

DAILY REPORT

Law Firm Rebranding Goes Beyond Shortening the Name

Recent rebranding efforts in Atlanta involved firms examining themselves and talking with clients to decide what they wanted to project to the world.

By **Jonathan Ringel** | November 06, 2018 at 10:47 AM

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Swift Currie's former (left) and current logos

From the outside, law firm rebrands sometimes look like a task done with a scissor that simply cuts two of a firm's four names to create a snappier moniker.

But a couple of recent rebranding efforts in Atlanta suggest that a mirror and a tape recorder are more essential tools, as firms examined themselves and talked with clients to decide what they wanted to project to the world.

Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers, the 145-lawyer litigation firm based in Midtown, just completed a yearlong rebranding effort that dramatically changed a logo created 15 years ago.

That stamp from 2003 was itself a big move—in that the firm unveiled its first logo, one that dropped “McGhee & Hiers” from its public image (but not its formal name).

The 2003 logo hardly broke new ground, with its most-daring feature being the “S” in “Swift” linking with the “C” from Currie. But the new logo unveiled in September is far different, with the two names marked in lowercase cursive, divided by a gold slash.

The change was developed by two companies and a firmwide committee of about 20 people, said managing partner Terry Brantley and business development director Michele Golivesky.

The move was based in part on interviews with clients, outside lawyers and lawyers and staff within the firm.

The interviews revealed the firm was known for lawyers who were approachable and with whom clients can talk about anything. The firm created “connections beyond ‘just a client,’ ” said Brantley, hence the informal look of the logo.

Asked how his colleagues accepted the change, Brantley cited a study that said 70 percent of lawyers tend to disagree with any change.

“We got our share” of initial concerns, he said, but he and Golivesky are optimistic about the results.

Golivesky, who was marketing director during the 2003 rebrand, said the new logo will be on everything with the firm name—from business cards to golf shirts.

“It’s a new look, but the same client service,” she said.

The firm has doubled in size since the 2003 rebranding effort, which Brantley said was driven in part by “a lack of consistency” in what the was being called.

The firm managing partner at the time received the blessing of the senior partners, whose names were being jettisoned from the logo, Brantley and Golivesky recalled.

Law firms, like many other businesses, have for years been shrinking their names. Just look at Dunkin’, the new name for what was Dunkin’ Donuts.

“We don’t get to choose what we’re called. We can simply admit the reality and use that to our benefit in our marketing,” Ross Fishman, a former litigator who founded Fishman Marketing, told [The American Lawyer](#) last month. “The marketplace was calling Mintz Levin ‘Mintz’ long before they changed their logo, because there was no confusion. No one was thinking, ‘Which Mintz are you mentioning?’ ”

Lisa Hart Shepherd, CEO of market research firm Acritas, noted that in the company’s recent survey of global law firm brands, which asked respondents to name the first five firms that come to mind, 27 percent of the firms were identified by an abbreviated name.

“At some point, all well-marketed firms will admit the reality and the inevitability of this and will change their logos, because there’s so much precedent now,” Fishman says.

That’s what happened around 2005 or 2006 at Carlock Copeland & Stair, which removed “Stair” from its brand, said managing partner Shannon Sprinkle.

“In reality, we found people tended to drop Stair, as many people naturally only say the first two names of many multinamed firms,” she said, “We decided to embrace that natural inclination.”

“Ours was less of a rebranding than really just trying to be consistent in usage,” added Sprinkle, who emphasized that the legal name of the firm remains Carlock, Copeland & Stair.



Miles' old and new logos

Last spring, Marcie Dickson, chief marketing officer at Miles Mediation & Arbitration, completed a yearlong rebrand for her firm.

Dickson, who came to Miles in 2015 after working on the business side of the Daily Report, said Miles' rebrand started as a move to improve the firm's website.

She had noticed, however, that everything with Miles' name on it "didn't match what we stood for."

Like Swift Currie, Miles' rebrand included interviewing clients and discussion among the firm, which counts 35 neutrals on its roster. "It made everyone a stakeholder," Dickson said.

The result, Dickson said, is a dynamic [website](#) with a modernized look that includes the firm's core values and tells stories that go far beyond what she feared the firm's old material projected—simply "Miles is an ADR firm."

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