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Law Firm Press Releases: Do's and Don't's

Firing off a press release about your law firm's latest news and sending it to a bunch of media outlets might seem like a simple thing, but there's more to it than you think, says Gina Rubel, the author of "Everyday Public Relations for Lawyers."

One of the most overlooked questions a law firm should ask is whether the topic is newsworthy.

"Usually everybody thinks their case is newsworthy no matter what it is, but often it's just important to the law firm," said Rubel, a lawyer and owner of Furia Rubel, a public relations and marketing agency.

Whether your news is important depends on the facts and your audience. A \$250,000 verdict in a fender bender is not going to be newsworthy unless there is something precedent-setting about it. But a \$250,000 settlement over a banking fee where consumers get a dollar each might be something that a consumer TV program would cover because it affects the masses, Rubel said.

Timeliness is also a key element.

"Lawyers will say, 'I got a verdict two weeks ago. I want to publicize it.' Too late. If you don't give it to me the day of or day after the verdict, it's not timely," said Rubel.

Before a case is resolved, using press releases can be a smart and effective strategy to get the other side to the settlement table, but lawyers should be aware of ethical restrictions, including ABA Model Rule 3.6, which covers trial publicity.

Lawyers can also get into trouble if they issue a press release about a settlement too early.

"Let's say you settle an asbestosis case for \$5 million and you start publicizing it the day of the agreement but you don't have the check in hand," said Rubel. "The [insurance] carrier may withhold the check and question the publicity. It happens often."

Social media has created



many new avenues for sharing your press releases, but Rubel advises waiting until your firm has a social media policy in place.

Some traditional rules to follow about distribution include sending press releases only to individuals, not to a blind carbon copied list, and choosing the best person at each media outlet rather than blanketing the organization.

Paying for a distribution serv-

ice like PR Web for your press releases is a smart way to get your news out, but only send important national press releases to wire services, Rubel said.

This is because national wires, which get distributed directly to reporters, are searchable and a search that turns up every press release about your firm will only clutter up the relevant legal news.

— SYLVIA HSIEH

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