



Information for Law Firms On Sponsorship



SPONSORSHIP AND CHARITY SUPPORT TO PROMOTE YOUR FIRM

Sponsorship involves supporting an event, usually by donating either money or time. Charity support involves donating money and/or time but often encompasses wider activities, such as fund raising.

These involvements help promote loyalty among existing clients by:

- Linking your firm's name to an event or cause that enjoys good support.
- Establishing your firm as one that is involved with the local community.
- Promoting your firm as being not totally self-focused or just profit-oriented.
- Being seen to give something tangible to the community you exist within.

Sponsorship and charity support help build a positive reputation for the firm through:

- Association with the event or cause being supported.
- The high profile that your firm's logo and name can gain as a result.

Choosing Events and Causes to Support

Local events, sports clubs and charities are likely to contact you, requesting support, and the number of requests you get will grow as your firm becomes better known. To avoid being plagued and ending up with a lot of uncertainty it is worthwhile spending time discussing a strategy and guidelines within your firm.

It is a good idea to ask all staff for their thoughts or suggestions for causes or organisations. Make a list of these and consider having members of the firm vote on who they would like to support.

This approach ensures that members of the firm feel included and are therefore more likely to participate. It also allows you to refuse unsolicited ad hoc requests on the grounds that the firm has existing sponsorship commitments.

Involving staff in decisions about sponsorship/support can have significant benefits. Altruism can also have a positive effect on the internal culture of the firm. People generally prefer to work for a caring organisation. Also involving the firm in the local community will help the staff integrate within the community which will have positive effects.

Review sponsorship beneficiaries periodically. Opening up sponsorship will provide other good causes with a chance to access patronage. Changing charities can create opportunities to 'launch' public relations events.

Important Disclaimer – Please Note

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ENSURING YOU COMPLY WITH ADVERTISING REGULATIONS

When planning sponsorship, especially when using the firm's logo and name on advertising and promotional literature or editorial about the firm for an event or cause, solicitors need to ensure that everything complies with the Solicitors (Advertising) Regulations 2002 and with subsequent practice notes. These rules can be accessed on the Society's website at: <http://www.lawsociety.ie/Solicitors/Regulations/Solicitor-Advertising/>

The regulations lay down broad fundamentals and, as such, should be carefully read. In particular, they prohibit advertisements which:

- Are likely to bring the profession into disrepute.
- Are in bad taste.
- Reflect unfavourably on other solicitors.
- Assert that a solicitor has specialist knowledge superior to other solicitors.
- Are false or misleading.
- Are contrary to public policy.

Regulation (4)(a)(viii) bans advertisements which refer to claims or possible claims for damages for personal injuries, the outcome of such claims or the provision of services by solicitors in conjunction with such claims.

Regulation 4(a)(ix) prohibits advertisements which "solicit, encourage or offer any inducement" to make such claims.

Regulation 4(b) specifies that advertisements generally shall not include more than:
the solicitor's name, address, telephone and fax numbers, place of business and location of information provided by the solicitor that is accessible electronically; particulars of the solicitor's qualifications and legal expertise; factual information on the legal services and areas of law to which the services relate; particulars of charges; and any other information permitted by Regulation 5 of these regulations

Regulation 5 contains a list of the "other information" permitted by the regulations, such as hours of business, job descriptions, membership of organisations, reference to other clients (with that client's consent) and other miscellaneous information.

Regulations 6 and 7 deal with where advertisements may and may not be published. Solicitors are not permitted to advertise on any form of transport, such as on buses, and in any inappropriate locations, such as near death notices, in a hospital, in a doctor's surgery, a funeral home - or anywhere of a similar character.

Regulation 9(a) is also important to note. It forbids the inclusion of any words or phrases which suggest that legal services relating to contentious business will be provided at no cost or at a reduced cost – such as "no foal no fee".

No advertisement can contain cartoons, dramatic or emotive words or pictures, nor can it refer to calamitous events such as a train or bus crash. Regulation 9 also prohibits reference to a solicitor's willingness to make home or hospital visits - as this can be interpreted as a form of 'ambulance chasing'.

Regulation 13(a) provides that an unsolicited approach may not be made where it is likely to bring the profession into disrepute. Regulation 13(b) provides that approaches may not be made in inappropriate locations.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SPONSORSHIP ACTIVITIES

Take Advantage of PR Opportunities

When taking on a new cause or event, send out a press release – preferably with a picture of you handing over an over-sized cheque (obtainable from most banks) to a member of the sponsored organisation or charity. When staff members hold money-raising activities, ensure someone is allocated the role of photographer and send any pictures with a press release to the local papers.

Keep Your Clients Informed

Tell clients about any sponsorship you do or charity you support. For example, if you sponsor a local event, write or email your clients to tell them about the event and your firm's role. If your firm holds events to raise money, feature this in your newsletter and website and you can also list organisations supported in your brochure.

Provide Materials to Advertise Your Firm

This may involve having a banner or logo boards made that can be displayed at events to advertise your firm's involvement. However, be careful that everything is in compliance with the Solicitor's Advertising Regulations.

EVALUATING SPONSORSHIP AND CHARITABLE INVOLVEMENTS

One of the main benefits to your firm undertaking sponsorship or adopting charitable causes is that it can help raise the firm's profile and present your firm as having an interest and involvement in the local community.

Therefore, in terms of evaluating the success of these activities, success in raising your firm's profile and presenting it as caring about the local community can be measured by the positive coverage received.

You can assess this in two ways:

- The first way is simply to measure the amount of coverage that these activities gained for you in the press and other media.
- At a higher level, you can research the perception of your firm by the local community.

Because of the costs involved, it is unlikely to be cost-efficient to conduct research into the effect of individual initiatives (unless the sponsorship is for a lot of money).

However, it is worth conducting regular research to understand how your firm is viewed, perhaps every year or two years. Sponsorship and charitable donations may only form a small part of other work you are undertaking to position the firm and therefore as a whole you may not be able to identify their effect.

What you can do is look at descriptive phrases and find out, for example, whether your firm is viewed to be involved in the community, and whether it is viewed as having a caring culture - or is just concerned with profit.