

MAY/JUNE 2004

LEGAL MANAGEMENT NEWS

THE JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ADMINISTRATORS — OREGON CHAPTER



JUMPING ON THE **BRANDWAGON**

The story *behind* ALA-Oregon's new look

Introducing your board of directors for 2004-05



Association of Legal Administrators

OreGO

ALA

Ch...

- Q. What do this logo, *Legal Management News*, and ALA-Oregon have in common?
- A. They're all...

BRAND NEW

THE NEXT TIME YOU SAUNTER INTO STARBUCKS® for your shot of Sumatra, consider this. By some estimates, Starbucks pays about \$4.50 per pound for its high-quality roasted coffee beans. By the time those beans are brewed and sold by the cup, the same pound of coffee will return anywhere from \$40 to \$80 per pound — a gross profit margin of roughly 900 percent to 1800 percent.¹ How, you may wonder, can a company leverage a seemingly mundane commodity like coffee into such a lucrative product?

In a word: *branding*.

Starbucks is a classic example of what successful branding can do for a company — and even an entire product category. Fifteen years ago, coffee was pretty much an afterthought. Back then, even so-called “coffee shops” weren’t really known for their coffee; they were just places to grab a quick bite of breakfast or lunch. By creating coffee shops that actually *specialized in coffee*, Starbucks completely redefined the way most of us think about the beverage. In the process, they also created one of America’s most pervasive and influential brands.²

Although no law firm has yet been able to do for legal services what Starbucks did for coffee, branding remains one of the hottest topics in contemporary legal marketing. This article briefly explores the concept of branding legal services and then describes the branding initiative recently undertaken by ALA-Oregon.

What is branding?

As marketing gurus Al and Laura Ries suggest, branding a product or service is much like branding cattle. Branding allows a rancher to distinguish his or her cattle from all the other cattle on the range — even though most cattle look the same. Likewise, a corporate branding program creates a perception in the consumer’s mind that there is no product or service on the market quite like *yours*.³

Branding is not an advertising campaign, a logo, or a clever slogan. These things may all help express the brand, but they are not the brand itself. A business is branded to the extent that it is *known for something that others are not*, and that “something” is uniformly understood by employees, clients, prospects, referral sources, and the media.⁴

When meeting with a new client in my marketing practice, one of the first questions I ask is, “What is one thing you do differently or better

Tips on branding a law firm

1. The firm’s name must be simple or memorable (many firms shorten or change their names for branding purposes).
2. The name must be associated with a position, capability, characteristic, or value that is credible.
3. The position must be unique, differentiable, or asserted before anyone else (i.e., the brander must have “first mover” status).
4. The message must be clear and iterated, reinforced by everything the firm does.
5. The position should be derived from and integrated into the firm’s vision statement and strategic plan.
6. The firm must be disciplined enough to avoid any message or activity that is inconsistent with the brand.
7. Everyone (lawyers, staff) must understand the branding position, be able to articulate it, and live it every day.

Source: W. Bower, “The Importance of Branding and Brand Name Recognition in Today’s Marketplace,” *Altman Weil Report to Legal Management* (November 1999): 1-2.

than any of your competitors?” Put differently, “What is one thing I can get from your firm that I cannot get anywhere else?” The answer is important because *it differentiates a firm that provides a “brand” from a firm that simply provides a “commodity.”*

If you have trouble answering this question, you are not alone. Many clients struggle before offering up some vague reference to “great service” or a “reasonable price” — neither of which meaningfully differentiates them from anything. And even if *you* can answer the question, try asking several colleagues in your office and see what they tell you. If your firm has truly developed a brand, everyone should give the same answer. If 10 people give you 10 different answers, you have some work to do.

Although marketers often liken a brand to a firm’s “personality,” I prefer to think of a brand as a promise (at least a *perceived* promise) that certain expectations will be met if I buy your product or service rather than your competitor’s. I go to Starbucks because I expect to get an impeccable cup of coffee and an array of beverage choices I cannot get

anywhere else. I send a package via Federal Express because I absolutely, positively expect it to be there overnight. I come to your law firm because I expect . . . well . . . you tell me. What exactly *can* I expect from your law firm and how is this different from any other law firm?

That’s the essence of branding.

Rebranding OLMA

The Association of Legal Administrators has adopted “*The Source for Legal Management Information and Knowledge*” as its slogan. Of course, ALA wants to be known for providing authoritative answers to questions about law firm management. Beyond that, the implicit branding message is: *ALA can provide information that no other association can provide because no other association understands the unique characteristics of law firms quite like ALA*. Hence, if I only join one association, ALA is the association I should join.

It sounds simple. But how does one go about creating that perception? In other words, how do you build that particular “brand” of membership?

Many of the changes taking place within ALA-Oregon are part of a

larger effort to brand the organization just that way. The new name and logo are designed to more closely identify the Oregon chapter with the Association of Legal Administrators. *Legal Management News* is designed to provide you with a product that is unique to your membership: information that not only looks different, but **is** different because the only place you can get it is on these pages. Thus, the success of the rebranding effort partially depends on the extent to which ALA, ALA-Oregon, and *Legal Management News* become the **first** resources you consult when you have a question about your job.

The making of a magazine

When I was asked to look at restructuring the *OLMANet* newsletter, I began by posing the following questions to the decision makers at ALA-Oregon:

- **Editorial vision.** What do you want the publication to be? What

will be its editorial vision and mission?

- **Name.** In making the switch to a journal, do you need (or want) to keep the name *OLMANet*?
- **Content.** What types of articles do you want to see more of? Less of? What do you want the publication to do that other communication media (e.g., web site) are not doing?
- **Features vs. departments.** How many feature stories can be run in each issue? What new “departments” do you want to create?
- **Resources.** Who currently writes for the publication? Who *should* be writing for the publication? Why are these people not writing now? Where do you obtain new content?
- **Advertising sales.** How is advertising space sold? How do your ad rates compare to other association publications? Can you increase the rate card? Do you

have a media kit? How much do we know about the demographics and purchasing habits of the readers?

- **Style.** What sort of impression do you want the publication to make? Formal and academic? Informal and friendly? Something that resembles a news magazine?
- **SWOT analysis.** What are the publication’s current strengths? What are its weaknesses? What can the publication do that no other publication can (i.e., what is its market position)? Are there any opportunities that you are missing (e.g., is there an opportunity to promote the journal to nonmembers)? Are there any threats to the publication from competing organizations?

Although not all of these questions were directly related to branding, collectively they helped us conceptualize how ALA-Oregon wanted its new magazine to be perceived.

The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding

Al and Laura Ries published **The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding** (New York: Harper Collins) in 1998. Limited space precludes discussing each of these ideas in this article; however, the book is well worth reading.

1. **The law of expansion.** The power of a brand is inversely proportional to its scope.
2. **The law of contraction.** A brand becomes stronger when you narrow its focus.
3. **The law of publicity.** The birth of a brand is achieved with publicity, not advertising.
4. **The law of advertising.** Once born, a brand needs advertising to stay healthy.
5. **The law of the word.** A brand should strive to own a word in the mind of the consumer.
6. **The law of credentials.** The crucial ingredient in the success of any brand is its claim to authenticity.
7. **The law of quality.** Quality is important, but brands are not built by quality alone.
8. **The law of the category.** A leading brand should promote the category, not the brand.
9. **The law of the name.** In the long run a brand is nothing more than a name.
10. **The law of extensions.** The easiest way to destroy a brand is to put its name on everything.
11. **The law of fellowship.** In order to build the category, a brand should welcome all other brands.
12. **The law of the generic.** One of the fastest routes to failure is giving a brand a generic name.
13. **The law of the company.** Brands are brands. Companies are companies. There is a difference.
14. **The law of subbrands.** What branding builds, subbranding can destroy.
15. **The law of siblings.** There is a time and a place to launch a second brand.
16. **The law of shape.** A brand’s logotype should be designed to fit the eyes. Both eyes.
17. **The law of color.** A brand should use a color that is the opposite of its major competitor.
18. **The law of borders.** There are no barriers to global branding. A brand should know no borders.
19. **The law of consistency.** A brand is not built overnight. Success is measured in decades, not years.
20. **The law of change.** Brands can be changed, but only infrequently and only very carefully.
21. **The law of mortality.** No brand will live forever. Euthanasia is often the best solution.
22. **The law of singularity.** The most important aspect of a brand is its single-mindedness.

Initial efforts at logo redesign...



In earlier columns, Stephanie Wetjen has alluded to some of the changes you can expect to see in the editorial mix. The ultimate goal is to reposition *Legal Management News* from a newsletter into the premier professional journal/news magazine for Oregon legal administrators.

Enter the logo

As with the magazine, the redesign process for the logo began with a series of questions:

- Why do you need a new logo?
- Who is your primary market?
- What image do you want to portray?
- How dramatic a departure do you want the new logo to take from the old logo?
- How is your organization perceived now? How would you like that perception to change?
- How will the logo be used? Where will it be used?
- Are there any constraints placed upon design by the chapter's affiliation with the Association of Legal Administrators?

These questions helped narrow the focus on what ALA-Oregon wanted its new identity to do.

The design itself took place in several rounds of revisions. We began with a series of rough sketches; each sketch emphasized one or more ideas generated by the preceding questions (see sidebar above, *Initial efforts at logo redesign...*). These were presented

to ALA-Oregon's board for feedback. I encouraged the board to "mix and match" at this stage of the process, i.e., tell me what they liked and did not like about each of the concepts. Often clients will like the typeface in one concept, the color in another, and the artistic treatment in a third.

For round two, I used this amalgam

of feedback to generate a second, smaller set of options. I presented these to the board and asked them to choose the one they liked best. That choice formed the basis for the final design (see sidebar next page, *...and the finished products*).

In round three, I presented the final design choice in several

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About the author

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renderings with subtle differences in color. By this time, everyone had a chance to think about the logo in detail and they were able to make a choice quickly.

The final step was to employ the new logo in various options for letterhead layouts and record the artwork into final digital form.

...and the finished products



I thoroughly enjoyed working with ALA-Oregon on this project. While the artistic side is the most fun; the strategic side is the most intellectually challenging. I have found that branding and positioning initiatives force clients to think through some very difficult issues; to put themselves inside the hearts and minds of their customers and figure out what kind of unique “promise” they can (and want) to make. It is not an easy task, but it is almost always worthwhile.

References

¹“Starbucks—What’s a Pound of Coffee Worth?” www.amchamsal.com.

²An excellent account of the Starbucks branding campaign can be found in Scott Bedbury and Stephen Fenichell, *New Brand World*. (New York: Viking Books, 2002).

³A. Ries and L. Ries, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 7.

⁴C. Maddock, “Law Firm Branding: Is It Working?” *Altman Weil Report to Legal Management* (February 2000): 1. **LVN**

Do you know what clients really think about your firm?

Here are some well-known factors that clients consider when evaluating and choosing a law firm. Does your law firm distinguish itself by these measures of excellence?

Outstanding work results
Excellent counsel and advice
Expertise in specific areas
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