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▶ Tip Sheet

BY CHRIS HINZE



Coordinating International PR: It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World

If you think managing PR for the Washington, DC office from of a New York law firm is hard, try handling PR in London and Paris from the West Coast. As U.S. law firms have expanded into Europe and Asia, they have encountered a whole new range of strategic and operational challenges when it comes to managing their communications on an international basis.

While time zone differences might not be entirely new to most firms with a presence on both the East and West coast, they are magnified significantly when the office is sitting five, eight or even ten hours ahead of headquarters. Media deadlines mean that a story has already been through one news cycle before the U.S.-based PR team and management are even aware of something happening.

Nicole Quigley, assistant director of media, public relations and communication at Washington, DC-based Crowell & Moring LLP agrees. She says: "Communication with both partners and consultants alike is naturally strained due to the time differences. When calls must be scheduled in advance and e-mails are received a day late, the natural give and take required for a real-time PR campaign becomes stressed."

Roger Cohen, global communications director at White & Case LLP, adds: "The main issues involved in overseas work is ensuring consistency in the application of standards regarding substance, style and quality of material generated and getting real time awareness of what everyone is up to."

LONDON CALLING

London appears to be the first port of call for firms operating overseas – and with its strong financial center, common law background and English as a

first language, it appears to be a relatively painless place to set up shop compared to other countries in the European Union. More than 100 US law firms have a presence in London. Most have fewer than 40 lawyers but several have a significant foothold.

The legal media market however, is very different to what is experienced in the U.S. There are a series of weekly

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magazines – *The Lawyer*, *Legal Week* and *The Gazette* – as well as monthly magazines – *Legal Business*, *The European Lawyer* and *International Financial Law Review* – who have a very strong focus on the performance and behavior of law firms as businesses well as pieces on the technical aspect of the law. Unlike the U.S. market, these publications are in hot competition with each other and, as a result, for most of them the goal is to be first with the news.

Crystal Rockwood, former director of communications for Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, observes: "There is more amusement and color in the U.K. legal media reporting style than the U.S. Indeed, they have extremely tenacious reporters, good ones that will honor their source relationship, who you can trust implicitly. Others, not so."

WHO'S IN CONTROL?

So how do you handle the demands of overseas offices and their different media envi-

ronments?

Offices far away from the mothership can sometimes feel isolated and left to their own devices. That sometimes means that extra special effort needs to be taken in order to keep them happy while also keeping a sense of overall perspective.

According to Paula Zirinsky, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP's director of media relations and communications: "Whether it is a smaller overseas office, or a smaller office in the US, expectations always need to be managed. I find the smaller the office or practice, the more pronounced the levels of expectations are. Don't expect to know every member of the media everywhere. Hire locally to overcome that. Expect some early mornings – worse when we talk about Asia. Be patient and try to understand the different markets; U.S. media relations tactics aren't necessarily welcome elsewhere."

Others, however, take the view that using a consultant in local markets is not always the best way forward. The firms with a substantial overseas operation can afford the resources in-house. Roger Cohen argues: "No agency can remotely approach the value and quality of the global team we have assembled."

What it all comes down to is the willingness by the firm to support its overseas practices, while also recognizing that some of those media will seek you out whether you like it or not. *PR*N**

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