

# Memphis Business Journal

## IN DEPTH: ATTORNEYS

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### Successful marketing requires long-term planning

[Linda Water Nelson](#)

Clients can't hire you if they have never heard of you.

Those are the wise words of John Ryder, a member of Harris Shelton Hanover Walsh law firm.

Ryder, a long-time proponent of marketing for legal practices, says it is critical to understand that, while practices aimed at consumers can make the best use of traditional advertising, others, such as real estate law firms, should address their message to Realtors and brokers who usually provide referrals. Other specialty practices often rely on attorney referrals.

"Many firms do not have specialists on staff who handle white-collar crime, intellectual property or other issues. To provide the best possible representation, they generally refer them to an attorney with that unique type of practice or background. That translates to attorneys marketing and promoting to other attorneys," Ryder says.

Glankler Brown PLLC takes its marketing program seriously. Marketing director Tanya Turner is not an attorney, but an on-staff professional with responsibility for generating exposure for the firm's activities. Eight attorneys out of the firm's 58 sit on Glankler Brown's marketing committee, providing necessary business insight and control.

"Within the past 10-15 years, law firms have come to realize that clinging to old thinking will not help to develop business," Turner says.

In addition to planning special events, such as Glankler Brown's recent party at the Dixon Gallery and Gardens for about 300 clients, prospective clients and friends of the firm, Turner is responsible for the Web site, targeted advertising with local media, and client-relationship planning.

Turner says the annual party, which costs the firm a sum in the low five figures, accomplishes two goals. The party demonstrates the firm's commitment to its current clients, showing appreciation for the relationship and allowing them to meet socially with all of the attorneys who work on their legal business. Also new client prospects are exposed to satisfied existing clients, and sources for referrals are brought together without a business agenda.

Since the Supreme Court's decision 27 years ago in *Bates v. State Bar of Arizona*, which found that attorneys have a First Amendment right to advertise their services, the doors have been open to law firms for more assertive marketing. Since that decision all attorneys have faced a more competitive

business model where power has shifted to the clients' hands, says Sandra McQuain, a partner with legal consulting company Howell McQuain Strategies.

Often law firms pull back on marketing when there is a downturn, which she sees as a mistake.

"This is all about long-term strategy and investment," McQuain says. "The time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining ... a couple of bad years or a consolidation leading to a lack of visibility, often means it is too late to fully recover. This is especially true in Memphis, where many firms are now branch offices for larger legal organizations in other cities."

Lawyers are taught the practice of law, not running the business of law, McQuain says.

"Often it is wisest to enlist outside resources that can help define the needs, identify a firm's most marketable points and execute plans and programs for optimal use of the firm's resources," she says.

McQuain says prospective clients are not the only targets for marketing.

"There is a tremendous challenge hiring exceptional legal talent," she says. "Understanding competitive compensation programs and doing the kind of marketing that makes a firm desirable to a potential employee is also crucial since firms are only as good as their lawyers."

As to the oft-asked question of which Memphis law firm does the best marketing job, McQuain says, hands down, it's Corey B. Trotz.

"They understand their target clients and how to reach them. They promote continuously. And Corey looks like the guy who could live down the street, so consumers relate," McQuain says.

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