

## Is Print Advertising Passé?

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Lawyers, law firms and legal marketers have all increasingly come to understand the central importance of a firm's website and online marketing efforts in recent years. But what has become of the old-fashioned print advertising campaign? Can such campaigns still hold relevance - and value - for a modern law firm? I submit that they can.

By way of explanation, let's start by acknowledging some of the perceived downsides of print advertising. The three big negatives usually levelled at print campaigns are that they are expensive, they are untargeted, and they are slow. In short, detractors claim that print advertising is everything online marketing is not (or shouldn't be). However, there are ways to turn this thinking on its head. Let's look at each of these criticisms in turn:

**Myth #1 - Print is too expensive:** There is no doubt that running a sizable print campaign in your city's major daily newspaper or a large-circulation magazine is a significant line item on your marketing budget. But the perceived high cost of print advertising can have two important benefits – first it creates a barrier to entry for those firms that aren't prepared to engage in this form of marketing, thereby clearing a path for those that are. My mantra when it comes to choosing advertising formats is that the ideal media placement is one where your clients are and your competitors are not. If you can find that, you significantly increase the effectiveness of your marketing spend. The second benefit of print advertising's perceived high cost is one of positioning – because print campaigns are perceived as expensive, they carry with them a degree of built-in credibility that the firm doing such advertising is by definition a “major player” in the market. Such credibility can be invaluable for a firm seeking to position itself for a broader market share or looking to move upmarket towards premium, higher margin work. So while print advertising is expensive, the cost-benefit analysis warrants its use in some circumstances.

**Myth #2 - Print is too untargeted:** The second perceived negative of print campaigns is that they are untargeted. For a firm seeking to build profile and raise awareness, intense focus on niche markets is not necessarily the right approach. Sometimes you need to shout your message from the



rooftops, and advertising in major newspapers and magazines allows you to do so. “Mass circulation” means just that after all.

**Myth #3 - Print is too slow:** The third critique of print advertising campaigns is that they are slow. In our current “always on” business environment of constant email contact, RSS feeds, twitters and a dozen other instant communication vehicles, the notion of sending out hard copies of your marketing message that get ploddingly delivered to your current and potential clients’ physical mailboxes by actual human delivery people seems almost quaint. What we sometimes overlook though is that instantaneous is also quite regularly instantly forgettable. A print campaign that delivers consistent, recognizable messaging at regular intervals (e.g. once a week in newspapers or once a month in magazines) over time can build a sustained brand awareness for your firm in the minds of your clients and prospects that can be a critical factor the next time “something comes up” for them that requires the kind of services your firm can provide.

### **Theory in Practice – “Fresh Thinking”**

One firm that has chosen to undertake a significant print advertising campaign is Vancouver-based multi-practice firm Alexander Holburn Beaudin & Lang LLP. In late 2006 and early 2007 the firm launched a 12 ad campaign entitled “Fresh Thinking” with a regular placement in the Thursday business section of Vancouver’s major daily newspaper. The campaign ran over four months as a major component of the firm’s strategy to increase its visibility in the market and build brand profile. Ads in the campaign followed a consistent visual layout, using photography of the firm’s actual lawyers, management and staff, with one or more green apples as a visual metaphor for the campaign’s tagline of “fresh thinking”. For example, one ad (“Fresh Air”) told the story of Darryl Pankratz, a partner in the firm’s transportation practice who was in the process of earning his pilot’s licence and showed him tossing an apple aloft. Each ad illustrated one aspect of the firm’s practices, services, or programs that exemplified the fresh thinking theme.

The campaign’s reach and popularity were confirmed in multiple ways. Existing and new clients regularly referenced the campaign in discussions with the firm’s lawyers. A judge began a presentation at the firm by ceremonially removing a green apple from his briefcase and placing it on the podium before commencing his talk. Additionally, the firm went on to be selected as “Legal Marketer of the Year” for 2007 at the Legal Marketing Association’s Vancouver Chapter annual awards ceremony.



Carrie Innes, Alexander Holburn's Marketing Manager, confirms that the campaign has proven so successful that for 2008 the firm has chosen to extend it by developing additional ads and running the campaign in BC Business Magazine, a major monthly general interest business periodical on the West Coast.

So, are print campaigns passé? No. Are they the right solution for your firm? If you are seeking to build profile and increase broad market awareness for your firm and you are prepared to make an investment in brand building, the answer might well be yes.

**Tips for Successful Print Campaigns:**

1. Don't include the kitchen sink: deliver one key message per ad.
2. Be consistent: develop a recognizable style or visual anchor for your ads.
3. Develop a campaign: create at least 3 ads. One-offs are less effective.
4. Go big or go home: Use at least some colour and aim for a half or full-page ad whenever possible.

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