

Matters of fact: Advertising and publicity of services amongst the legal profession

Following decades of practice under the marketing radar, the legal fraternity's marketing communication activity has seen a significant increase over the past five years. While governed by the rules of the Law Society's Advertising Marketing Guidelines, firms have ventured into the marketplace, leveraging both above-the-line and below-the-line elements such as public relations.



(Image: Wikimedia Commons)

"Similar in nature to the marketing of other professional services, auditing firms provide a good example, it has become essential for law firms to communicate their services in an increasingly competitive market," says Kevin Pietersen, director at Gauteng law firm Lanham-Love. "The legal profession is complex, with different firms practicing various aspects of law; marketing these services across several channels and target markets is critical to the success of a firm."

Services offer largely determine publicity methods

Pietersen notes that showcasing the depth and breadth of both subject knowledge and experience, particularly for a multi-practice firm, is an essential building block in its reputation. Attorneys specialising in personal injury, road accident fund claims and divorce by example, have opted for above-the-line advertising. "Media and message choice is largely dependent on services offered," says Pietersen. Lanham-Love is a corporate and commercial firm specialising in mining law, mergers and acquisitions and high value recoveries among others.

Lanham-Love's marketing communication strategy focuses on public relations and leverage of its attorney's expertise. "Our stakeholder audience comprises large corporations, mining houses and institutions - with the most effective reach being public relations."

Whatever the channel, Law Society rules govern

He says that no matter which channel or marketing methodology is leveraged, attorneys are governed by the rules of the Law Society. "Marketing and publicity activities are managed by stringent rules that, once distilled, indicate that external communication is bound by matters of fact." Pietersen says that attorneys may not make claims, nor misrepresent any aspect of a practice.

"The rules of the Law Society are drafted in the spirit of responsible advertising and communication - and still prohibit touting or the open solicitation of services."

Pietersen expects that marketing communication activity among the legal fraternity will continue to grow.

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