

# Small Firm Business

**Agenda**  
MARKETING

## Start Spreading the News

Advice for developing a law firm newsletter.

By Paramjit Mahli

As the competition for new clients intensifies, creative business development is becoming the name of the game. Small firms that are building their marketing efforts need to be sure that they aren't doing themselves a disservice by not taking advantage of some of the more basic tools, such as a firm newsletter.

A newsletter can be a very effective way to raise your firm's profile. They help maintain client relationships and inform readers of legislative changes — about which they will ideally seek your counsel.

### The basics

Of course, content will vary depending on the practice and the intended audience. However, there are some general guidelines:

**Coverage:** If you're uncertain about readers' expectations, conduct a survey. Keep it simple, and focus on preferences regarding content, length, and distribution method.

**Audience:** Develop a mailing list from an in-house list of established and potential clients. Create a sign-up form on your Web site and assure anyone who registers that you will protect the privacy of their information. Finally, be sure to include instructions on how to unsubscribe in each newsletter. Note: Don't succumb to the temptation to send unsolicited e-mail using purchased lists.

**Format:** As a rule of thumb, keep articles short (250-450 words). Break the text by using graphics, bullets and numbering, and simplify any legalese.

**Tone:** Be cautious not to oversell the firm. Prospective clients will make judgments based solely on your newsletter. A key objective is to remind readers of your services, as well as to educate, inform and promote. But promotion does not mean a hard sell, which can actually discourage inquiries. Aim for 80 percent content and 20 percent soft sell. An example of a "soft sell" might be incentives or discounts given to clients who refer new business.

### Information to include

Include firm announcements, profiles of attorneys and news briefs on breaking legislation or events.

In 2004, Charleston, S.C. torts firm Richardson, Patrick, Westbrook & Brickman began issuing *Disclosure*, a quarterly newsletter that is designed and assembled by ad agency Rawle Murdy & Associates.

*Disclosure* readers are most



often lawyers that the firm works with or has worked with in the past. Some 95 percent of its mass tort cases are referred by other lawyers. *Disclosure's* content provides news, statistics and information on the latest causes of action.

For example, the Spring 2004 issue opened with a story on Zyprexa, the top-selling schizophrenia drug, which was recently linked to diabetes. That article generated a number of calls and led to partnerships with co-counsel on cases involving the drug.

*Family Matters*, a newsletter from the nine-lawyer Phillips, Lerner & Lauzon in Los Angeles includes articles written by appropriate professionals. For example, a recent issue included an accountant's guidance on the tax treatment of stock options that must be divided up in a divorce.

