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Paula Black has advised law firms around the globe on everything from powerful and innovative design to marketing strategy and business growth. She is an award-winning, Amazon-bestselling author and the force behind **In Black & White** (inblackandwhiteblog.com), a blog dedicated to clear, straightforward advice and open discussion of legal marketing issues. For more information on Paula Black, her books and her company please visit paulablacklegalmarketing.com.

Legal Marketing: Lessons from a Marketing Consultant

After 15 years of working with both individual lawyers and firms, I've come to realize that not all marketing strategies were made for everyone. For some, creative is the route to follow, while others fare better when focusing on the basics. Taking into account time, experience and marketing goals, I personalize every marketing plan I work on, but sometimes things don't go as expected. Here I present five lessons I've learned when it comes to legal marketing...

You've got to have buy-in support.

While it's often tempting to create elaborate marketing strategy, the key to making it work is commitment and buy-in. Years ago my team and I conceptualized an incredible strategy for a mid-sized firm to cater to its varied industry clients—they loved it. Yet, from the beginning the concept was not explained and carried through the organization, and as we delved deeper and deeper into creating the brochure, website and materials, the concept became more and more complicated and the communication began to break down. What was, at first, an innovative concept turned into a nightmare for both myself and the client. The lesson: no matter how exciting the idea, without the support of the entire firm it's destined to fail.

Know when to back down.

This is a lesson I continue to learn on a daily basis. Whether it's compromising on a firm name (something I've done many times) to meeting attorneys halfway on marketing strategy, it's the age-old wisdom of picking your battles. The truth is, no matter how much experience in marketing, branding and positioning I bring to the

table, the end result has to come from the attorney or firm themselves. They're the ones who know what clients they want and how they want to present themselves to the public. I can give my advice, impart my experience and expertise and plead, beg and usher them into what I see for their future...but the real decision has to come from them.

Not everyone needs a tagline.

I'm a big proponent of the firm tagline. In fact, I often spend a considerable amount of time working with clients to develop and perfect a strong, powerful statement that can sum up their firm vision and personality. But the truth is... not everyone needs a tagline. One of my clients has a very specific practice area, and after rounds and rounds of tagline options we finally came to a clear conclusion: rather than a marketing statement, his firm would benefit more from a descriptive statement, making clear to potential clients and referrals just what it is he concentrates on. Once we solidified that...everything else fell into place.

Think outside the box.

Sometimes the creative can go hand-in-hand with marketing strategy. A few years ago I was faced with clients who, though partners, focused on very different clients and practice industries—corporate and criminal defense. After a few rounds of creative we realized that what they needed (but couldn't have) were two separate websites. So we created those within one overall firm branding. Though all the colors, fonts and branding stayed the same, we were able to create two very separate sections of information to appeal to two very separate groups of clients. By making clients choose which area they wanted to learn more about from the very first entry page, we were able to keep the firm branding unified but speak directly to each attorney's audience.

Not every attorney has to do everything.

The lesson here: Play to your strengths! I've learned to identify early the skilled writers and set them up as bloggers; recognize the networkers and help them target industry organizations; and cultivate the large personalities into prolific speakers. It's all about understanding where their talents—and comfort zones—lie.

Overall, the lessons I've learned are applicable to almost any profession, but they're solid ideas to consider when

approaching your own legal marketing. Whether its being open to a new way of speaking to clients to making marketing and business development fall into YOUR comfort zone, the key is to pay attention and focus...and never get frustrated. There is always a solution.

