

Reputation Management for Law Firms

TIM PHILLIPS



PUBLISHED BY



IN ASSOCIATION WITH

ManagingPARTNER **LegalMarketing**

Reputation Management for Law Firms

TIM PHILLIPS



Contents

Executive summary.....	VII
Acknowledgements	IX
Chapter 1: Reputation – what’s it worth?.....	1
The minimum standards	1
The financial value of reputation	2
Have we been here before?.....	4
Can we measure the value of reputation?.....	4
The impact of new structures.....	5
Case study: Holman Fenwick Willan.....	5
Interview with James Huckle, commercial director, Holman Fenwick Willan	6
Warning: meet the rich.....	7
Case study: Cision – reputation in numbers	8
Seven drivers of reputation	9
Reputation from within.....	9
Chapter 2: Your brand	11
Training soft skills.....	11
Making rain can be learned	12
Values should drive behaviour.....	12
Get a life	12
Start early.....	12
There are measurable benefits	13
Young lawyers need to take initiative	13
Case study: creating a distinctive brand.....	13
Structure creates brand – good and bad.....	14
Dressing up your brand.....	15
The 10 rules of dressing for reputation	17
A changing brand.....	18
Protecting brand image when disaster strikes.....	19
Protecting the brand in stressful times	20
Creating effective business continuity.....	21
Data security policy.....	22
Case study: Irwin Mitchell – surviving the floods	22

Chapter 3: Dealing with the media	25
Aggression and silence – not recommended	25
Giving journalists what they need without risk.....	26
What journalists think of lawyers	28
Owning a story – reputation-building in the press.....	30
Delivering bad news.....	33
RollOnFriday – the power of transparency.....	34
Your misconduct in the media	35
Chapter 4: The court of public opinion	37
Rapid rebuttal.....	37
The reputational PR process.....	38
Case study: The Franklin Mint.....	40
Case study: Michael Jackson	41
Outsourcing reputation protection.....	42
The danger of ‘legal chill’	43
Litigation communications	45
Chapter 5: Managing reputation through Web 2.0	47
Blogging to build reputation	47
Case study: ‘May It Please The Court’	49
Possibilities of social media.....	50
The threat from social media	51
Case study: lawyers who bring sexy back.....	53
Full disclosure.....	54
Dirty laundry.....	54
Chapter 6: Reputation in recruitment	57
What candidates think of your reputation.....	57
What you think of their reputation	59
Case study: recruiting for the regions	59
Reputation and graduates.....	60
Case study: distinctiveness in recruitment	61
Recruiting non-lawyers.....	62
Chapter 7: Directory listings – good or bad for reputation?	65
Directory reputation	65
Achieving a strong rating.....	66
Directory inflation	68
Case study: Osborne Clarke.....	69
Chapter 8: Social responsibility	71
<i>Pro bono</i> and reputation.....	71
Case study: Allen & Overy.....	72

The politics of <i>pro bono</i>	74
Diversity and reputation.....	75
Using citizenship to develop staff.....	77
The principles of good corporate citizenship	78
Index	79

Executive summary

FORMER US Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan – a man whose reputation has taken a few knocks in recent history – once explained the importance of reputation:

“Manufactured goods can often be evaluated before the completion of a transaction. Service providers, on the other hand, can usually offer only their reputations,” he told a graduating class at Harvard University.

This describes lawyers’ predicament very well. Reputation – whether your firm’s, your department’s or your own – is the key to winning and retaining business, or advancing your career.

The idea that reputation simply attaches itself to good work might have been broadly true 50 years ago – now, not so. Outside the UK the break with the past was not so sudden, but in the past 20 years, managing reputation has become more important. The rise of the global law firm has gone hand-in-hand with the rise of global communication and globalisation. Reputation management isn’t an ‘add-on’ to the business – at a fundamental level – it is the business.

This report investigates the best way to manage the reputation of your law firm. The day-to-day tasks of reputation management are not the sole preserve of lawyers: much of the work is done by marketing departments, agencies and consultants; yet, they can’t function without the active cooperation of the firm’s partners and associates – and the inspiration and encouragement they provide.

Many challenges remain, however. A partnership structure is often not the ideal forum in which to set about managing reputation. Reputation management is often conflated with public relations (to be fair, there is an overlap), and so is not considered an appropriate task for a lawyer. Important and fundamental processes are delegated to other functions (mostly marketing communications) or external agencies. That compromises the ability of firms to make substantial changes, as the sponsors of that change do not command sufficient respect.

Also, reputation management, as we shall see, is not a single discipline. Instead, it is an aspect of many other processes. When analysing management processes, it’s usual to call for a chief officer – but a ‘chief reputation officer’ would be nonsense. Instead, there has to be an understanding of the role that reputation plays in every aspect of the business.

Finally, law firms sometimes have a narrow and slightly old-fashioned definition of reputation. The measures of technical excellence and fee-earning capability are extremely important, but they are only part of the picture. There are new challenges to how that is communicated. Firms also have to acknowledge that their clients are not the only stakeholders affected by how they manage their reputation – the public, potential recruits, law schools and regulatory authorities will also have an influence on the future success of firms.

Chapter 1 sets out why law firms should make reputation management one of the principal functions of the business – a discipline in its own right and not simply a ‘nice-to-have’ accessory.

Chapter 2 examines how law firms manage their own reputation in the everyday business – what, in most sectors, is known simply as the brand. In law firms, the brand involves:

- Your reputation for excellence and how that is earned;
- How you develop your staff’s reputation;
- Whether you are developing the correct skills; and
- How you present yourself to your clients.

Chapter 3 provides expert advice on how law firms can effectively deal with the media – how they can use the press to ‘own’ particular cases or issues, have their name associated with excellence in those fields, and how they can plan these campaigns and measure their value, as well as react in a crisis.

Chapter 4 discusses how law firms can use communication to assist their clients: using publicity and managing a situation beyond simply dealing with the law, and understanding journalists and their requests for speaking with, or writing for them.

Chapter 5 discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the first point of communication between you and your stakeholders – the internet as a communication medium. While it conveys information rapidly, it is unreliable. A solution to this problem is to have an effective internet strategy, in order not to compromise your crisis management strategy.

Chapter 6 analyses the best way to manage communication to another important group of stakeholders – your prospective employees. Your reputation as an employer

will have a direct relationship on your success as a business. What are recruits and recruiters looking for in a firm, and what methods can you use to influence their opinions? What do new hires consider reputation to be, and does that match the way you convey your brand?

Chapter 7 discusses the time-consuming and difficult process of submitting information to legal directories. How important are they? How do you manage the time most effectively, and what can you do to guarantee the best results from submitting to legal directories?

In Chapter 8, we end on the theme of corporate citizenship. Of interest to employees and prospective recruits alike, it has the potential to be a powerful influence on your reputation. The legal principle of *pro bono* is a proud tradition – but how should it be managed?

The past 20 years have seen a revolution in reputation management. As the Legal Services Act 2007 opens up the provision of legal services to other competitors, reputation management will be even more a fundamental part of the business. Times are difficult to negotiate – handling reputation is easier when you are winning clients and opening offices than when you are making partners redundant and cutting back on community programmes. In the modern business environment, effective reputation management is key to the business’ survival. This report provides guidance from experts in the field of reputation management on enhancing your reputation, brand and image as a law firm, to stay ahead of the competition in the current market.

Acknowledgements

THANK YOU to the firms and agencies whose work we use as examples, and thank you to the others who contributed, but for various good reasons, requested that their contribution be anonymous.