EVERYONE WANTS FAME

By Kady Volmering & John Hellerman

Dennis Merkley, a banking attorney at my firm, Howard & Howard, knew he had valuable insights to share, especially when it came to the ever-changing landscape of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). But like many attorneys at smaller firms, getting his voice into the right rooms—or publications—was a daunting challenge. Competing for attention alongside the nation's largest law firms, each with expansive PR budgets and entire teams dedicated to media relations, seemed impossible.

For several years, the firm had been utilizing the classic approach to PR: a monthly retainer that would yield results sporadically while trying to cover too many bases at once. And with our firm budget (<$100k), our focus became unclear and we weren't reaching the desired metrics.

Like many mid-size firms, we were "doing PR" (i.e., checking the box, spending resources, devoting time). And, without having anything to compare it to, we were complacent and felt "happyish." But, our results did not enable us to "use PR" to really support—and encourage—our attorneys' business development activities. Over time, the activity was beginning to feel pointless. That was, until the firm found and embraced FAME, a unique results-based approach to PR offered by John's team at Hellerman Communications. Unlike traditional flat-fee retainers, FAME, which is an acronym for "Focused Authoritative Media Exposure," operates on a primarily points-based system, ensuring that our firm pays only for the tangible results Hellerman achieves—published quotes or authored articles—and not failed effort (a really important and critical difference that enables me to control and direct our budget much more effectively).

Dennis's FAME campaign quickly turned his expertise into a national conversation. Under my supervision and direction, Hellerman's team monitored and identified banking trends and developments with the CFPB and spotted timely opportunities for Dennis to share his expertise. The effort quickly paid off. Within weeks, Dennis was quoted in *Newsweek*, *American Banker*, and the *National Law Journal*. When asked, Dennis acknowledged the earned media credentialed him immediately and, by sharing it all, he opened meaningful discussions with clients and prospects.

Why wouldn't it have? Creating a reputation for performance in a niche is important for business development and is greatly aided by generating focused thought leadership content, especially in respected authoritative media. Such content utilizes the credentialing effect of respected institutions to vouch for your partners' (and firm's) expertise. Indeed, every firm and every partner wants and needs some FAME!

SUCCESS IS THE VALUE

Howard & Howard is a mid-sized firm with a very modest annual PR budget. Like many firms our size, we need to maximize every dollar spent. That's where a results-based system like FAME stands out: it guarantees value for any budget by allocating points to specific media results rather than hours of effort. For example, securing a published byline in a reputable, desired outlet costs us 2,300 points, while getting quoted costs us 1,900 points. We purchase Points in bundles and can save money by loading up on them. If no results are delivered, no points are deducted. This approach ensures that firms like ours can achieve the same high-caliber, premium results as larger firms but without the inefficiency – and uncertainty – of traditional PR retainers; when I buy a bundle of FAME Points I know I'm going to get that amount of actual earned media value in return.

Jim Morgan, another Howard & Howard attorney, saw firsthand the success of this points-based, campaign-driven approach. Specializing in bankruptcy, he wanted to position himself as a thought leader on the SCOTUS decision in the Purdue Pharma case. While other, larger firms, might be investing tens of thousands of dollars on such an effort, our firm allocated 7,500 points to Jim's goal and the Hellerman team sprang into action, quickly securing quotes for him in *Yahoo! Finance*, *Bloomberg Law*, *Law360*, and *Inside Health Policy*.

For Jim, it was about building credibility quickly in a very crowded space. Being quoted in *Bloomberg Law* and *Yahoo! Finance* wasn't just a personal win—it gave him tangible content to share with clients and colleagues, reinforcing and credentialing his experience for actual business development.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IS THE GOAL

This is the core value of the FAME system; it isn't just about a quantity of media placements. It's about turning those placements into useful business development tools. This was also particularly evident in the case of Joe Barber, our firm's intellectual property and trade secrets attorney. Joe had an idea for an article on how weakened non-competes were impacting trade secrets during layoffs—a topic that resonated with his clients. Working with Scott Frost, a firm colleague, Joe first co-authored an article for the *New York Law Journal*.

The team leveraged Joe's experience to secure additional opportunities, including features in *IAM* and *IPWatchdog*. For Joe, these placements became more than just PR successes—they were opportunities to deepen relationships with clients by collaborating on timely, impactful content.

Co-authoring that article with Scott not only strengthened their professional relationship, but it also opened up conversations with clients of theirs who were dealing with those exact challenges. As he shared, "The exposure positioned me as a go-to resource in my field."

FAME IS THE SOLUTION

By focusing resources on strategic, results-driven, high-value earned media campaigns, results-based PR offerings like FAME allows firms like ours to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with larger competitors, showcasing thought leadership without overspending.

A results-based system like FAME transforms PR from a cost center into a strategic business development tool. The process is simple yet effective. There's no guesswork—every point has a clear value and every result is tied to measurable outcomes. While I can and have used the Points to benchmark our needs against competitors (e.g., the competitor/partner has 6,000 points of media in the last 12 months, while we only have 2,000… so, let's get at least another 4,000…), this year I plan to use them to gamify PR internally to scale interest and participation amongst all firm partners. For me managerially, this level of predictability and transparency is game-changing. For partners like Dennis Merkley, Jim Morgan, Joe Barber, and a handful of other Howard & Howard attorneys, the benefits are clear: increased credibility, stronger client relationships, and a competitive edge in crowded markets.

If you're a small or mid-sized law firm operating with a lean budget looking to elevate your reputation, enhance your business development efforts, and compete with industry giants, a results-based system like FAME is likely the solution you've been waiting for. By focusing on results and strategic value, using a system like FAME ensures that every dollar spent will contribute directly to your firm's growth.

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John Hellerman is the President of Hellerman Communications, an award-winning corporate communications agency positioning professionals to win business and navigate crises.