

THOUGHT LEADER PROFILE

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This is the seventh installment in a monthly series profiling “thought leaders” in the field of legal marketing and client development. Each installment features the thoughts of a different expert in legal marketing on a topic that they see as a critical concern for law firms. This month’s profile features Eleanor Kerlow, the senior public relations manager at Hunton & Williams, who received the 2007 LMA Your Honor Award for best media relations and was named Best In-House Legal PR Professional by PR News in 2005. Profiles are created and produced by the LMA Resources Committee thought leaders Catherine Alman MacDonagh and John Cunningham.



ELEANOR KERLOW,
Senior Public
Relations Manager

More Than Just A Message

BY JOHN O. CUNNINGHAM

A well-executed public relations program not only shapes desirable perceptions about a law firm—it helps to drive sales, according to Hunton & Williams Senior Public Relations Manager Eleanor Kerlow.

Kerlow, who recently moved to Hunton & Williams from SUTHERLAND (formerly Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan) says that most lawyers now understand the benefits of a good PR program, and consequently they are eager for positive public exposure. “Lawyers often say: ‘I see the names of our competitors everywhere. They are quoted in print, they’re on television, and they speak on panels. How can I do that?’”

The secret to that success, says Kerlow, is leverage. “If you have a noteworthy legal product, think of three ways you can use it, instead of one,” she says.

Kerlow points for example to the work of a partner in SUTHERLAND’s broker-dealer practice. That lawyer produced an article for a legal trade publication by BNA based on a statistical study he had done of contested disciplinary actions decided before the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. “The article uncovered a bit of a surprise—that it often pays to challenge enforcement actions in litigation,” Kerlow recalls.

By using the article for a press outreach, Kerlow got several other legal and business journals interested in interviewing the attorney. “Each time he was interviewed, he had a chance to mention BNA, and that helped to further build that relationship,” she observes.

The topical press exposure then became the launching pad for the “expert” lawyer to appear on a number of panels in various public forums rich with prospects. “The result of all this activity was that we positioned our lawyer as a thought leader in his field,” says Kerlow, adding that this “brought him into greater direct contact with key contacts and potential clients.”

She predicts that firms of the future will view PR as a fundamental part of business planning by focusing on the basic goals of visibility, reputation building and market access. “The key is to start with real market research on what clients [and the public] think of you. By knowing

where your position is in the marketplace, you can then develop a message and a program to reposition yourself according to your goals," Kerlow explains.

She adds that for the forward looking firm, "PR is not just about articles and comments in the press, but it is very much about your organization, your brand and your markets."

With blogs, Vault reports, cell phone cameras and text messages, anyone can instantly broadcast your worst conduct or your failings, so you have to be at your best all the time," the PR expert adds. "[That's why] it is incumbent on firms to train people that they are at great risk when they don't live the values of the firm nor understand that the internal is external."

Kerlow concludes that an effective PR program must also incorporate training on all of the basic elements of public relations. "So many lawyers think they can just wing it with media, and that is big mistake," she says. "You must understand how media and community relations are built, and refine those relationships, learn how you can be helpful to media as you would be to your clients, and keep the firm, practice and individual messages front and center."

Understand Public Relations

SUTHERLAND's Eleanor Kerlow suggests that "it is important to help people take every step in the evolution of consciousness about public relations." She offers up several resources that can help to "demystify the media" and "improve understanding of how media momentum is constructed." Among her favorite published sources are:

- *In the Court of Public Opinion*, by James F. Haggerty;
- *Eyewitness to Power*, by David Gergen;
- *You are the Message*, by Roger Ailes and Jon Kraushar; and
- *Selling the Invisible: A Field Guide to Modern Marketing*, by Harry Beckwith.



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