventualities covered – including addressing lawyer fears of where things could potentially go wrong.

## **Persuasion**

The priority for lawyers is serving their clients – and generating fees. Time is money. Appreciate that a 30-minute meeting with you could be costing them hundreds of pounds in lost fees – so make every minute count by being really prepared and focused.

Unless they see a clear benefit to devoting hours of their time to developing a media relations campaign you will struggle to get their attention. You need to answer the "What's in it for me?" question. And explain

that the results may not be immediate.

You can persuade lawyers by appealing to their dedication to clients – sharing their views on a media platform will reassure clients that they have chosen the right adviser. Remind them that if clients see competing lawyers in the spotlight they may experience cognitive dissonance.

You can explain how using media relations increases their reach and repurposes content they have already developed for seminars and newsletters – then it's an efficient time saver from this perspective.

Harness psychologist Cialdini's six drivers of persuasion – scarcity (there are few opportunities to gain coverage), reciprocation (you will help them in return one day), commitment and consistency (they have already agreed that an enhanced profile is important), social proof (there are other top lawyers showcased in the media), liking (you have a great working relationship) and authority (the firm's management is committed to media relations).<sup>2</sup>

## **Pressure**

You can resort to getting senior sponsors and champions to apply pressure to lawyers to participate in media relations. Where there are firm or team plans, projects or thought leadership campaigns you can show how one lawyer's support is vital for the timelines of other lawyers. They won't want to be seen as the one letting their colleagues down.

Or you can prompt the management team and heads of department to adopt an active approach to media relations – role models are extremely powerful in the legal world.

And be kind to yourself – it's really hard when you are constantly battling against time pressures on the one hand and lawyer resistance on the other. PRs in law firms experience a lot of stress and if this is constant it can take its toll on your enthusiasm and your physical and mental health. Take time out to reconnect with your PR peers to remember that you are talking sense and to stiffen your resolve. You'll be able to return to the never-ending buy-in challenge with fresh determination too.

## **Patience**

One of the first lawyers I ever worked with advised me "Slowly, slowly catchy monkey". Changing attitudes takes time. You need to be consistent, persistent and patient to engage lawyers and win their trust and buy-in.

I urge you to anticipate all the possible objections you will hear and to prepare in advance your answers and responses to such attack strategies. Know that you will be required to patiently explain things time and time again if you are to succeed in the long run.

Accept that some lawyers will be control freaks. They will want

to micro-manage everything. They will need to see everything to approve it before it is released. At least twice. You'll need real patience to work with those folks.

I used to wonder why law firms hired and paid experienced PR practitioners to promote them in the press when they simply ignore our advice and refuse to co-operate. But then I realised that winning that understanding and collaboration is a vital part of our role.

At the end of the day, nothing sells like success. So equip yourself with victory stories and evidence (impressions, digital analytics, engagement, enquiries etc) to show that media relations is effective.

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# Chapter 11

## Measurement

*by Caity Dalby*  
*Content Manager*  
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In the legal sector, so much of a law firm's success is dependent upon the reputation of the firm. Reputation isn't single-handedly built by the accomplishments of a firm's lawyers in the courts, but rather an intricate combination of proactive public relations, media monitoring, crisis management, and internal communications.

But PR is no longer just counting mentions. It's adding value to a business. The problem is, of course, that PR professionals across sectors disagree on what metrics to measure and how best to articulate the value they deliver. A refocusing of the PR industry has taken place, as a direct result of the proliferation of technology driven media intelligence tools. Rather than fixating on vanity metrics, attribution measurement, and reactive actions, PRs should use measurement proactively and strategic PR opportunities must be sought out.

In this chapter, we outline key measurement metrics and the steps to take to make an impact from day one.

### MEASUREMENTS

#### Share of Voice (SOV)

In the legal sector, understanding the percentage of media coverage attributed to a law firm is absolutely necessary. The calculation of Share of Voice (SOV), is the measurement of prominence in the media in comparison with direct competitors. And in such a competitive sector, it's a great way to benchmark authority and ascertain cut through of key messages.

Calculated with a simple equation (firm's mentions/competitors' mentions x 100 = SOV), SOV is an integral part of competitor tracking that enables the benchmarking of PR efforts. The most efficient way to calculate SOV is to conduct individual searches for each competitor, allowing the building of an extensive overview of the competitive landscape and accurately calculate market SOV. As a measurement approach, it enables drilling down into the data to gain insights into SOV on a macro (entire sector) and micro (specific practice area within law) level, with combinations of topics, locations, and more.

So, the more searches available, to intensively scrutinise the competition, the better. Consequently, if you're planning to invest in, or switch to, a media monitoring tool, it's prudent to be mindful of whether pricing is based on number of searches. Unlimited searches are the key to success for competitor tracking.

## Sentiment

Sentiment is a notoriously tricky metric to measure. Defined as the tone of the media coverage about, featuring, or mentioning a firm; this metric enables the quantifying of whether associations with a brand are positive or negative. Whether to keep on top of public perception or evaluate how a recent decision has affected the public's judgement of a firm, sentiment is an absolute must.

Sentiment's primary issue is an historical one. Since the inception of media monitoring in the late 19th century, human metrics like sentiment had to be discerned manually. As just one step in the lengthy, manual clippings process it can be disregarded as an unnecessary addition. But continual improvements in modern media monitoring technology, especially the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), has dramatically improved this process and the accuracy of the results.

Being able to provide an overview of sentiment in reports to key stakeholders at a law firm, means that it is easier than ever to prove the value of PR to the wider institution. Even more significantly, accurately tracking the sentiment of earned media coverage enables the spotting of dips, anomalies, or spikes in sentiment. Allowing potential PR crises to be dealt with proactively.

Following a crisis, sentiment continues to be a useful metric to measure. Tracking and reporting on changes in sentiment is important and will streamline the often long and arduous return to pre-crisis sentiment. It also draws out insights, revealing past mistakes with clear visualisation of where things went wrong.

## Volume over time

Volume over time is vital to track. Not only as a business as usual metric for benchmarking ongoing efforts, but as a tool with which to inform crisis management and prevention. Debt and bankruptcy have sparked crises in businesses for centuries, and they're still threats that need to be managed. But with better connectivity, communication, and awareness, there comes increased opportunity for, and variety of, crisis.

For law firms, data breaches and the fallout of the #MeToo Movement are very real and can cause potential devastating crises. Exactly the type of crisis that would skyrocket negative media mentions. Tracking volume of media coverage and mentions over time makes it easier to spot these spikes in coverage, as part of a comprehensive crisis management strategy.

## Topic tracking

Trend and topic tracking is an important metric in the measurement tool belt. It facilitates research into specific topics and analysis of nuances within the legal sector. Manifesting itself in the automated tracking of regulatory updates, changes in legislation, new case law, and the trends and topics being covered in industry publications.

The nuances it can detect and analyse include the prominence and successes of different practice areas, both within the legal sector, and a law firm. Again helping to differentiate between a macro overview of the legal competitive landscape and a micro view of individual lines of investigation.

Topic tracking is also a fundamental aspect of competitor monitoring. Tracking competitors shouldn't end with basic media monitoring and vanity comparisons. By tracking specific topics in tandem with competing law firms, core values and key messages can be compared and contrasted. Whilst also staying up-to-date with firm merges, executive moves, deals, strategic or high-profile client acquisitions, and lateral hires.

Competitor tracking in itself is a vital part of any PR strategy, but in legal PR implementing extensive and in-depth tracking is absolutely essential.

### **Key message penetration**

In a similar vein, measuring key message penetration in the legal sector is important and easier than you think. It is as simple as breaking down earned media coverage by theme. By separating out and identifying where key messages are gaining traction, it's possible to measure the strength of a firm's association with each.

As with SOV, sentiment, and topic tracking, it's also possible to measure the competitors' key message penetration. Benchmark the success of key message penetration and open new avenues of messaging - learning from the competition. If direct competitors are getting better cut through, reassess and work to change that.

### **Media monitoring**

The most basic and fundamental metric to measure for PR professionals is media coverage and mentions. And whilst it's still important to track them, it often becomes a solely reactive vanity metric. Focus on proactively tracking industry publications to avoid these pitfalls and enhance outreach.

Proactively seek and pitch earned media opportunities as part of a comprehensive PR outreach strategy. It will also stand you in good stead by arming you with boundless knowledge of the trending topics in the legal sector.

### **Geographical**

Most law firms have national, if not international, operations and as a result, being able to interrogate a firm's geographical presence is invaluable. Drilling down into the data and calculating the volume of media coverage in a specific location can help when targeting key demographics and assessing possible expansion.

So, track the cut through of key messaging in different locations. This



will facilitate and optimise the calculation of market SOV in specific geographies. Different topics associated with specific locations when tracked will also provide insight into the competitive landscape on a localised macro level.

## Prominence

When determining the success of PR efforts and the prominence of a firm, it's important to monitor more than just media coverage and mentions. Dive deeper into the content; prominence is determined by the level at which a firm appears in the article. Whether the name of the firm is mentioned in the headline, first paragraph, body of the article, or footnotes/references, will affect the impact that coverage will have for brand awareness.

By incorporating prominence into the measurement of SOV and sentiment, it is possible to build a comprehensive overview of how a firm is performing. It's also essential to track during crisis management and prevention. When measuring volume over time and looking for spikes in coverage, prominence can be used to measure the significance of the spike. Having a thorough investigative process within media monitoring, will ensure that any PR response or crisis management is warranted.

## Reach

Being able to calculate the potential reach a publication, journalist, or broadcast has can vastly improve a PR strategy. Leverage that information - provided by some media monitoring tools such as *Signal AI* or the publications themselves - to target PR outreach to get the media coverage that makes sense for you.

Alternatively, it is one of the few vanity metrics that will quantify the worth of PR to a law firm's key stakeholders and add another dimension to reports.

## Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE)

Finally, we have Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE). To avoid ending on an entirely negative note, the less said about AVE the better. But for clarity, it is the calculation of the cost of media coverage, had the coverage been a paid advertisement. No longer considered effective, AVE has been superseded by the above metrics and is best left in the 20th century.

Ultimately everyone wants to make their mark, whether entering a new industry, starting work as a recent graduate, or beginning a role at a new law firm. Making your mark as a legal PR can be a difficult task. But by focusing on value over vanity, and truly making PR instrumental to the firm's media success, you can put a firm and yourself firmly on the map.

# Chapter 12

## Making your Mark as a Legal PR

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I've been in legal PR for 19 years. It's a different game now compared to how it was when I started my career: back then it was mainly media relations, and there was less appreciation for legal PR as a discipline.

Just as the legal profession has changed, so too has the career of a legal PR. You have to be open and willing to expand your repertoire. For instance, digital and content management is a big part of the suite of tools the legal PR must have – more so than any other aspect of the marketing mix.

It's always been a high-stakes arena. After all, you're dealing with senior stakeholders as well as a proactive media audience. But as social media makes transparent the inner-workings of large organisations, long-held issues come into view. The legal PR must brace for new levels of reputational risk, incorporating reputational management and monitoring into their day-to-day.

As with most careers, the level of work progresses as you do. It can become a 24-hour job at times, and you have to be constantly switched on. Ultimately, you need to be able to manage in good times and in bad to enjoy a long career in the sector.

Through your career, if you want to (really) stand out as a legal PR, these are my tips for you.

### **Understand the business you're in**

All firms are different, despite the fact that they often appear to offer similar services. The key is to understand the nuances of the firm that you work for and be able to work with an intricate mix of decision-makers that flex and bend to support business outcomes.

You can only really do that by being thorough. Take the time to understand your network, then build on those relationships.

There have been times in my career where I haven't been able to get through to a partner and have my voice heard. For whatever reason, they haven't wanted to engage despite me trying all sorts of tactics. Don't let that impede your job. There's lots of politics in a firm. But if you use your emotional intelligence to navigate that, you'll still find ways to deliver.

### **Trust your voice**

There are so many voices in this career and sector that it's easy for you to suppress your own. But I can't emphasise enough the importance

of trusting your voice and being able to express it. If you're not confident in expressing your view, people will not include you in critical conversations.

This is something I learned early on in my career. At one firm, I was the first and only in-house PR for some time. I had to rely on my judgement and leadership. That process taught me to understand the implications of any advice that you're giving the leadership team.

### **Aim to become a trusted adviser**

Perhaps the greatest predictor of your involvement in key business-critical decisions by senior leadership is how trusted you are. If you're not trusted, decisions will be made without you and you will only be asked to manage the outcome, likely making the waters of communications choppy to navigate.

You have to earn trust. Invest time in building relationships one to one with key stakeholders, whether that's partners or associates. Building relationships with partners gives your work gravitas. And building relationships with associates can aid you in what's happening on a practice level. Do this and the firm will trust you with its deepest, darkest secrets.

That's no easy feat. You're dealing with myriad personalities. Not everyone will like you or your approach. But to do good work, you need to be actively involved. Over time, your contributions should speak for themselves.

Being in this adviser role, lawyers often asked for my view on their social media content. It is great when this happens. Employee advocacy is really effective when it comes to a firm's reputation and if people come to you with their questions, you'll be able to encourage and support their engagements in a meaningful way.

There are no shortcuts to becoming a trusted adviser. Constantly monitor how the advice you're giving is received and acted on, or not. Over time, you can cultivate a spirit of openness across the business.

### **Learn to improvise**

Even when you're at a junior level, there are times you might have to make difficult calls. You need to be adaptable and to be able to make decisions quickly. And a good deal of PR is more art than science.

In short, you need to learn to improvise.

The way you do this well is by stretching yourself across every aspect of the business. It's your job to get to know the DNA of the firm and in PR, we're in a privileged position to do so. Not everyone in the business is exposed to this.

In my office, there are more than 85 partners. I have to know broadly what everyone is doing. I never know when an aspect will fall into my domain in terms of a corporate response.

Naturally, the further you travel down the road of legal PR, the better you'll

get at making decisions with confidence during fast-moving situations.

And this is how aiming to become a trusted adviser will underpin your ability to improvise. When you have strong relationships with the senior team and across the firm, you're empowered to exert your influence and try new approaches. When you're trusted, you're listened to.

### **Accept your mistakes**

In an industry of high stakes, PRs are seen as the "fixers". As some would have it, we sprinkle PR dust and issues go away. Obviously, this view is wrong.

I once mistakenly leaked something to a journalist. There was a sentence in my email copy that should not have been there. Arhhh! I had to go back to the managing partner and fess up. In the end, we were able to work with the reporter on doing a story at a time that suited the firm. But understandably, he wasn't best pleased.

It goes without saying that you should try to avoid making mistakes. But when you do make them (and you will): accept that you're human, own them and move on.

Legal PR can be a high-pressure job. But even when you are in crisis mode and are working to get ahead of, or prevent, a story, being thorough will always serve you well. Take the time to assess situations calmly before you jump in.

### **Use your role to make a positive difference**

There is a lack of diversity in PR across the industry, both in-house and agency. When I joined the sector, I rarely met anyone of colour at networking events. Most of the peers at my level were female and we all appeared to be of a similar age. Of course, diversity extends beyond ethnicity and gender to embrace social mobility, disability and those who identify as LGBT+. And whilst the wider industry is alive to the fact that it needs to do more to increase diversity, progress is very slow.

Why does this matter? Well, the diversity balance of the environment in which you work is changing, which means legal PR cannot and should not stand still, either.

You may not be responsible for the recruitment of the team, but you can still be part of the change that we need to see in this sector. Working in PR means we are uniquely positioned to positively impact our firms, and wider society, by facilitating and celebrating diversity. Focus on challenging and widening the narrative, for example by putting forward spokespeople who aren't white and male. Take ownership of your own cultural competency and actively seek out perspectives that are different from your own.

### **Align PR with the business**

I constantly seek opportunities to demonstrate the value of PR to senior management and practice leads. I remain, at all times, conscious

of the KPIs, of how we can measure what we're doing in a way that meaningfully showcases the value of PR to the business. Be outcomes-focused and align everything that you do with the firm's business priorities. Collaboration is key. Work closely with the marketing team to leverage priority campaigns, projects and industries.

### **Develop a growth mindset**

Experience gives you confidence but like anything, delivering consistently requires resilience, commitment and versatility; an ability to be an all-rounder and learn new skills. I have no problem being an unfinished article and having a mindset of continuous improvement as you progress in your career will serve you well. You can always add to your skills and knowledge base to enhance what you do day to day.

### **Know when to switch off**

PR is arguably all about being totally switched on, available and ready to react. But to be a really good legal PR, you should also know when to switch off. Find ways to diffuse: go to the gym, work from home, see non-legal PR friends so that you don't talk shop all evening. Your wellbeing and work-life balance can be put under immense (and unnecessary) pressure. Don't allow work to burn you out.

### **Pay close attention to (and take advantage of) future trends**

Over the past 20 years, legal PR has grown up. There is more structure to the team and the processes adopted to manage and direct communications across offices and jurisdictions. At the same time, the legal PR is seen as an increasingly important asset in firms.

Keep an eye on the trends that are shaping the legal sector and be ready to embrace the steady evolution of the sector. Communicating differentiation is a challenge in the legal sector. Employee advocacy and visual communications will increasingly be used to counter this by creating an authentic narrative, amplifying culture, simplifying complexity and bringing stories to life. In response, you will need to continue to hone your storytelling and digital communication skills, whether that is in the area of managing and curating content or video production.

Thriving as a legal PR in a hyper-connected, data-driven world requires agility.

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Legal PR has come a long way; but there's still a long way to go. I'm confident the support of the PRCA will help move us in the right direction. I hope my tips will ably assist you as you develop your career in this exciting sector.

# About the PRCA

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Who we are: founded in 1969, the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) is a UK-based PR and communications membership body, operating in 66 countries around the world. Representing in excess of 30,000 people, the PRCA is the largest PR membership association in the world. The PRCA promotes all aspects of public relations and communications work, helping teams and individuals maximise the value they deliver to clients and organisations.

What we do: the Association exists to raise standards in PR and communications, providing members with industry data, facilitating the sharing of communications best practice and creating networking opportunities.

How we do it and make a difference: all PRCA members are bound by a professional charter and codes of conduct, and benefit from exceptional training. The Association also works for the greater benefit of the industry, sharing best practice and lobbying on the industry's behalf e.g. fighting the NLA's digital licence.

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# About Byfield Consultancy **Byfield** Consultancy

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Byfield Consultancy was founded in 2007, just as the 'big bang' of the Legal Services Act began to transform the communication demands for every player in a fast-evolving and more competitive business environment. We now work with a growing range of legal sector businesses including domestic and international law firms, barristers' sets, litigation funders, insurers, technology providers, accountants and economic consultants. In litigation PR and crisis PR, our clients range from major corporations to SMEs, entrepreneurs, high-net-worth individuals, charities and family offices.

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