





# GETTING THE WORD OUT TO A **WIDER** AUDIENCE

Get an inside look at how the CLLA has changed its marketing methods in the past year.

By Erin Brereton, CLLA Marketing & Communications Director

In recent months, you've heard a number of things about the changes CLLA is embarking on as a result of the Alibrium project.

Many of those changes will be implemented in the next few months. (For more on what's planned, check out Executive Vice President Tony Hilver's column on page 26.)

However, you may not realize that the CLLA staff has already begun making some significant procedural changes.

When I came on board, the CLLA didn't have any staff members dedicated to promoting its programs and events. The League had, in the past, focused almost exclusively on promoting its events to its current membership. As a result, attendance was down, and the immediate response to try and increase it had been to increase the number of promotional e-mails sent to our members.

The result wasn't positive. Our metrics show that the more messages that were sent out, the less members opened. That's understandable — too many reminders can get annoying, fast.

Over the past year, I've tried to implement more defined, structured marketing methods to expand our reach to new industry members (and, hopefully, prevent members from receiving six CLLA e-mails a week).

I often hear members ask at meetings, "What are we doing for marketing?" So I thought it might be helpful to provide a brief overview of some of the new marketing practices that the CLLA has implemented.

We were able, for example, to make several significant planning and promotional changes for this year's Chicago Convention, for several significant reasons:

- **WE HAD MORE TIME TO PREPARE:** For the first time ever, we were able to open registration 15 weeks before the meeting in late January. In some cases, we've only had 4-5 weeks to market meetings — which is not enough time to send any promotional pieces in the mail (due to the postage rate we use, items can take up to three weeks to reach recipients) or notify many other associations or industry members. Event organizers would

often get frustrated that we weren't able to reach a significant number of potential attendees, and, in many cases, the ones we did reach couldn't come because when they found out about the event, their schedule was already booked.

- **WE EXPANDED THE AUDIENCE WE MARKET TO:** In the past, the League focused primarily on marketing to its own members. Because we had additional time to publicize the Chicago Convention, we were able to create promotions that targeted new groups of non-member industry professionals — marketing the meeting through new online, print and other channels to reach new audiences.

- **WE ADDED MULTIPLE POINTS OF CONTACT:** A marketing campaign's success depends on several factors, including the frequency and format of the communication that is sent out. Opening registration earlier allowed us to start promoting the meeting earlier — and more successfully. During the first month after registration opened, from approximately Feb. 5-March 5 alone, we sent out more than 75 different promotional meeting messages, print pieces, e-mails and other items both to members and non-members.

Those changes may seem simple — really, they are — but they allowed us to do more marketing than we've ever done for a meeting in the past.

A few of the major Chicago Convention marketing efforts included:

- **ESTABLISHING PROMOTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER ASSOCIATIONS:** We were able to work with the Turnaround Management Association, which has more than 9,000 members in 48 chapters, who agreed to send several messages about our convention to its membership. We also published promotional items (at no cost) in each monthly International Association of Restructuring, Insolvency & Bankruptcy Professionals (INSOL) e-newsletter, from January to April, which was sent to all 9,000 INSOL members. Those two groups alone provided us with a total of 18,000 potential industry member attendees that we were able to promote the Chicago Convention to, on a regular basis, for the first time this year.

- **AN AGGRESSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN:** Frequent convention promotional tweets and interactions with other industry Twitter users resulted in organizations like *Chicago Lawyer* magazine and *The Chicago Daily Law Bulletin* promoting the CLLA convention to their more than 3,700 followers; frequent LinkedIn and Facebook items also helped promote our meeting programs to non-members.

- **WRITING AND DISTRIBUTING A PRE-EVENT PRESS RELEASE:** Having worked both in marketing and as an editor at several national and niche publications, I know what wording and

overall content make a press release resonate with journalists. (After you spend some time sorting through dozens on a regular basis, believe me, you learn pretty quickly what works and what doesn't.)

To help the CLLA obtain coverage, I wrote an original press release about the convention and distributed it through both my list of industry contacts (publications such as InsideARM and Collections & Credit Risk) and a distribution service to reach thousands of other media outlets — including 30,000+ individual journalists and bloggers.

In its first week, the press release received 15,747 impressions and 414 reads on the distribution service site. It was eventually picked up by roughly 100 publications and websites, including the *Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Miami Herald*.

- **PLACEMENT ON INDUSTRY BLOGS:** It isn't always easy to get publications to print press releases; however, packaging the information with other content can often help it look more newsworthy. This year, we were able to promote the meeting to a new audience of 15,000 legal professionals — ranging from attorneys to firm leadership to law students — through a guest post on attorney networking tips, which included information about the convention, that I wrote for the YouBlawg law blog. Using a similar approach, I placed an item about our convention on the LexisNexis bankruptcy law community blog. Approximately 50,000 legal professionals access the LexisNexis communities.

- **WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING EFFORTS THROUGH OTHER LEGAL ASSOCIATIONS:** First-hand endorsements can be some of the strongest sales techniques. To help promote the Chicago Convention to targeted audiences, we worked with several members, who were kind enough to post copy we wrote to listservs and message boards for groups and associations they belong to. We were, for example, able to post a promotional item, for free, on the Chicago Bar Association's Counsel Square online community, and send out a message to all Chicago Bankruptcy Bar members through the Chicago Bankruptcy Bar listserv.

- **PLACING ADS IN INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC PUBLICATIONS:** Print and online ads are effective ways to reach large audiences; they can also be costly, but if you can find a publication that caters to a group you're trying to target, they can be worth the investment. As such, starting in February, we created and ran a custom ad in the bankruptcy section of the Law360 site. The ad also appeared in its daily e-newsletter, which has a subscriber base that includes a massive 100 percent of the largest 100 law firms. We were also able to place a free banner ad that appeared daily in the Collection Industry News e-newsletter (sent to 30,000 collection agency, attorney, debt broker and creditor subscribers) from February to April. Collection

Industry News also sent out two dedicated e-mails about the convention to its subscribers.

- **PRINT PROMOTIONAL PIECES:** In addition to the on-site convention directory and mini-schedule, we produced and mailed a separate promotional print piece to more than 4,000 non-member industry contacts, culled from lists of members of other related legal and finance associations, Midwest-based bankruptcy and collection attorneys, Chicago-based firms of all sizes and other sources — plus all U.S. and Canadian CLLA members — more than 2 months before the convention.

- **CREATING A SPECIFIC MARKETING CAMPAIGN AND DISCOUNT PROGRAM FOR THE CONVENTION EDUCATION TRACKS:** We designed several special offers to target different segments of the industry, including the \$150 day pass for the complex commercial litigation program and retail collections program and the law student discount. Practice area-specific flyers were created and distributed in bankruptcy judges' courtrooms to promote the programs. We also sent out regular e-mails to more than 20 lists containing thousands of non-member industry contacts promoting the special programs.

- **SENDING A PRINT LETTER TO MORE THAN 400 CHICAGO-AREA BANKRUPTCY ATTORNEYS:** In addition to the print piece we sent out in February, we sent a letter, via U.S. mail, with convention information to a highly targeted list of 400 area attorneys we'd identified as being key industry members who may be interested in attending. The letter promoted the meeting and encouraged recipients to take advantage of our special one-day rate options.

- **RECRUITING OUR EVENT SPONSORS TO PROMOTE THE CONVENTION:** To utilize our connection with the convention sponsors, we helped the sponsors publicize our event (and their presence at it) to their prospective and current customer contacts by providing information for them to distribute. E-mails were sent to their contact lists, promoting the Chicago Convention to yet another audience of non-CLLA members.

- **CO-PROMOTING A CO-SPONSORED EVENT:** Our first-ever women in collections networking event, an afternoon tea, was arranged with the help of the Network of Professional Women in the Collections and Call Center Industries (PWCI) group. We were able to send out specific promotional messages about the convention, CLLA and women in collections networking event to the PWCI membership, which includes thousands of debt buyers, creditors, collection agency employees, law firm employees and other industry members.

- **CROSS-PROMOTION THROUGH OTHER CLLA COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS:** In addition to e-mails, we conveyed information about the convention to members through custom-produced Chicago convention ads and other promotional items that

appeared on a regular basis from January to April in *Commercial Law World* and our weekly e-newsletter, *CLLA Connections*.

- **AN EXTENSIVE NON-MEMBER E-MAIL CAMPAIGN:** More than 32 customized promotional e-mails were sent during a three-month period to non-member groups, including 900 local construction, complex commercial litigation and other attorneys; CRF, NABT, NACM, NARCA, TMA, NCBJ, law list and Midwest bar association members; and previous CLLA members. In addition to lists we've compiled over the years, more than a half-dozen new lists of potential Chicago-area attendees — which included local Cook County bankruptcy, complex commercial litigation, retail collections, construction law and other attorney contacts — were added to our mailing lists before the convention.

- **AN INTERNAL CLLA MEMBER E-MAIL CAMPAIGN:** CLLA members also received e-mail registration reminders on essentially a weekly basis to ensure all members knew when hotel and registration discounts were about to end — and other compelling reasons why they should attend the Chicago Convention. That said, we still have a significant amount of work to do. Re-establishing our market presence and persuading new audiences to attend CLLA events is a process. Success won't happen overnight; but I am confident that, with a continued commitment to early, thorough and comprehensive promotion and marketing programs, we will be able to grow both event attendance and membership — and ensure that the CLLA is widely viewed as a vibrant, dynamic organization. ●



*Erin Brereton has worked on marketing, publishing, advertising and corporate communication projects for companies including YMCA, McDonald's, KeyBank, Northern Trust, Janus, Wolters Kluwer's legal division, tax consultant McGladrey, global accounting firm Baker Tilly, American Music Group, the Ronald McDonald House Charities, the Cartoon Network, the International Interior Design Association and Nielsen Media. A graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Brereton created the concept for and launched the Olsen twins' mary-kateandashley magazine in 2001 and has written a half-dozen non-fiction books for Scholastic, Triumph Books and other publishers. She previously taught journalism for Columbia College's Continuing Education Program and mediabistro.com; has been interviewed by media outlets including ABC, WGN and the New York Times, and has written articles about the legal industry, finance and other topics for more than 50 publications — including the Chicago Tribune; Legal Management magazine; Wealth magazine; Bankrate's Interest.com; KeyBank's College Notes; Medical News; Multi-Housing News; Life & Style Weekly; Club & Resort Business; American Builders Quarterly; Discovery; Green Building & Design and Profile magazine.*