

OPINION & COMMENTARY

FROM DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW EDITORS & GUESTS

Law Firm Marketing and PR Lessons From 2020 to Take Into 2021

Commentary by
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“Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn.” This has long been one of my favorite quotes, but it really hit home in 2020. If you came out of this year without any lessons, you weren’t paying attention.



King

Like those in many other industries, law firm marketing and PR professionals rolled up their sleeves and quickly reacted to the pandemic, social unrest and an election season like no other. What lessons can we take from 2020 into 2021 and beyond? Here are four:

- You must continue your marketing efforts and stay visible with clients, even if you can’t meet people in person.

For many firms, in-person networking—through event attendance and speaking engagements, lunches and meetings—has long been a staple of their marketing and business development strategy. So



what happens when you can’t leave the house? Call it a day and wait for a vaccine?

As I found in [my own research into past recessions](#), it’s vital to maintain top-of-mind visibility during a downturn. For this particular recession, that meant that law firm marketers had to pivot (sorry, we’ll ban that word after this year), with many moving conference and networking budgets to online thought leadership through blogging, writing bylined articles in trade

publications, hosting webinars, podcasting and more.

Conferences and in-person events won’t come roaring back as soon as the calendar flips to a new year. In fact, many predict that these events won’t return until the later part of 2021. Thus, it’s imperative that marketers continue to focus on these online thought leadership strategies to ensure brand visibility and reputation traction isn’t lost as we weather the final months of the pandemic.

- When the world is changing rapidly, avoid seeming “tone deaf.”

Did you have a major announcement planned for Monday, March 16? We did, and I’m sure many others did, too.

One of our clients—a legal industry association—was announcing the appointment of a new CEO, and we had targeted that date for the roll-out of a press release, social media posts and an email blast. As you can imagine, we decided not to go forward with that announcement. If we had moved forward, not only would the news have gotten lost in the mayhem of those early days of the pandemic, but our client would have appeared uncompassionate and out of touch.

Similarly, as the Black Lives Matter movement gained traction, days like Juneteenth (June 19) and #BlackoutDay2020 (July 7) meant that planned activities such as press releases, social media posts and email newsletters had to be quickly reimagined. Should you post anything? Or revise your messaging?

Those who were already actively engaged in [social listening](#)—using digital tools to understand public sentiment—were much better prepared to shift their messaging and respond to current events, whether that meant pausing planned social media posts or postponing public announcements that would have seemed tone deaf given current events.

To ensure you don’t fall in the “tone deaf” camp, make sure you’re tracking online mentions of your brand and related topics, as well as general client sentiment, to ensure your messaging is appropriate to current conversations.

- Podcasts shined in 2020, for good reason. Don’t miss out.

I am in the midst of launching our own podcast, and I’m a little late to the game. After being a guest on many podcasts, I began to understand its true value—relationship building and networking, while creating valuable content, all from the comfort of your home office.

I listed relationship building first, as I’m finding that to be the number-one value I’m gaining from the experience. At a time when we can’t schedule those valuable face-to-face meetings, asking someone to chat with you for your podcast is a phenomenal way to instigate new relationships and have in-depth conversations, with the added value of producing content.

Even if you don’t want to launch your own podcast, you should be targeting them in your PR outreach. Podcasts continue to rise in popularity, with many traditional media outlets adding podcasts to their mix of media platforms. In 2018, there were 48 million weekly podcast listeners. This is expected to grow to 115 million by 2021, according to Statista. Get your feet wet by appearing as a guest on newer, less well-known podcasts, then work your way up to those with bigger audiences.

- Brand activism is here to stay. Know where you stand.

2020 was, unquestionably, the year of brand activism. Amid a pandemic and racial unrest, brands took a stand like never before, with firms pledging support for the Black Lives Matter movement in droves. This is a transformational shift, as

conscious consumers force brands to publicly declare their values and then act on them.

To avoid the perception of tokenism, law firms must be clear about their values and ensure they are walking their talk. This is especially true for diversity in law firms, as in-house continue to call for more diverse representation.

If your firm had already addressed diversity issues, you were way ahead of the game. Let 2020 be a lesson that you can’t ignore this anymore. Silence is now considered a statement on its own.

While 2021 seems like the promised land where we can safely leave behind the pain of 2020, we must learn from this historic year and apply its lessons to all aspects of the firm’s business—and marketing and public relations is no exception.

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