

# Branding dilemmas befuddle law firms



**BRIEF CASE**  
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It's a struggle for any law firm to stand out from the rest of crowd



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Law firms have put a lot of effort into some of their websites, their imagery – or “livery” as the pros call it – and other branding issues. But when it comes to the short strokes, it seems the firms are not exactly making a standout success.

Take taglines. If you're a major firm you want to be regarded as the best, naturally. And that's exactly what some of them tell us, instead of slipping in something a little more memorable and imaginative.

Take Bell Gully (“setting the standard as New Zealand's best law firm”), for instance. Why not “Just Sue It!”?

Or Russell McVeagh (“New Zealand's premier law firm”). Could they do “Like Writs With That?” Or Buddle Findlay (“New Zealand lawyers” – really?). How about, “Home of the Whopper Lawyers.”

You see the problem. Hardly finger-lickin' stuff, is it? Not a Steve Jobs or Colonel in sight, it seems. Where would Avis be without their “We Try Harder” or BMW without their “Ultimate Driving Machine.”

The fact is that in today's world of fingers doing the walking a good tagline is worth its weight in sales. Or fees. According to the research produced in the metrics-laden *ACLA/CLANZ Benchmarking Report*, law firms here have some major branding issues.

Joe Public, let alone the law firms' own clients, don't really know the difference between one firm's “brand” and another. The point of difference is missing.

The *Benchmarking Report* shows only 17% of corporate clients regard their lead law firm as clearly better than their nearest competitor. That's surely enough to worry the most hard-headed law firm chief executive.

More so if the firms realise that, according to the benchmarking survey of corporate clients, nearly three-quarters of all firms expect to review their law firm relationships in the next two years. The pressure on fees and performance remains higher than ever, just as the barrier to law firm changeover is lower.

## The me-too school

It's as if law firms all come from the school of “me-too.” There's a sameness that stultifies, no matter how much they talk up their differences. Firms have put added emphasis on their websites. I specially like Chapman Tripp's effort and Simpson Grierson has done a good job with its upgrade, too.

Some have done other things, such as reducing their names to the two-name moniker and adopting the dot com web address. Certainly none has done what

PricewaterhouseCoopers has done with their looney use of crazy capitalisation and topsy-turvy fonts to provide hyphenation headaches for editors everywhere.

The *Benchmarking Report* indicates that good branding and differentiation is not so much a question of cost but rather one of value.

The report indicates that firms need to focus on the client perspective on their practices.

The good people at *NZ Lawyer* tell me Ron Pol, principal *Benchmarking Report* researcher, is doing an article on law firm brand differentiation.

Should be interesting. I always like a good oxymoron.