

# The Law Firm Merger Diaries: Getting The Message Across

By **Ashley Horne** (December 8, 2025)

*What goes on behind the scenes before and after a law firm merger announcement? As the pace of mergers picks up, this Law360 Expert Analysis series explores strategies for effectively navigating various aspects of the process, with insights from practitioners at firms that have recently merged.*

*In this installment, a year after Womble Bond Dickinson announced its U.S. business would merge with Lewis Roca Rothgerber Christie LLP, Chief Marketing and Business Development Officer Ashley Horne discusses the importance of communications and brand strategy in successfully positioning a combination.*



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Law firm mergers are happening faster than ever — and without deliberate marketing and communications plans, even the strongest combinations risk blending into the background.

Nearly 50 combinations were completed during the first three quarters of 2025, outpacing 2024 and signaling an ongoing consolidation trend as expenses increase and firms seek out new markets.

These are intricate transactions, involving the union of partnerships and their leadership teams, in addition to legacy infrastructure and client bases. But as a recent Citigroup Inc. client advisory noted, "brand remains more important than scale" in determining merger success.

Communications and brand strategy can be pivotal in successfully positioning a combination. Doing it right requires big-picture focus, but also a grasp of how small details, especially internal touchpoints, can help reinforce your message.

From drafting a merger communications plan to client care, law firm marketers can successfully balance brand, culture and communication when undergoing a merger.

## How We Got Here

A look back to 2017 can offer some insight into potential challenges.

That year, U.S.-based Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice LLP merged with U.K.-based Bond Dickinson LLP, creating a new firm with entirely new branding: Womble Bond Dickinson.

While that combination created its share of work for our client development departments, in some ways it was easier than our most recent merger, where the decision was made to fold Lewis Roca in under the existing Womble Bond brand identity.

After all, Lewis Roca had a history dating back to its formation in 1950. Its clients — particularly those based in the Southwest where the firm held certain name recognition — carried a very positive perception of the Lewis Roca brand.

Understanding that any communications would have to balance Womble Bond's global brand with an expanding list of regional needs was an important first step that established a North Star for all our efforts.

### **Putting a Plan in Place**

As with any complex transaction, marketing and communication departments must plan well ahead of the merger's completion. To get started, marketers should consider the following.

#### ***Identifying a Target Audience***

This will likely include clients, attorneys, support staff and media. But more segmentation will be necessary for particular communications: For instance, we created different messages for clients and attorneys of Lewis Roca than those of Womble Bond.

#### ***Choosing the Channels to Get the Message Across***

Assess which channels are best to reach particular audiences. The intranet might be the right place for internal stakeholders, email could be best for clients, and a press release is ideal for media. Sharing consistent messaging across LinkedIn and other social channels once the deal goes through is also important.

#### ***Delivering the Message***

In a merger, having top leaders from both legacy firms speak in support of the combination can set the right tone. With that said, not every message needs to come from the same place.

For example, in addition to a firm-level email our team drafted to send to Womble Bond clients, we also ensured relationship attorneys were equipped with their own communications assets so that their clients understood how they would benefit from the merger. Remember, too, that certain attorneys may benefit from coaching ahead of these discussions.

#### ***Message Timing***

When it comes to law firm merger communications, timing is critical. Partners, for instance, need to be looped in early on, before clients receive the news.

Once partners are on board, however, clients should be apprised before the merger is announced publicly; this step should involve both personal outreach and firmwide communications, emphasizing the business value and advantages of the combination.

The resulting plan merger strategy document helps ensure messaging is consistent. Any consequent communications or marketing efforts should tie back to this strategy.

### **Be Ready to Pivot**

Having a plan is vital. But it's also important to be flexible when complications inevitably arise. For example, what if news of the merger goes public before you're ready?

Ultimately, that may not be in your control. At the same time, though, you want to tell your story — not let others dictate the narrative. Should the news break early, you must be

ready to catch up your internal audiences and client base quickly.

Putting a plan in place well in advance — and including response strategies should a leak occur — can help relevant stakeholders prepare.

Communications teams can be proactive on this front by emphasizing confidentiality. Yet balancing confidentiality and transparency creates a challenge.

You want to control the information, but you also need to make sure everyone who needs to know is informed, including clients.

At Womble Bond, we found that engaging in person was the best strategy for maintaining that tricky balance. In late 2024, Womble Bond and Lewis Roca's leaders visited various offices and made the business case for the merger directly with partners.

Those conversations built credibility and trust in a way no email could replicate.

Client care also requires a personal touch. Before any public announcement, we ensured that attorneys were personally reaching out to clients to explain what the merger meant for them.

We equipped attorneys with tool kits, FAQs and sample language so clients heard the news directly from the sources our team deemed best equipped to deliver the news.

We also engaged outside public relations consultants early on in the process to think through holding statements and understand the media landscape and potential messaging angles. They were prepared in case they needed to plug a leak, and once the merger was announced, we worked with them to help with external messaging and media outreach.

### **Post-Merger Internal Communications Priorities**

Once the merger agreement is signed, new internal communications priorities come to the forefront.

Day-to-day issues are important to attorneys and team members. Even seemingly small questions such as "Will my phone number change?" can be critical. To that end, we created a centralized hub for documents and information on the firm's intranet site to help keep all team members up to date.

Answering the immediate questions isn't the only goal of a good internal communications plan, though. You also want to build a unified firm culture.

Since January, our client development team has spotlighted cross-market successes, integration milestones and collaborative efforts via a weekly internal email. This type of good news gets attorneys asking how they can get involved.

### **Getting the Most out of Marketing Spend**

Today's law firm leaders must adopt new technologies to amplify their merger messaging.

Instead of traditional ad buys, firms can get more out of a focus on account-based marketing powered by marketing technology tools. These strategies enable widespread market recognition without the spend of mass advertising.

These tools also enable a more targeted approach, which was critical for our latest merger. For example, we focused our efforts on Southwest markets, such as Phoenix and Las Vegas, where the Lewis Roca brand was most resonant.

For several months, we used a modified logo to show that "Lewis Roca is now Womble Bond Dickinson."

Brand transitions take time — you have to build that equity market by market. However, discontinuing the use of legacy terms after a year at most helps emphasize that you are one, unified law firm.

## **Conclusion**

Mergers are as much about people and culture as they are about strategy and branding. Successfully navigating the complexities of uniting two firms requires a thoughtful balance of planning, flexibility and communication.

From ensuring clients feel valued and informed to fostering a unified internal culture, every step is an opportunity to build trust and strengthen the new firm's foundation.

Think of communications not as a task but as a thread that runs through every stage of a combination. By prioritizing clear messaging, leveraging modern marketing tools and embracing the chance to evolve, law firms can turn the challenges of a merger into a powerful platform for growth and collaboration.

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