



COMMUNICATORS TALK

NEWS FROM THE NABE'S COMMUNICATIONS SECTION • Summer 2004

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The Chair's Column

Cynthia Kuhn, 2003-2004

Recognizing the Value of Doing Things Well

I recently was reminded of some sage advice I received as I began my professional career: make the effort to do small things well. Throughout my years as a bar association communicator, I've noticed that everyone seems to take notice of the big things done well — the annual meeting, the monthly magazine, the website, the president's special initiative. But when I've looked closely at these major initiatives, I've come to realize that they really are the result of many small things done well.

I recalled this advice earlier this spring when I was invited by the Virginia Bar Association to participate in a panel discussion on the topic of using technology to add value to member communications. In preparing my comments, I turned to the NABECOMM list to get a sense of how bar associations large and small were incorporating technology to improve member communication. In reviewing your generous responses, I was struck by how well you all have done the many small things in your bar associations to improve communications with and among your members. While many of these efforts may not be recognized with a Luminary Award, they nevertheless show that small things done well can have an immense value for our members individually and our associations collectively.

Let me share a few of these small things done well:

- The Virginia Bar Association's website follows legislative matters through a news aggregator service operated by "State Pulse," which posts press releases from government agencies and offices as well as links to newspaper articles of interest to the legal profession.
- The Fairfax Bar Association helps its members mark special events through an "Add to my outlook calendar" option on its web events calendar, making it simple to pluck up an event and save it for future reference.
- The Rhode Island Bar Association's website has a scrolling news feature that provides relevant current news and links to its more comprehensive e-bulletin as well as an online poll feature to get member opinions on such topics as member benefits and legislative proposals.

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Nominating Committee Announces 2004-2005 Section Officers and Council Members

The NABE Communications Section Nominating Committee is pleased to announce the 2004-2005 Section Officers and Executive Council members:

Officers (2004-2005):

- **Susan Andres**, Alabama State Bar, chair
- **Duane Stanley**, Hennepin County (Minnesota) Bar Association, chair-elect
- **Carol Manning**, Oklahoma Bar Association, secretary
- **Francine Walker**, The Florida Bar, treasurer
- **Cynthia G. Kuhn**, The DC Bar, immediate past chair

Council Members (2004-2006):

- **Daniel Cirucci**, Philadelphia Bar Association
- **Emily Eastin**, Columbus (Ohio) Bar Association
- **René Eichem**, Kansas Bar Association

The 2004-2005 officers and 2004-2006 council members officially began their terms of office at the section business meeting on Aug. 4 during the 2004 NABE Annual Meeting in Atlanta (Aug. 3-6, 2004).

Colleen Buggy of the Ohio State Bar Association and Mark Matthewson of the Illinois State Bar Association will remain on the council to complete their terms of office, which expire in 2005. Matt Silverman of the State Bar of Arizona has been appointed to assume the unexpired council term of Joe Conte of the State Bar of New Mexico, who has resigned. Matt's term expires in 2005.

We are fortunate to have such a strong group of officers and council members. We extend our best wishes to Susan Andres and the section leadership team for the 2004-2005 year. We encourage all section members to get involved in the governance and committee process.



The President's Columns

Christine Cendagorta

Some Advice

The first thing I did after getting the invitation to speak here today¹ was put a request out on the Communications Section listserv to ask my colleagues at the other bar associations what they would like me to tell you. Answers came back quickly, and they gave me good advice to pass along. Here's what the bar's editorial staff would like you to know. First off, you can trust that they want you to look good. And, they want to get the publication out — well-edited and on time. I know we have all toyed with the idea of running a blank page with the president's picture when that president failed to meet a deadline for the fifth time, but none of us would really do it. So, from the editor's desk, here are our best collective suggestions.

I organized these suggestions under some key words, and the first is:

■ **Opportunity** — Too many bar presidents see the page as a chore or as a mouth in which to insert a foot. If you choose to write a regular column — or if it is a “requirement” at your bar — try to see it as an opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with the members of your bar about issues, news, or events that are important and timely. Your column should be distinctive from the news and reports in the magazine. It should have a personality — yours! My current bar president is from Chicago and his two passions are the Cubs and the High School Mock Trial program, which he coaches. He challenged himself to find a way to mention the Cubs and Mock Trial in each column and he's come pretty close. It made the columns personal and people have responded to that. So, don't be shy about showing your point of view — you can even add your signature to the page to reinforce that it is your point of view rather than the bar's.

■ **Leadership** — Use the page as a tool of your leadership. In most bars, you are lucky to see one-third of your membership at any kind of meeting throughout the year. Your page can be a forum where you identify issues that you, along with other bar leaders, think the bar should address. It should provide a viewpoint that is unavailable to readers except in your publication. That way, you signal to readers the value of belonging to the bar. I

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There's Power in Numbers!

by Colleen Buggy

Last fall as part of the NABE Communications Section Workshop, I had the pleasure of moderating a panel consisting of Bill Weber of the Massachusetts Bar, Chris Blake of the Connecticut Bar, and Emily Eastin of the Columbus Bar on successful membership recruitment and retention techniques. I guess what we shared that day was appreciated, because I was asked to bring this group of talented folks back together for an encore presentation during the 2004 NABE Midyear Meeting in San Antonio.

All of us were impressed with the interest shown this topic. While not all bars have a person solely in charge of membership, I think all agree that member satisfaction lands in everyone's lap, especially in the case of voluntary bars where our members drive all that we do. Our bars may be different sizes, but the concepts behind the projects shared by the panel could all be modified to fit different budgets.

Speaking for a metro bar, Emily Eastin reflected on the importance of developing recruitment activities that offer new members discounts on dues throughout the year and retention activities that emphasize member recognition. Recruitment campaigns such as "Give Us Half a Chance" that promotes half-off discounts on dues midway through the year and "Three for Free" that gives new members three months of free membership at the end of the year have been successful programs to draw Columbus attorneys into membership. Throughout the year, the Columbus Bar also recognizes and thanks members who commit to a higher level. For example, the "100% Club" recognizes firms that enroll 100 percent of their attorneys as members, and sustaining members are recognized with a special golf outing, recognitions in publications and at the convention, and thank you notes and e-mails. The Columbus Bar also commemorates members' years of service with anniversary e-mails for every five years of membership.

Over in Connecticut, Chris Blake took a taboo topic and turned it into a successful recruitment campaign. Can you say TELEMARKETING? (I'll give you a minute for your shudders to subside.) Chris explained how the Connecticut Bar was able to use a telemarketing firm to bring in net dues income of more than \$20,000. Chris emphasized the importance of selecting a quality vendor with good references who is willing to work closely with the bar staff to develop a script, track the results, and prepare final reports. The Connecticut Bar conducted the telemarketing campaign in two phases: Phase I targeted recently lapsed

members (one year or less) and Phase II targeted members terminated for nondues payment within the last three years, with a particular emphasis on new member benefits added within the last few years. Chris was happy to report that Phase I reinstated 53 out of 319 recently lapsed members and Phase II reinstated 55 out of 831 lapsed members. Chris recommended that other bars that try a similar telemarketing campaign give periodic updates to their officers and board — they will appreciate the efforts and positive results.

Bill Weber focuses his recruitment and retention activities on creating reasons for nonmembers to join and for current members to continue their membership. At the Massachusetts Bar, he concentrates on two primary areas: (1) information on and access to technologies for legal practice and law office management and (2) career management. In addition to CLE, career management activities include programming focused on legal careers and the business of being a lawyer. Topics such as alternative career options, interviewing skills, client care, billing, and marketing are all presented in a mix of day-long seminars and shorter, more informal talks to make the Massachusetts Bar the place their members turn when needing advice in these critical areas. The same goes for technology. The launch of Casemaker online legal research in Massachusetts has led to an increase of about 100 members a month there. Once members old and new began turning to their bar association for some of their technology needs, the Massachusetts Bar launched the Legal Tech Toolbox. Through affinity partnerships, the Toolbox contains discounts on online CLE, Web-based phone and business systems, listservs, voice recognition software, document management software, and computer training for lawyers. Bill believes these career management and technology tools will be key in retaining and growing their membership.

Emily, Chris, Bill, and I are all willing to discuss these and other recruitment and retention activities with you. While these programs are successful now, we all have to keep an eye to the future and what the new generation of lawyers will want and need from their bar associations so that we can provide those tools and programs and ultimately be indispensable to our members.

(Colleen Buggy is the Ohio State Bar Association's director of membership services and is a member of the Communications Section Executive Council.)

Developing a Communications Plan

By Christopher G. Blake, CAE

You are attending a meeting of your association's governing body. Suddenly, the bar president turns to you and says, "We need to do something about all the bad press lawyers get. Do you know what we need? We need a good communications plan!"

The president then asks you to develop and implement a communications plan within the next two weeks. Your reaction? You could faint on the spot, develop a coughing fit, or open your mouth like Ralph Kramden on "The Honeymooners" and blurt out, "Homina, homina, homina!"

A better reaction would be to diplomatically clarify for the president and the governing board what a communications plan is and what it can do and cannot do for your bar association.

A communication plan is not a set of unrelated, glitzy, and attention-getting communications. It is a way of thinking about communication that is rooted in the substantive work of the bar and underscores the bar's positive impact on the profession and the communities in which lawyers work. This means that every action of the bar is a communication, not just that component of its work that is sometimes called "public relations." For example, when a bar association moves to a new building, the very act of moving is a powerful communication to members. A communication plan considers all of the activities of a bar association and identifies how each activity can be an opportunity for formal communication that enhances the reputation and other goals of the association. With that as background, there are a number of essential concepts in the development of a communication plan.

■ First, a communications plan is not going to end lawyer bashing in the media or in society or quickly improve the image of the profession among the general public. What a good communications plan will do is enable a bar association to find out what it stands for, what

others think it stands for, where it wants to go, how it wants key audiences and constituencies to perceive it, and how it will apply its communication resources to produce results.

■ Secondly, communications planning is a strategic endeavor, not a tactical operation. Although you will develop tactics to achieve your communications goals and objectives, planning the strategy should be the key focus that must overlay all of your activities.

■ Third, while developing a communications plan can be done in a relatively short time, implementing it is a long-term process, and, as such, it cannot be rushed or done haphazardly.

■ Fourth, your bar leadership and governing board are important players in this process. As stakeholders, they have a major interest in the long-term health and well being of the bar association and the profession. They need to participate in development of the plan, buy into its goals and dynamics, and have realistic expectations of what it can produce.

The first step in developing a communications plan is research. Your bar association needs to find out where it stands in the minds of its key audiences. This assumes that the association has identified *who* are its key audiences, and is willing to conduct research about their perceptions of the bar association and its work. These data will provide a baseline against which to evaluate the effectiveness of your program after it has been executed.

The next step is planning. Assuming you have identified the audiences the plan is going to try to reach, the next step is to identify the messages that you want to convey. A unified message platform contains a central idea and three or four related planks that permit you to address virtually any topic while communicating the platform. You remember the old message triangle: primary message at the center of the triangle, facts, statistics, and anecdotes on the three sides.

An important part of this planning process is to state the goals (what you hope to achieve) of your program. The goals should be specific, and their results should be observable. For example, a goal that says: "Improve public opinion of lawyers," is not going to be terribly useful. A goal that says "Increase voter usage of bar association evaluation of judges, as evident in comparison of pre- versus post-campaign usage demonstrated in exit poll research" is a specific and measurable goal. If it is an external communications plan, identify significant publics (examples: lawmakers, opinion leaders, the business community) you want to reach and messages for each public.

Next, you should develop strategies, which are overall approaches to action such as "education campaigns" or "partnerships" and action items for each of your goals, which are activities, such as "news conferences, paid advertisements, specific events" that you will use to communicate with each of your audiences.

Then, design an implementation plan with a timeline, budget, and specific responsibilities. Make sure your plans match your fiscal resources.

Implement the program.

Evaluate the program after each major tactical initiative so that you can make mid-course corrections and, after the campaign is completed, to see whether you have achieved your goals. Follow-up research is essential, because you want to compare where you are versus where you started. Finally, the research will help you determine how the plan can be maintained and integrated into the overall work of the bar association.

(The writer wishes to thank Sarina Butler, director of the American Bar Association's communications group, for her assistance with this article.)

Recognizing the Value ...

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- The State Bar of Arizona recently launched an online chat system to keep members informed of substantive issues in a format where they can get questions and answers without ever leaving their desk and is developing an online document vault for sections, where members can post practice-specific legal forms to share.
- The Hennepin County (MN) Bar Association's e-newsletters generate specific messages to specific segments of the bar in a targeted fashion.
- The Iowa State Bar Association's weekly electronic newsletter keeps members up-to-date on the status of important legislation during the General Assembly session, enabling members to respond quickly and in a timely manner when important votes are scheduled.
- The Montgomery County Bar Association established listservs through Yahoo so that the members of its sections can communicate with each other and to receive from the bar current information pertinent to their practice.
- The North Carolina Bar Association helps its members track their continuing legal education credits online with CeLEView.

I am certain that each one of you can think of small things done well in your bar associations. Take time to recognize those achievements on behalf of yourself and your colleagues. Although those efforts often are overlooked in the public recognition department, I hope you will agree that an ongoing practice of small things done well sets the foundation on which great things can be accomplished.

Make Tracks to Minnesota
Where Creative Ideas Run Wild!



October 6 - 9 in Minneapolis

Make Tracks to Minnesota!

Register now for the upcoming Communications Section Workshop. Don't miss out on this exciting program!

For full program details and registration information, go to <http://www.abanet.org/nabe/csworkshop.htm>

Some Advice

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would ask your editors for copies of a recent readership survey to see which other legal publications your readers already read. Then, you may see a gap in news or commentary that your column can fill.

■ **Voice** — There are a few of my colleagues who disagree, but I think the column should be in your voice unless you are really uncomfortable as a writer. A really good ghostwriter can capture your personality, but I believe that readers can catch on year after year if the staff takes over ghosting a column. If it's in the president's voice, it can be personal, like an intimate conversation with a friend or colleague over coffee or a beer. As one editor suggested: Write as if you are talking to an individual, save the rhetoric for the platform. If you do choose to have staff write or rewrite your column, you might try either dictating your thoughts or doing a detailed interview with the staff person. That way, it will still be very much your voice.

Now to the practicalities:

■ **Deadlines** — Nothing is more frustrating to editors than having to hold up an issue of a bar magazine for a president's column — especially if it's the fourth or fifth time it's happened. Deadlines are real and missing them can be expensive to your credibility and to the bottom line. Your magazine or newsletter has timed advertising, a calendar of events and notices of important meetings or seminars. If you hold it up, that hurts the advertising revenue and damages your bar's reputation. I'm one of those people who works better ahead of schedule. I actually had my college papers done a few days ahead. I haven't met a bar president yet that does that, but as editors, we

are nothing if not adaptive. Does the editor give you a false deadline to keep you on track? Sure. Ask up front for a drop-dead deadline and then don't miss it. Or, have an agreement from the get go that if you do miss that deadline, the editor can fill your space and it goes without your column. There is no guilt in this one, as long as it's understood that "if you don't hear from me by 'x' date, I'm not writing a column this month." You

will earn the undying affection of your communications staff if you do nothing but meet deadlines. The deadline issue rolls into:

■ **Communication** — Before you ever write your first column, meet with the communications director or editor and agree on some basic working conditions. First, how do you feel about being edited? If you are very particular, let them know so you can work out a plan to edit and review each column. Most of the 35 presidents I've worked with said right up front, "Chris, I want this to be right, read this carefully and fix what needs fixing." But, the closest I've ever come to getting fired was after I edited the sentence structure of a president who apparently thought he was William Faulkner — writing one lengthy paragraph that consisted of a single run-on sentence. I had freelanced for magazines and was pretty used to being edited so I assumed — never a good idea — that he would appreciate an improvement to his prose. He didn't — he said that

he was a very good writer, and he knew that because his wife told him so. That time, what I wanted to do was stamp at the bottom, "Dictated but not read." The lesson — have the talk before you start. Agree on an editing process and stick to it. You should also talk about length. Most readers don't want to jump to another page from the president's column. Try to stick within the word length and don't be afraid to go shorter. White space is good and allows for a pull quote or some art. The talk should also

include a discussion of content.

■ **Repercussions** — To avoid repercussions, continue that communication I already mentioned. Talk with your senior bar staff ahead of time so that everyone is on the same page. Personal essays don't require the same oversight that issue-oriented or political columns do. Make sure those columns are thoroughly vetted by those who know the issue. You don't want to advocate a position or lay out details that are contrary to your bar's official position or that are outdated. There are times when your legislative committees or perhaps a liaison to some other issue has more information — or newer information that you want to include. Generally, your executive director is going to know that and can help you avoid the confusion and repercussions. Now to the writing:

■ **Writing** — Remember the advice your English teachers gave you. Write what you know. I would add, write what you care about. The best

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Some Advice

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column my current president wrote this year — and the one that got the most response — was when he related a racial event he witnessed in downtown Reno. His shock and dismay came through in his writing. Try not to get so hung up on perfection that you get stuck. When my daughter was in grad school and she called at some ungodly hour with writer's block I advised her to use the "vomit approach." Just start spewing and pretty soon the thoughts will be flowing. If you do that better dictating, do it that way. One caveat: Don't try to write your column right after you've finished writing a brief. You need to do a warm-up first. I used to write a letter to my grandmother in-between editing my newsletter and writing a feature just to make the switch to my real voice.

■ **The Jerry Maguire Column** — You remember what happened to the Tom Cruise character after his all-night writing spree. I had a president a couple years ago who wrote his column in the wee hours — the time on the e-mail was the giveaway. I began to call those columns his "Jerry Maguire moments." If that works for you, go ahead, but let the column sit awhile before you start the editing process. Or, at that point, add a note on the e-mail that asks your editor for help in the final editing. Most of us love the opportunity to make good writing better.

Lastly, one of my colleagues was adamant that the page should have a name other than the name of this program — President's Page. The Philadelphia Bar calls the page Frontline because they see their chancellor as being on the "front line." We call ours "Random Thoughts," which is a little lighter tone in what is more of a newsletter. They also were pretty unanimous that it's better to skip a column than to run a mediocre piece of work. I agree, and as I said before, most editors can fill the space or move things around if your column isn't coming. I also tell my presidents that they are welcome to use a guest columnist in a crunch — Jay Leno and Larry King use guest hosts and you can too. If you are going to skip a column or use a guest, arrange it in advance and keep your editor in the loop.

If you use the suggestions from this program, your columns will be the ones future presidents turn to as examples of what to do.

Footnote

¹*Ms. Cendagorta, a past chair of the NABE Communications Section, delivered these remarks as part of a panel at the recent Bar Leadership Institute in Chicago.*