

## How We Work: The Project Memo

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At HBC, we design communications campaigns for law firms and other professional service providers.

We also realize that for those not steeped in the worlds of PR and marketing, that first sentence may sound vague.

Everyone has some idea of what it means to be a lawyer, or a dentist, or an architect. But creating communications campaigns—what does that actually *mean*, the reasonable person might ask. And how do you go about doing it?

To make our work more concrete, today we're going to lift the veil and offer a glimpse at the first stage of our work on nearly all of our engagements: the **project memo**.

For every client for whom we work, our mission is to use communications tools to help our client generate new business. One reason that sentence, like the one that started this post, may sound vague is because the specific shape of any given communications campaign can take many forms. Should our client start a blog? Draft an article series? Seek out speaking engagements?

In order to determine the right shape of a campaign, we start at the beginning: with a thorough understanding of our client's desires, and its position in the market. With that information, we lay out a map for a communications strategy in the project memo, which we deliver to our clients at the start of an engagement—and use, jointly, as a guide to their ongoing success.

Let's take the example of a global law firm's immigration practice, which wants to establish its position as a leader in corporate immigration in the United States.

As a first step, we first **research** our client and its practice. On a review of our client's website, Chambers reviews, and other relevant materials, we might find, for instance, that our client's immigration practice specializes in helping corporate employers move talent wherever it is needed across the globe. Understanding our client's expertise at a very specific level will later be helpful in determining appropriate opportunities to pursue.

We also perform a **media analysis**, researching the visibility of our client in relation to its competitors in the business and trade press. A simple Factiva search of immigration practices ranked in Chambers Band 1 or 2 will give us a rough but meaningful basis for comparing the levels of media exposure for these elite practices. (We used the firm name and "immigration" as our search terms here.)

April 2011—April 2012	
Firm Name	Hits
Duane Morris	99
Greenberg Traurig	86
Morgan, Lewis, & Brockius	64
Baker & McKenzie	58
Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy	43
Hogan Lovells	19

The average number of media hits for this group is 62, meaning that Duane Morris, Greenberg Traurig, and Morgan Lewis are relatively “overexposed” (a good position to be in, especially at Duane Morris’s degree of separation from the pack), while Baker & McKenzie, Fragomen, and Hogan Lovells are not receiving a level of media exposure commensurate with the quality of their practices.

These findings would go into the project memo for our client, along with a variety of **opportunities and ideas** to enhance the practice’s media coverage. The memo would include items such as “hot topics,” editorial calendar opportunities, potential reporter meetings, branded content ideas, and more.

**Hot topics:** One of the most beneficial ways to position attorneys within the firm as thought leaders is to identify “hot topics,” about which our client’s attorneys would be well-positioned to offer commentary to media outlets.

Given the practice’s focus on companies with mobile workforces, some topics that have recently been in the news include:

- 2012 Summer Olympics: The United Kingdom Home Office has been preparing for an influx of businesses and visitors into the country in advance of the Summer Olympics this year. As a result, numerous problems have arisen out of the government’s ability to handle the large quantity of businesses requesting visas for employees so that they can work during the games.
- U.S. Immigration Reform: Since 2008, President Obama has been pushing for comprehensive immigration reform in the United States. Part of that reform would make it easier for companies to bring talent into the United States to fulfill jobs in such sectors as pharmaceutical, technology, and other highly skilled industries. However, Congress has been slow to act. The President outlined that immigration reform will be a priority in the upcoming election debate.

Next we would identify media outlets within the immigration space, which make potential targets to approach with story ideas built around the above hot topics. Some of these outlets include:

- *Immigration Daily*;
- *Immigrant Magazine*;
- *Immigration Briefings*;
- *Immigration Law Today*;
- *Workplace Immigration Report*;
- *Voice*;
- *HR Magazine*;

- *Human Resources Report*; and
- *Human Resources Leader*.

This list would be narrowed down based on our discussions with the client and an understanding of its desired audiences, resulting in a final target list that might include just these:

- *Workplace Immigration Report*;
- *HR Magazine*; and
- *Human Resources Report*.

**Editorial calendar opportunities:** By researching the editorial calendars of relevant publications for the coming year, HBC can identify opportunities for our client's attorney to contribute bylined articles to those publications. Some of those editorial calendar opportunities would include:

- *Inside Counsel* – Immigration Update (July 2012);
- *New York Law Journal* – Immigration Law (August 2012); and
- *HR Magazine* – Employment Law (November 2012).

**Reporter meetings:** HBC would also set up background meetings between our client's attorneys and reporters who cover immigration issues. Our goal with these reporter meetings is to ensure that members of the immigration practice are always top-of-mind when breaking stories related to corporate immigration occur. The reporters we would reach out to might include:

- Lawrence Downs, *New York Times*;
- Elise Foley, The Huffington Post; and
- Peggy Gargis, Reuters.

**Branded content ideas:** Branded content—blogs, e-newsletters, an annual survey, a seminar series, or other recurring content that is branded with the firm name and used as a forum for discussion of immigration issues—is a great vehicle for promoting a firm while delivering value to its target audience. Branded content can take any number of forms, and the specific approach HBC recommends (including whether a branded content initiative is valuable at all) depends on a detailed review of the issue area and competing offerings.

All of the above would go into our project memo and make a blueprint for our work with the firm.

After working with that blueprint, we would analyze the results of the campaign with a **final project memo**—detailing placements received, checking our results against the firm's goals, and running another competitor analysis.

But that's the subject for another post; hopefully, for now, this one has given the reader a better understanding of what we mean when we say we design communications campaigns.