

## **Q: My look-alike firm doesn't believe in branding. How can I bring them around?**

**A:** One thing I've found particularly effective as a good first step for some firms that won't accept any particular firm-wide strategy or message is to try it instead with a practice, niche, or industry group. Some firms that might not be "ready" for branding could still benefit significantly from a similar endeavor directed toward a more focused audience.

One reason I feel many firm-wide branding programs fail is that they're trying to market every aspect of a full-service practice to an indefinite, non-differentiated, general business audience. It's tough to create a dynamic, differentiated branding message that has to work for every lawyer, every practice, and every potential client in every industry and geographic region. Not impossible, but more difficult. And then most marketing budgets are too small to cause it to penetrate this enormous audience.

I believe that a better approach for those firms is narrowing their target audience so their message can be more powerful and their dollars spread over a smaller, more targeted audience. This is one reason why I believe that industry-based marketing programs like the BugLaw campaign work so well. Finite audience, minimal competition, every marketing dollar is leveraged toward a specific goal. It's still a Branding strategy, but it's not aimed at branding the entire firm to The World, or to All US Business Executives.

The Bug Lawyers were "ready" for branding, but they initially asked me to brand them as a highly skilled business law firm in Alabama -- too large and general an audience for it to work within their limited budget. I persuaded them to try the exact same thing within a narrow industry niche instead -- which is what made it work so quickly. Of course, this means allocating more resources toward some lawyers and less to others, but that's what strategy is all about. The BugLaw campaign is available at [www.rossfishman.com](http://www.rossfishman.com).

I think it might be in the Ries & Trout book *Positioning* where they make the sensible point that you don't see any Procter & Gamble advertising, because they know it's more effective to market Tide, Crest, Pampers, *etc.* separately to their distinct audiences. Most law firms, however, don't/can't brand Litigation or a particular specialty or industry group to the exclusion of the other practice areas. For the obvious political reasons, most law firms, because they're run as everyone's-equal partnerships, market their Procter & Gamble-ness. I think that's too bad because it's one of the big reasons that branding's not working as well as it should and is getting an undeservedly tarnished reputation.

As we all know, great marketing in a democratic, professional-services partnership can be tough. So help a small, dynamic, dedicated and motivated group succeed. Then after others get jealous, you can expand your success from there.