

Three Ways Legal PR Specialists Can Support Your Firm's Diverse Attorneys

by Debra Pickett



Law firms serving corporate clients face increasing pressure not only to make their workplaces more diverse and inclusive overall, but also to ensure that more women and people of color occupy top positions of power.

The January 2019 [open letter from 170 general counsel](#) serves as the most pointed example of this client demand. In it, they called on law partners to “develop, promote and retain talented and diverse attorneys” — or risk losing business to firms that take diversity and inclusion seriously. Law firm leaders who have long paid lip service to these goals without actually changing their recruiting, professional development or performance evaluation practices face a true crisis, and mapping out a path forward that satisfies client demand, not to mention the moral imperative to create firms that better represent our society, will require a multifaceted approach.

It might surprise you to learn that a sophisticated communications and media strategy is a crucial piece of that plan. While public relations may not seem to have an obvious connection with diversity efforts, PR partners who specialize in the legal sector can provide law firm leaders with strategic, targeted support to meet their goals for equity. Effective law firm PR partners can help you:

1. Audit current initiatives

Most firms are doing something on diversity and inclusion, with varying results. If these initiatives are not yielding the desired outcome, it's time to think about why. Sometimes the real problem is not a lack of effort but the flawed thinking behind a program.

For example, many initiatives intended to address gender equality target differences in women's approach to risk-taking, negotiation, and work-life balance. While that may sound like progress, focusing on individual women's choices furthers beliefs and stereotypes that have been debunked by decades of reliable data about fundamental gender differences. Men and women are not nearly so different as we persist in believing. They behave differently in various settings not because of inherent traits but because of organizational practices that reward and punish men and women differently. Equity initiatives that target systemic issues like parental leave and the pay gap are more likely to improve the promotion and retention of women.

As your approach to improving diversity evolves, your internal and external communications need to evolve too. PR support can help you demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of the problems and the solutions — and show clients that you are serious about making measurable progress.

2. Reimagine networking

Today's attorneys know they must provide excellent client service and master the art of business development. That typically involves some form of networking: getting out of the office to form relationships with clients and prospects, and planting the seeds for referrals and new business down the road.

But old-fashioned networking—on the golf course, in the bar, at the country club—is not always a strategy that works for women, people of color, LGBTQ lawyers, and others who have come to the field from outside the old boys' network.

If you are serious about supporting your diverse attorneys, you can get proactive about professional development that helps them build their business in ways that work for them. And your PR team can help these attorneys become more active in relevant professional organizations, nominate them for awards, boost their online and social media presence, and facilitate alternative networking opportunities.

3. Activate a hands-on media strategy

A customized, targeted plan to promote your diverse attorneys' immense skills and experience, as well as their innovative approaches to old problems, is key to raising their profiles and, by extension, your firm's profile as well. PR support can help attorneys build relationships with the reporters who cover issues in their practice area so that they can become expert sources. Attorneys can partner with writers to create thought leadership articles for the publications most widely read by their clients and prospects. Nothing helps you take control of the narrative about your firm like media opportunities that highlight the skills and experience of your current and future diverse superstars.

With clients pressuring law firms to change their ways, creating a diverse and inclusive workplace has gone from a lofty goal to a strategic imperative. This necessary transformation presents leaders with significant challenges, but the good news is you don't have to go it alone.

Experts in communications and media strategy can help you take practical steps to develop and support the diverse attorneys who serve your most valued clients. And, of course, as you would expect, PR professionals can also help you share the good news about the progress you're making in advancing diversity and inclusion in your firm.

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