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LEGAL AFFAIRS: Law firms play the name game

Practices shorten identities in effort to be more memorable

By MICHELLE PARK

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Determined to become more memorable in this increasingly succinct, social media-immersed world, more law firms want the world to get to know them on a first-name basis.



By the end of February, Akron-based Roetzel & Andress will roll out a new logo and website bearing only the word, Roetzel.

And, in early 2012, Squire Sanders dropped the Dempsey that used to round out its name. Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan and Aronoff LLP in fall 2010 began using only the Benesch for marketing purposes, and Calfee, Halter & Griswold LLP, too, has since 2005 used only the Calfee in its logo.

"It's a lot more contemporary to have a law firm with a short, succinct, memorable name than it is to have a string of three, four, five names," said Rick Rymond, a member of Reminger Co. LPA's executive group and the man behind the firm's advertising and marketing.

"It's easier to brand," he added. "We don't think of PepsiCo as the PepsiCo Bottling Co. of North America, or whatever it is. Shorter is easier. Shorter is more identifiable."

While some firms shortened their names years, even a decade, ago, the trend seems to have accelerated in recent years, legal insiders say.

Nationwide, a number of firms also have abbreviated their names to initials, following in the

footsteps of big accounting firms such as KPMG, noted Peter Zeughauser, chairman of Zeughauser Group, a legal consulting firm with offices in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and California. He cited DLA Piper and K&L Gates as examples.

"There has been a somewhat long-term trend to go (to) one name for firms," Mr. Zeughauser said. "Easier to remember. Better for graphics. Both add up to more effective branding."

Limiting a firm to one name also can make things easier in the event of mergers, he noted. Consolidation has been on the rise in the legal field.

And, with more firms joining the Twitter-sphere, where users may use only 140 characters in a single post, the shorter your name, the longer the rest of your post can be, noted Jeanne Hammerstrom, chief marketing and recruiting officer for Benesch who served as 2011 president of the international Legal Marketing Association.

"You only have so much room, and you don't want to use up all of the room with names," she said.

More than just name dropping

Most law firm executives cite branding and marketing as the reasons they've shortened their firms' names. Many also note that legally, their firms' names remain their longer versions of the past.

Reminger & Reminger Co. LPA, however, did legally change its name to Reminger Co. LPA in 2007. Being a more identifiable law firm in the marketing realm is more important today, Mr. Rymond asserted.

"The sources by which people select a lawyer are far more driven by media outlets than they were 20 years ago," he said. "Twenty years ago, people selected lawyers because that's who their dad used. Now people select law firms based upon, I think, a lot more objective information that's available."

Changing Reminger's name actually was quite inexpensive, Mr. Rymond noted, which begs the question: Why, then, isn't everyone doing it?

"One of the reasons that some firms may be slow to adopt a name change is you've still got multiple principals whose names still appear in the firm name and there may be an ego factor, a pride factor," Mr. Rymond said. "We didn't have that. We had no Reminger here when we changed our name."

The name shortening is symptomatic of the evolution of larger law firms to now emphasize the entity over the individual lawyer, said Rob Roland, managing partner of Day Ketterer Ltd., a Canton-based law firm that dropped three names in 2004.

"By removing the names of influential individual attorneys from the firm name, law firms are consciously or unconsciously, I don't know which, emphasizing the organization over the individual," he said. "This is the opposite of how the law firm world operated in the past."

The mobility of attorneys today is a major motivator of that trend, Mr. Roland said.

"There was, for many, many, many years, very little mobility of attorneys between offices," he said. "Now, you see attorneys moving all the time. A main player today at a big firm could be a main player at another firm tomorrow, and so therefore, the logical extension of that is that the law firm cannot tie its identity as tightly as it has in the past to a particular attorney."

Cleveland firms aren't just dropping names.

BakerHostetler — formerly Baker & Hostetler — and Walter | Haverfield LLP — no longer Walter & Haverfield — in 2012 eliminated what executives say is the "antiquated" ampersand. Walter | Haverfield's logo now is presented in a linear, not stacked, way.

"Ampersand is an old form of punctuation," said Ralph Cascarilla, managing partner of Walter | Haverfield. "We thought ... the bar approach, the linear approach would be an updated presentation of the firm name.

"It's a recognition of exactly how people speak," he added. "People don't say Calfee, Halter and Griswold. People say Squire Sanders or Thompson Hine or Walter Haverfield. The shortening of the names is a reflection of the current culture.

Nod to history

Some firms' names remain a mouthful, and they're not apologizing for it.

"We did not get caught up in the marketing whim of the moment," said Christian Patno, who serves on the eight-person strategic committee for McCarthy, Lebit, Crystal & Liffman Co. LPA in Cleveland — often dubbed McCarthy Lebit anyway, he noted.

"We have no plans to change," he added. "This firm is about the lawyers; it's about the history of the lawyers. We don't need taglines or catch phrases to try to compete for clients. Our clients know us."

McCarthy Lebit executives considered shortening the name and decided against it, Mr. Patno said.

"Who we are is who we were 50 years ago, only larger," he said. "It's what works for us. If what you're doing is working for you, why change it just to keep up with the Joneses?"

Those least likely to make the change are first-generation firms, said Ward Bower, a principal of Altman Weil Inc., a legal management consulting firm based in Newtown Square, Pa.

"Partners are still around and sensitive to keeping their name in the firm name, even if it's the fourth out of six," he said. "It's just ego."

The reason for no name change at Kohrman Jackson & Krantz PLL in Cleveland is "respect for our history," said Marc Krantz, the firm's managing partner and son of Byron Krantz, one of the

founders. The three named partners remain active in the firm, he said.

"You lose a little bit of history of the firm whenever you start dropping names," Mr. Krantz said.

"We actually think that our three names sound good, with the two k's bookending the Jackson in the middle," he added. "We're not worried about anything being more snazzy than our name."