



**Wanamaker Was Right: Getting The Most Out Of Your Firm's Print Ads**  
*A Perspective From Law*  
October 2006

**By Doug Stern**

John Wanamaker practically invented retailing. It was the late 19th Century, and he was bringing thousands of shoppers to his downtown Philadelphia department store with all sorts of gimmicks and innovations.

Advertising was one of these innovations. And, Wanamaker was spending fortunes on the city's papers.

Despite his success, Wanamaker used to complain. He'd say that he was confident that half of what he was spending on advertising worked... but that he couldn't tell which half.

**Not Much Has Changed**

Most big law firm managing partners understand how Wanamaker felt. You're probably planning your first campaign, looking for ways to do a better job with what's out there now, wondering if you're on the right track or idling somewhere in between.

Whatever your status, the following offers a few corrections or confirmations. It begins with a word about having the right expectations, the issue that usually stays on top for most managing partners.

**Setting The Bar**

Lots of studies show that print advertising is the best way known to "get found." It's efficient and, if well-produced and well-distributed, faster than anything else at getting your name and message out there.

On its own, however, it is not likely to get the phone ringing with new business. That's because ads largely are a *cognitive* tool--one that lets its viewers know you exist. Ads impart information.

Rainmakers know, however, that information alone won't get you hired. That takes connecting emotionally with clients, something that recognizes that people buy from people.

**RainToday.com**

**Wanamaker Was Right: Getting The Most Out Of Your Firm's Print Ads**

***A Perspective From Law***

**October 2006**

**By Doug Stern**

**Page 2**

Print ads generally lack the capacity to convey the *emotional* charge it takes to "get picked". Good ads will get you on the short-list. They'll soften the sale. But the rest is largely up to you and your rainmaking skills.

### **What's A "Good" Ad?**

First, it has to get noticed. That takes using an image that will arrest the viewer's eye. That's tough, considering the relentless bombardment of images and messages each of us endures or ignores every day.

Robes and globes probably won't get the job done. Neither will pictures of gavels, scales of justice, law libraries, briefcases, huddles of lawyers, or any other hackneyed, hidebound image.

Look instead for an image that conveys wit. Or sophistication. Or intelligence. Look for an image that illustrates your firm's values and personality. An image that sets you apart and relates to your clients' self-interest.

Second, your ad has to be readable. Think of it as you would a billboard. Remember that your clients are blasting through whatever magazine, newspaper, or airport in which you've placed your ad.

Can you read and process more than seven words when you drive by them at 70 MPH? When you're also checking your PDA and carrying on one or more conversations?

Too many words in an ad will lose a viewer's attention, no matter how firmly the image grabs them. That's true of both the headline and your ad's text.

In fact, a few of the wrong words will lose them. Keep the focus on suggesting value to them and away from stating your credentials for the sake of impressing anyone with them.

### **We Can Do That!**

Resist the urge to produce a print ad by yourselves if you have no background or experience in advertising. Especially the written part. Ad copy is tough to write. It suspends rules. It's conceptual. Writing it is an art.

**RainToday.com**

**Wanamaker Was Right: Getting The Most Out Of Your Firm's Print Ads  
*A Perspective From Law***

**October 2006**

**By Doug Stern**

**Page 3**

Lawyers can write. Many can write well. But it's extremely rare to find one--let alone a group of lawyers--who can compose an ad. Much less a series of ads.

It's rare to find an attorney who can write like an artist.

**Is This Working?**

It's a matter of when, not if, your partners will ask about ROI. They live in a *quid pro quo* world. And, after all, it's their money.

Tell them the following. "We don't know if it's working and have no way of finding out. The mathematical model has not been invented to reliably measure the impact of advertising."

Tell them about John Wanamaker.

**Cutting Through The Clutter**

People are a little like radio receivers. They have different abilities to pull in weaker signals and to keep the stronger ones separate.

Your job is to send a signal with enough strength and clarity to get picked up easily...regardless of any inconsistencies at the other end.

This is where it pays to be consistent. Have you just re-launched your Web site or re-designed your letterhead? Plan to? Then tie your ads to the color palette, the message and anything else that represents your image and that's already--or, about to be--out there.

Remember, too, that once is not enough. In fact, once is a waste. I swear by the studies which suggest making seven impressions to get and to stay top-of-mind.

So, figure on at least seven insertions each year for your ads. That's on the low end. It assumes that you're mailing, calling, socializing with, and otherwise making impressions on anyone who matters to you and your business.

RainToday.com

## Wanamaker Was Right: Getting The Most Out Of Your Firm's Print Ads *A Perspective From Law*

October 2006

By Doug Stern

Page 4

### How Asymmetry Helps

There's another key to getting your ad noticed and remembered when it's just one of an avalanche of competing messages and images from others. This is the part of your campaign that recognizes that most consumers bore easily.

Boredom will kick in if your ad's targets see the same image and message from you week after week, month after month.

So, vary. Create two or three complementary print ads, budget permitting, and alternate their placement. Make them all part of a consistent theme and look, but with enough variety that your public notices each ad each time with a little surprise (even when they've seen the ads before) while still associating them with you and your campaign.

Silence offers the same thing. Go dark in the summer and holiday months, when your customers are on the beach...mentally or physically. This will heighten the impact of your ads when they reappear. And, it will save you some money!

### Reaching The Right People

Even the best ads won't do you much good if they're in the wrong place. Here's where being strategic figures in.

Assuming you have a limited budget, what's your top objective?

- Getting merger candidates to take you seriously?
- Attracting outstanding law students or laterals?
- Making your existing clients feel proud that you represent them?
- Making your *internal* audiences more aware that marketing and selling matter at your firm?
- Letting a business or industry sector know that you exist?

Each of these objectives indicates a different, targeted media. Sometimes that's a local B2B periodical. Other times, it's a national trade publication read by managing partners.

RainToday.com

**Wanamaker Was Right: Getting The Most Out Of Your Firm's Print Ads**  
*A Perspective From Law*

October 2006

By Doug Stern

Page 5

### **Keeping This In Perspective**

Most of you have probably studied the available placement options. You've noticed that they're on to you.

Most B2B periodicals have ads from law firms. Some (e.g., the ones read by corporate counsel) are chock-full of law firm ads.

Publishers and their sales departments have, therefore, made it harder for a firm to get noticed *because* of the success they've had with law firms. Their attractiveness has made them less attractive.

So, keep advertising in its proper perspective. Print advertising for law firms has an important but limited purpose.

Difficulties aside (e.g., competition, weak ads, etc.), print ads work. But they work best when they're deployed in combination with other, coordinated get-found and get-picked activities.

Doing nothing is the only option with virtually certain results. Wanamaker knew that.

---

**Doug Stern** is a freelance business writer and marketing consultant based in Louisville, Ky. He has marketed major law firms throughout the United States, including managing their ad campaigns. Doug can be reached through his Web

site ([www.doug-stern.com](http://www.doug-stern.com)), via email at [stern.doug@gmail.com](mailto:stern.doug@gmail.com), or 502-599-6624.