



BY HEATHER SUTTIE

Name + Reputation =

The Law Society of Upper Canada could learn a thing or two from Canada's top law firm brands

EARLIER THIS YEAR,

an idea was floated to give the Law Society of Upper Canada a new name — something more modern and explanatory. Legal entities like the LSUC, however, aren't exactly nimble. To be blunt, they tend to shift more slowly than the earth's tectonic plates. And so it was no surprise that the proposal was denied, even though any new name wouldn't have come into effect until July 1, 2017, the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

While it's true that the LSUC's 200-year-old moniker and brand may be important to some within the legal community, the name means precious little to anyone outside the realm of law. Perhaps this kind of mystique is exactly what the LSUC wants. Or maybe the inclination is to cling like a barnacle to an archaic label for no other reason than "that's the way it's always been."

Debate on the topic included notions that a new name ought to clearly describe the law society's function, while there were other concerns that a change would cost too much money. The first point is right on the money; the latter is rather shortsighted considering that strong name recognition is worth every cent because it's tied to reputation, and reputation equals brand.

> WHO ARE YOU?

Nailing down your brand can be tricky business. Having worked on a recent branding exercise, more than 20 partners were asked to articulate the firm's brand and, not surprisingly, each response was markedly different. This is a common problem, since law firms often struggle with their brand identity.



Not all firms wrestle with identity, though. In the 2012 Canadian Law Firm Brand Index, which is compiled by Acritas, the top five firms (of 15 that were ranked) happen to be members of the so-called Seven Sisters. In order they are: Osler Hoskin & Harcourt LLP, Blake Cassels & Graydon LLP, Torys LLP, McCarthy Tétrault LLP and Stikeman Elliott LLP. The other two Sisters — Davies Ward Phillips & Vineberg LLP and Goodmans LLP — didn't make the list at all.

Data behind the findings were collected between February and October 2011 from interviews with 250 general counsel in Canada, who are the decision makers when it comes to firm selection. Participants were asked which firms were top of mind, most favoured, most considered for top-level work, and most used overall. They contributed 83 per cent of the data. The other 17 per cent of the data comprised the responses of 302 general counsel based outside Canada with a need for legal services in this country. They were asked which firms they would most likely use for Canadian work.

To say the Canadian legal market has undergone enormous change in the past few years due to mergers, international expansion and major marketing campaigns is an understatement. All these manoeuvres have made a marked impact on firms that have been doing the moving and shaking,

as well as those that have been left to bob in their wake.

> WHY SIZE DOESN'T MATTER

Whether you're a mover or a bobber, though, the strength of your brand in a crowded market, particularly in times of change, is likely going to determine whether you'll be remembered,

considered and selected, and as a result, whether you'll be financially stable.

Torys LLP is an excellent example. The firm ranks third among brand leaders on the Canadian Law Firm Brand Index, despite being smaller by head count. Further proof — like we need it — that size really doesn't matter.

According to managing partner Les Viner, "Brand recognition engenders client loyalty and facilitates a good deal of stability in the core business." He says Torys brand promise — "... that we deliver something special to clients consistently across all of our offices and practices, and through the ranks" — has remained unchanged in the 25 years he's been with the firm.

Consistently delivering on your promise is something Viner says the firm lives and breathes every day: "We remind ourselves frequently that branding is not marketing. Our brand is developed through our actions, not our words. Brand recognition is valuable because it takes so long to build. It is fragile so it needs to be cherished and protected."

So, when it comes to your name and your reputation, which together determine your brand, it would seem that you reap what you sow — no more and no less — with very little margin of error. ☺

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