

Client Alerts — Appearances Matter

by [Mister Thorne](#)

If you're an attorney, then I ask you to think about something you don't often (or ever) consider — how you appear in print.

Why? Because it's important. How you appear in print affects your practice, your ability to attract clients, and what you can charge for the services you provide.

How so?

Let's say you're in Barnes & Noble and you're looking through books about employment law. Your niece is about to become the HR manager of a firm with 100 employees, and you want to give her a good guide, one that she can refer to when it comes to hiring and firing employees, and so forth.

You take two books from the shelf and compare them. One is more substantial than the other, and has a much more inviting cover. You flip through the books, and you see that one has a much better design than the other.

If you're like most, then — before you've read a single line from either book — you're prejudiced in favor of the book that looks best.

It might not be the one you buy, but the better looking book has a competitive advantage over the other. Appearances count. [And professional publishers know it.](#)

The same effect is at work when people read something you wrote. Before they read it, they already have some impression of it, and that's a function of its appearance — be it a client alert, a practice area description, or the About Us section of your firm's Web site.

Consider a client alert you author. Of course, your big concern is the content. How informative is it? How timely is the alert? How unique? How well written?

Sure (at least, if you're a tall-building attorney), it's up to someone else to set the alert (which determines its appearance). But that should also be your concern.

Why?

Let's say you're a tall-building lawyer. Potential clients are the GCs of large businesses. In fact, that's the very audience for your client alert, which — no matter its topic — is a promotional piece. Certainly, it's meant to inform. But you know it as well as anyone else — you want it to help attract business. That's why you spent the time writing it.

Now, there's an army of law firm marketers out there who will tell you that you need to make sure you use plenty of SEO terms in your alert, but — for someone in your position — that's a bunch of nonsense. The sort of person who might retain you isn't likely to find you by way of a client alert.

Potential clients are going to learn of you from former colleagues of yours, or satisfied clients, not a Google search that yields a client alert.

Before they call, they'll get some background on you. They'll read your bio at your firm's Web site. They'll look for articles you've authored and — you should know this as well as anyone — what they find will color their impressions of you.

Before they begin reading your most recent article — that client alert with your name on it — they'll be forming impressions of you, and wondering whether you could possibly be worth \$800 per hour.

When it comes to first impressions, appearances count.

Look. You wouldn't meet a potential client without tending to your appearance first, right? And you wouldn't put your name to a client alert that looks no better than junk mail, would you?