FURIA RUBEL
communications, made simple.

www.furiarubel.com p/215.340.0480 f/215.340.0580 PO Box 348, Fountainville, Pa, 18923

Setting Measurable Public Relations Objectives for Law Firms

By: Gina F. Rubel, Esq.
President
gina@furiarubel.com

What do you want people to think, say or do when they hear the name of your law firm? This is the question that every law firm managing partner should ask herself when determining when and if to launch a public relations or marketing program. The answer to this question will help determine the direction of your communications, whether they be media relations, community outreach, trade association partnerships, in-house professional development, advertising, or any number of other outreach tactics. But for purposes of this article, let's just focus on public relations.

Great public relations can substantially accelerate business development cycles, increase audience awareness and help promote rapid growth. Harnessing this power can be a great boost – if it is done with clear objectives and is held accountable to your core business goals. Setting measurable public relations objectives is quintessential for executing effective public relations that can build your business.

The first step is to revisit – or articulate – your firm's *core business goals.* Understanding your business or performance goals is the first step in defining measurable objectives for a public relations program. When you measure the value of your public relations program, you need to substantiate that public relations has furthered your business goals. To get started, ask yourself how public relations programs can help achieve your core business goals and what public relations can do more effectively than advertising, promotions, management consultants, and other communications disciplines? Once you've answered these questions then you can move on to defining your public relations objectives.

The second step in the public relations planning process is to define your *public relations* objectives. In order to do so, you must answer several questions. Ask yourself, who is the *target audience*? Your target audience should be the thought leaders and decision makers who will ultimately affect your company's bottom line. For most law firms this includes current clients, prospects, referring counsel, and firm employees.

Once you have defined who you want to reach with your public relations programs, then identify what you want your target audience to think about your company. This is traditionally referred to as your *key message or positioning* *statement.* Decide how you wish your firm to be perceived and your position will flow from that message. For example, if your firm wants to be known for plaintiffs' riparian rights litigation, then you should craft your key message around riparian rights. This is not to say that all firms should niche in just one practice area but it also should be mentioned that niche messages are quite successful in today's marketplace.

Now that you have determined who you want to reach and with what message, ask yourself, what do I want the target audience to do once they hear my message? This is known in the marketing and public relations industries as the *call to action***.** Do you want plaintiffs to contact your firm if they believe they are sufferers of tortuous acts? Or do you want insurance agencies to use your firm for defense litigation? This call to action will help determine what tactics you will want to employ later in this process.

So now that you have identified who you want to reach and what you want them to think, say or do, you must determine how you are going to get that audience to answer your call to action**.** In other words, what is your strategy? Strategies are used to reach your target audiences and convey your messages, as well as to form the basis of your public relations plan. And we have not yet said *anything* about *tactics*. That comes a little later. Reactive, *ad-hoc* public relations tactics – "send out a press release," "hold an open house," "sponsor a continuing education program," "call the news," "hold a press conference" – are rarely effective, and sometimes dangerous. We will get to the fun stuff, but *first* do a sanity check on your objectives. *Are your public relations objectives measurable?*

Ask yourself, will our public relations objectives help achieve our business objectives? If you can answer yes to the following questions, then you've set measurable public relations objectives.

1. **Is your public relations strategy measurable?** Measurable objectives in public relations do two things: They facilitate and support business objectives, and they enable public relations practitioners to demonstrate programming success and accountability.

2. **Is your public relations strategy an end, not a means?** Strategy must be defined in order for you to identify the best tactics (means) to accomplish your objectives. Ask yourself, "What is the purpose of (insert objective)." The answer to this question is likely to move you closer to a clear, actionable objective.

3. **Is your public relations strategy realistic?** If your strategy is not realistic it can neither be executed nor measured, and you are wasting a precious resource – your time. Be realistic when you develop public relations program objectives. A common mistake is to over-promise

without attention to whether there is anything in the program that could achieve such an objective.

4. **Can you accomplish your objectives within the time allotted?** You must be cognizant of what it takes to execute a successful public relations campaign, and how long it takes to do it. Some programs take three months and others take three years – be reasonable when determining the amount of time you need or you're setting yourself up for failure.

You've answered yes to all the measurability questions and now you want to have some fun. In order to identify the public relations tactics that will accomplish your business objectives, determine what types of tactics will generate the response you desire. Will an appearance on the local evening news reach your intended target audiences with the messages you want them to hear or will a one-on-one seminar do the trick? Some common public relations tactics include:

- Media Relations / Publicity
- Community Relations
- Seminars
- Event Sponsorship
- Trade Association Involvement
- Articles (Trade & Consumer)
- Continuing Legal Education
- Industry Partnerships
- Special Events

The best way to make this determination is to identify your target audiences' typical activities. If you're reaching out to referring counsel, are they reading The *National Law Journal* and *Lawyer's Weekly USA*, or are they watching CNN and MSNBC news? Sometimes the answer is both. Know what publications your target audiences read, what television programs they watch, what radio broadcasts they listen to, what conferences they commonly attend, which thought leaders they typically trust, and most importantly who is making the decisions to hire legal counsel in their homes or companies. Then determine how your firm can be a part of the messages coming from those outlets.

It is also important to recognize and understand the trends in your target audiences lives and business and what types of programs (tactics) you can develop to respond to those trends.

Public relations planning and measurement has a continuum:

Business Goals	→	Public Relations Objectives - Audiences	→	Measurability Determination	→	Tactics Defined

- Messages
- Call to Action

So now that you've set "measurable" public relations objectives for your law firm and executed tactics that reach your target audiences with what you want them to think, say and do, you need to identify the tools that you will use to measure the success of your public relations program. Think in terms of coverage, exposure, reach, placement, demand, impact, calls or leads generated. *A*sk and answer several questions.

- Have we succeeded in achieving our goals?
- What happened as a result of our public relations program?
- How can we improve our public relations programs in the future?

Familiarize yourself with the glossary of public relations measurement tools, and choose the measures most effective for your business situation.

Media Coverage – measures the successful placements, number and type of media.

Message Exposure – measures the successful placement of specific messages you intended to place.

Media Reach –the number of people receiving the communication via the media, also known as the number of media impressions. In order to calculate Print Reach, determine circulation numbers for all of the publications carrying your messages. This is the raw number of subscribers who were exposed to the story. Multiply print circulation numbers by a "pass along" factor of 2.5 to determine the number of readers potentially exposed to your story. Broadcast Reach is determined by number of viewers (rating) at the particular time of day that your story aired. Online Reach is determined by the number of unique and repeat visits as measured by tracking software.

Value for Placement – The financial measure of media coverage is the cost to advertise in the same media space, whether it is print, broadcast or online. Your actual value is much greater than the advertising cost because your credibility is much higher when the story appears as news (not paid advertising).

Media Demand – is determined by whether media proactively responded to the press materials that you have supplied. Did reporters call back? Did you land interviews? Did the TV trucks roll?

Media Mapping – visually demonstrates local, regional or national media placements. Create a map of the U.S. and use "dots" or other notation to indicate where placements have appeared. This can visually demonstrate an overwhelming number of placements overall (many dots) or a well-controlled regional placement in a localized campaign (clustered dots).

Message Impact – measures awareness, attitude and behavior changes that may have resulted. This is usually measured via surveys or focus groups but can be gauged through general feedback received from public relations programs if budget is limited.

Objective Achievement – measures whether your public relations impacted specific desired effects such as clients generated, partnerships developed and lobbying results, endorsements achieved, etc.

Leads Generated – Calculate the number of leads generated as a result of your public relations campaign through (1) Attendance or participation in events or by entering a competition, and (2) Proactive demand for program output by requesting materials.

Competitive Analysis – For trade publicity, competitive analysis is very valuable. Review all articles in your target publications to measure the amount of coverage you have garnered versus your competitors during the relevant time horizon prior to public relations efforts. Contrast current levels of coverage with this foundation measure to demonstrate the heightened share coverage your company has attained due to your public relations efforts.

Relationship Analysis –Partnerships and joint campaigns are becoming an effective approach in public relations. Measuring the value of relationships that are built or strengthened through a campaign is a new challenge. Because the relationships are long lasting and have potential for future benefit and collaborations, their value goes beyond traditional publicity measures. Simple measures of immediate relationship value include event attendance, membership figures, newsletter readership and analysis of each partner's linkages with other influential organizations.

Assessing the success or failure of specific public relations programs, strategies, activities and campaigns is short-term measurement and evaluation. Assessing the success or failure your public relations efforts have taken as a whole, and their impact upon improving and enhancing organizational relationships with key audiences, is long-term measurement and evaluation. Both are important disciplines. Choose the measurement practices best for your situation and evaluate your public relations programming. If you followed the formula set out in this article, you should have no problem achieving positive and successful measurement outcomes.

Author Biography: Founder and president of Furia Rubel Communications, Inc. (www.furiarubel.com), Gina F. Rubel, Esq., is a Philadelphia lawyer with more than a decade of integrated communications experience. After practicing law for several years, Gina focused on her passion for proactive, integrated communication for the legal, healthcare, and nonprofit industries. Gina has developed and executed integrated strategic communications plans for large and small firms; supervised crisis communications, risk management and media relations for internationally publicized death penalty trials, planned events for major corporate, nonprofit, and philanthropic gatherings; and implemented programs that include corporate branding, publicity, special events, Web site development, and association relations.

Gina is an active member of the Philadelphia Bar Association, the Justinian Society, the Philadelphia Public Relations Association, the Public Relations Society of America, justCommunity, Inc., and the American Heart Association, among others. She served on a Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Disciplinary Board Hearing Committee for six years, acting as the chairperson for three years. She has published articles in *Lawyers Weekly USA*, *The Legal Intelligencer, Philadelphia Lawyers Magazine* and MediaMap.com and is a frequent lecturer. She is a 1991 graduate of Drexel University and a 1994 graduate of Widener University School of Law. Her current clients include Sheller Ludwig & Badey, Stampone; DeAngelo & Renzi, Eaton & McClellan; and Kenneth M. Kitay & Associates, among others.