

# LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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## 8 Rules for Great Advertising

By Peter Darling



Our society is one of the most marketing-intense in the history of the human race. Owing to the size of this country, advancements in technology (particularly media) and the prosperity the United States has enjoyed since the turn of the 20th century, Americans are immersed in a marketing-intense culture. Most well-known among these marketing juggernauts is advertising. You see advertising at gas pumps, in elevators, on the floors of train stations, in the sky, virtually everywhere you go, look or think. It permeates our lives.

Advertising is very powerful, and when used correctly can make or break a firm, or a market. Advertising isn't random. It's very carefully thought out, and very strategically developed. It follows rules. Although it may appear spontaneous, amusing, entertaining or automatic, advertising actually operates according to a set of very specific, strategic principles. In order to generate good advertising for your law firm or law department, it is essential that you understand and follow these principles. Though not a complete list, these rules will help get you started.

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**RULE 1.** You have to give people a reason to read your ad. This means, first and foremost, that a good ad has to stand out. It's imperative that it not resemble what everybody else is doing. It must be different, it must be unique.

**RULE 2.** You have about one second to get your message across. Readers are not patient people. They will not work to decipher an ad that is overly complex, vague or ambiguous. The entire concept behind the ad must be discernable at a glance, in seconds. If your ad is too difficult to understand, your readers will simply turn the page, which makes the entire ad worthless.

**RULE 3.** The essence of your message has to be simple. Overly complex ads are ineffective.

**RULE 4.** The words and the images have to work together seamlessly. One major cause of bad or ineffective advertising is when the words and the imagery are not in harmony. The image may convey one concept, and the words another, leaving the reader confused. In some senses, this rule is a corollary to Rule No. 2 — readers are not going to work to understand what's happening with an ad.

**RULE 5.** You must sell the product. A lot of ads are clever, interesting or funny, but ultimately do not sell the product. The product must always be the star of a good ad. If the ad happens to be for a service, such as law, the product typically is usually either a result, such as a successful trial, or an experience the client has. Since there is no tangible product, the outcome or the experience must be what is sold.

**RULE 6.** Visuals are really, really important. Lawyers, given their line of work, tend to emphasize words and logic, and underestimate the importance of images, particularly photographs, in communications. Advertising, particularly print, has the unique ability to maximize the impact of images, and use them to great advantage. A good image, as the saying goes, is worth more than a thousand words.

**RULE 7.** Silliness doesn't work. Occasionally, in what I suppose is a misguided attempt to emphasize the friendliness or humanity of their attorneys, law firms prepare ads that are just plain silly. While this may work for certain consumer products, if carefully done, it does not work for lawyers. When all is said and done, lawyers are still expected to be professional, and to be relatively serious.

**RULE 8.** If the concept is good, don't be afraid to swing for the fences. This last rule is more of an admonition. Good advertising is all about the underlying concept. If the concept is strong, do not be afraid to go out on the limb and try to do something bold, dramatic or truly unique. Advertising is not a discipline for the faint of heart. If a concept is good, use it for all it's worth.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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