



Why Legal Counsel Needs PR Counsel

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A marketing manager of a regional law firm in California told me a story last week that demonstrates why lawyers need PR counsel.

The morning paper arrived on the marketing manager's desk and to her surprise; the front page story quoted the managing partner of one her offices. She had no idea the attorney took the call from the reporter or gave a statement on behalf of the firm. The story focused on associate compensation, a sensitive issue among law firms today. The quote was far from the message that the law firm wanted to communicate to the legal community and the attorney gave an interview without checking with the firm's PR team.

We all know lawyers are well educated and smart, but too often they forget that those skills and traits that got them to become successful associates and partners are not necessarily the skills they need to work with the media. Everyone, even the top professional athletes and CEOs, need coaching.

In a perfect world, here is the game plan for when a reporter calls, especially if the subject matter is sensitive to the firm:

- 1) Take the reporter's call. Then, ask the reporter what she is writing about, what her angle might be, and what is her deadline.
- 2) Next, immediately call your firm's PR or marketing representatives. If your firm doesn't have those positions in-house, then call another partner to talk about the interview and how you should approach.
- 3) Determine whether this is the right opportunity for you or your firm. Just because a reporter requests an interview, that doesn't mean you have to grant it. Ask yourself how this story benefits the firm.

4) Prepare talking points based on the messages the firm wants to communicate. What you say will be printed, so make sure it's exactly what you want to communicate

5) Return the reporter's call before her deadline. Of course, this could all change if the reporter is writing about a major crisis at the firm.

In that case, engage a professional who specializes in crisis communications. It will be worth the investment. If you have other advice or tips, I'd love to hear them too.