

LAW FIRM NAMING

I'm planning to move to Tampa and re-launch my consumer bankruptcy practice. The Florida Bar allows non-deceptive trade names for law firms and I'm considering using one for my new solo law practice. Nobody knows me in Tampa so I'm not concerned about losing name recognition.

One day I'd like to retire and sell my practice. I think that it would be more valuable to a buyer if the firm name is a trade name than if I stick with [My Name], Attorney at Law.

On the other hand, most law practices use the names of the attorney owner/partners, so I'm concerned that I'm overlooking something.

Any thoughts on using trade names vs. attorney names when naming a law firm?

A lot of folks use trade names down here. Search sunbiz fictitious name registrations to make sure you aren't adopting someone else's.

Also, so many of the tradenames folks adopt for law school are so darn descriptive. That's not very helpful from a trademark perspective.

Good luck! Let me know when you get here -- we can get lunch.

Best,

Dineen Pashoukos Wasylik, Florida

We like our name. First thing we did after snagging the Web site (and registering with the state) is register it with the USPTO. And...we think it's a mighty perfect name for what we do. ;)

Amy J. Holzman

I know I'm old fashioned and too big of an Ayn Rand fan. As a solo I wouldn't dream of naming my firm without including my name in the firm name. That just my opinion.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

Thanks for the fictitious name search tip.

I originally thought about using a descriptive trade name, for both online and offline marketing purposes, but ultimately decided against it because I want to retain the flexibility to add or change practice areas in the future. I hadn't really considered the trademark perspective, but that's a good point.

Lunch sounds great. My move date is July 1, 2015, so we have some time to clear our schedules. :)

Alvin Foreman, Illinois

I like your name too. I think I'll use your tactic of snagging the domain name first and registering with the state and the USPTO second. I doubt that anybody would want to steal my domain name idea, but it would suck if they did and I had to either buy it from a squatter or pick a new name.

Alvin Foreman

John, my current solo practice is simply my name, so we're in the same boat right now.

I'm not sure how big Harrisburg is, but my guess is that your real name may be more valuable than a trade name in a smaller market. However, I suspect that in a major metropolitan area, a trade name would generally be more worthwhile.

Alvin Foreman

Monica, I don't personally know anyone who sold their firm, but I believe there is a market for small firms.

I plan to build a marketing list, develop systems, and goodwill, so hopefully those assets will be valuable to a buyer in the future. My goal is to make my new firm as turnkey as possible for a potential buyer.

Can you elaborate on what you meant by "Why not run your practice with the idea of taking a bunch of equity out when you retire?" Did you mean maxing

out my retirement plan contributions while I'm working or did you mean something else?

Alvin Foreman

It's in the water. Drinking Lake Michigan water makes us think differently (says the woman who grew up with a Lake Drive instead of a Lake Shore Drive). The water gives us an edge. ;)

Please let us know what you choose!

All my best,

Amy J. Holzman

Lo!! Lake Michigan water is the best! I hate it when I use a drinking fountain in a town that uses well water. Yuck!

I'll keep you guys posted.

Alvin Foreman

Thanks Patricia. I've heard that Sarasota is really nice. I didn't realize that Sarasota-Tampa was a do-able commute.

My move won't be until next July, but meeting over lunch sounds great.

Alvin Foreman,

Alvin, I'm about to change from Law Office of Brian W Freeman to a trade name for SEO and marketing purposes. My name will be descriptive, inc. I'm just wrestling with what descriptive terms to pick now.

Brian, I've gone back and forth over whether to use a descriptive trade name. I think there's a marketing benefit because a descriptive name immediately tells potential clients and referral sources what you do. However, from what I've read, Google's recent algorithm changes have significantly reduced if not eliminated descriptive domain names as a ranking factor.

What ultimately made me decide on a non-descriptive name is flexibility. I'm now primarily a bankruptcy attorney, but I may want to add practice areas in the future. I decided that a descriptive name would limit that ability or might require a future name change.

Alvin Foreman

No one has picked this one yet?

http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/I_Can't_Believe_It's_A_Law_Firm!

Dan X. Nguyen, California

I love that character!

Alvin Foreman

Monica, do you recall the arguments against buying a law firm?

Alvin Foreman

I'm going to weigh in on two fronts.

1) I knew I wanted a fictitious name for my firm because I was thinking ahead about longevity of my firm, how many different ways I could practice law (or not), and how I could leverage brand recognition.

I fell into the actual name somewhat by accident. I needed to create a Twitter account name back in 2009 while I was still in law school. I wanted to be recognized as a person in the legal field when I use Twitter, so I came up with @HartLaw.

Fast forward to setting up my firm. I realized that I have almost 5 years of contact with legal professionals through my Twitter account. Many people were aware of who @HartLaw was when I attended ABA events. Seemed dumb not to capitalize on that brand recognition, so my firm became HartLaw, PLLC.

Bonus? With a generic name like Hart I was having a hard time coming up

with a combination that wasn't already being used, where clients would get confused finding the wrong Hart Law Firm. Having HartLaw, PLLC gives me a bit of distinction, keeps my name in the forefront, and lets me change what I'm doing without having to keep changing my business name. (And my website name will be changing eventually. I bought web domains in law school well before I settled on HartLaw, PLLC.)

2) Here in WA, law firms are bought and sold - not frequently, but enough to consider that a future possibility. Senior attorneys will sell their firm lock-stock-&-barrel to someone else. Sometimes to a new attorney. Often, the Senior stays on as a consultant for a short time.

With my firm called HartLaw, PLLC, it will be possible to sell it in the future and not run afoul of the ethics rules. I'm looking forward to seeing what you pick for your firm.

AnnMichelle Hart, Washington

At HartLaw, we love the law!

I'll betcha never heard that one before.

Rick Bryan, New York

No, I didn't.... can I use it?

I did think of using something along the lines of "handling every client with heart."

Ann Hart

Between 2000 and 2004, I ran the docketing and IP paralegal dept for "The Red Hot Law Group", an IP boutique law firm. They were so successful that one of the largest law firms in Atlanta made the partners an offer they could not refuse and bought them out in 2001-2. We all moved to their multi-floor, imposing digs downtown which was too bad since the RHLG's offices in the historic Biltmore Hotel, converted to open office space, were much more exciting and cool. Unfortunately, Big Law also did nothing with the RHLG name and it eventually went the way of cancelled registrations at the USPTO and in commerce. It was the best law firm situation I ever was a part of and the most exciting. My RHLG boss is now my company's attorney!

Lyza L. Sandgren, Paralegal, Georgia

I Hart the Law

We Take Our Clients to Hart

Rick Bryan

Rick! I love those!!! ;-)

Ann Hart