

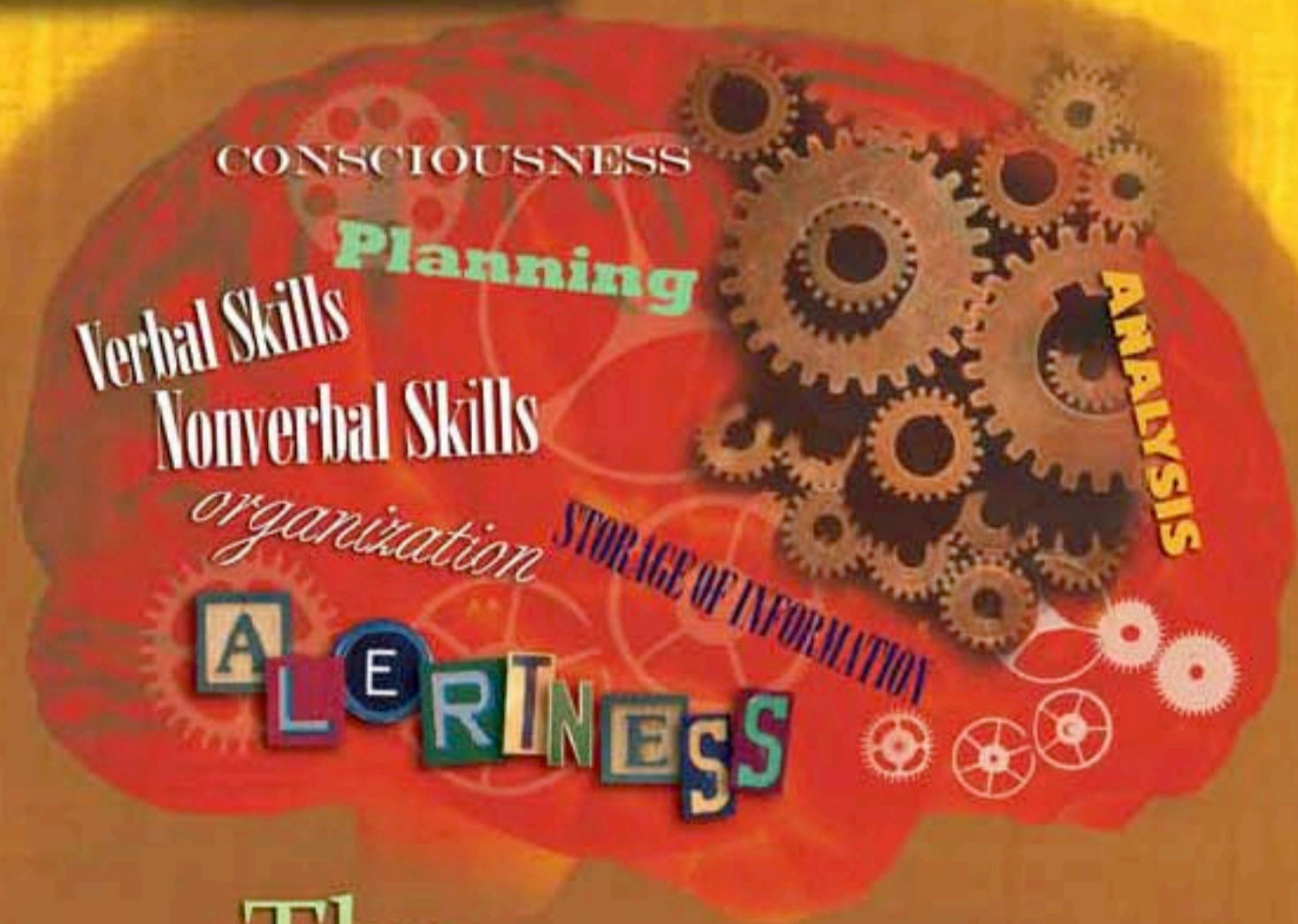


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- 26 Eat Your Spinach!
- 38 Branding Your Business
- 40 Aiding Truth and Justice
- 44 Why Russia?



## The Neuropsychology of Court Reporting

Page 34

# Creating

# Loyalty

Many people equate branding with logos like the Nike swoosh. But branding, especially in the legal field, reaches much deeper.

BY WENDY NEMITZ

In all my years of marketing professional services, I have never met any one so fiercely loyal as attorneys for their court reporters.

The experienced court reporter knows that loyalty is the bread and butter of the profession. It is difficult to know, however, if clients stay because of an overall brand promise or because of an individual reporter's personality and performance.

But it is not impossible to find out.

A strong brand creates awareness of your strengths in the marketplace while also giving you a consistent way to build loyalty with clients. Although most professionals think of a brand as a logo, I think that the messages that support your brand are much more important than the visual image on your business card.

Although you still want to showcase your personality and talents, success doesn't have to hinge on individual career or life transitions. There are several ways you can build brand loyalty and play to your strengths to gain an edge over competitors — for business development and client loyalty.

### Talk to Your Biggest Fans

Interview the clients you want to clone, and you will

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learn what keeps an ideal client coming back. Although attorneys may mention their rapport with a certain reporter, administrative staff members may emphasize other things, such as responsiveness, scheduling follow-ups, or troubleshooting under pressure. Include a mix of both attorneys and practice managers in your interviews.

Ask questions such as the following: When have I or we really come through for you? What do you think I or we value? What are our greatest strengths? Are there any weaknesses? These questions also help the attorneys and staff members understand that "their" court reporter is part of an overall brand promise.

Ideally, you should hire a third party to conduct the interviews to get an objective response from each client.

### Critique Your Competition

It's easy to get myopic in a fast-paced profession and to fail to see the edge that a competitor may be gaining on you. Whether through acquisition strategies or a niche in high-tech tools, you possess strengths that differ from those of other reporters.

They also have weaknesses. Competitors may not have timely transcripts for high-profile cases. Or maybe they don't offer a service that you do. Weaknesses are the crack in the door that you can widen by playing up your strengths in these areas.

By understanding the strengths of your competitors, you can also determine which strengths you already possess and which you can augment. Ask attorneys what they like about the firms they use. Visit competitors' Web sites. Network with other reporters at conferences.

### Develop Key Messages

A consistent brand is achieved not only through service promises, but also through the general impression of you or your people. Choice of dress, interaction with clients, and what you say about your services all contribute to your brand.

To make it easier for you or your associates to understand and represent your brand, you need to develop key messages or themes based on the feedback gathered from clients and your own competitive analysis. These themes will form the foundation of all communications in print, on the Web, and in person.

For example, if clients consistently say that you are skilled at clarity, a key message for your firm could be, "We deliver clear transcripts." When witnesses mumble, when attorneys fail to complete a train of thought, or when the acoustics in the room are horrible, you still deliver a useable transcript. You simply excel at clear transcripts.

Avoid key messages that everyone might use. "Great client service" is awfully generic and could probably be claimed by all of your competitors.

Key messages are closely aligned with what you already do best, not what you hope to achieve in the future. They become the talking points that you use to convert a prospect, to get referrals, and to attract additional colleagues. Key messages should reflect your internal culture and your value to clients.

### Be the Brand

Once you are satisfied that the key messages really reflect your internal and external value, offer training sessions or information to all your associates about how they could use key messages when working with clients or prospects. Explain what each key message means for branding, business development, and client retention.

You don't need to repeat key messages word for word; you just need to understand the spirit of the messages when discussing services. For example, if a key message is, "Our reporting technology is cutting edge," then team

members know that technology advances are a key advantage you offer in the marketplace. Reporters could then mention examples of the advantages technology offers to clients or associates.

If a key message for you is, "We are fun and friendly," then your people should certainly be friendly and act as if they're having fun at work. You will draw both associates and clients who identify with this message. A key message helps you own your brand.

### Build Consistency

Your brand will play out in the marketplace in many ways. It will be reflected in the first impression of your offices or people. It should be reflected in your logo and the colors you use in your offices or on print materials. Your Web site should have the same look and message. Public relations, attendance at conferences, and involvement in trade associations are all opportunities to reinforce your brand.

What is the ultimate goal? You want to attract associates who can reinforce your brand and thrive in your culture and to attract the clients who want what you've got.

Your brand can also assist you with growth strategies. Being clear about what you deliver to the marketplace results in alliances or acquisition opportunities that strengthen your brand. You'll avoid offers that don't fit.

Keep in mind that branding will evolve as market conditions change and as you grow and understand your value to clients. Continue to ask for client feedback, to monitor your competition, and to reinforce your brand internally through training and service expectations. If an engagement doesn't go as planned, ask the client what you could have done better.

With this knowledge, you may not become a household name. Attorneys may still follow their reporter to the ends of the Earth. Still, you will gain recognition and credibility. You will meet prospects who appreciate your unique value. You'll attract and keep the clients and associates that fit you best. ■