

Firm Stops Traffic with Virtual Tour



Preston Gates promotes move and markets firm with Flash video postcard.

By Larry Bodine

The snappiest piece of e-marketing to cross the Ethernet this year comes from the Orange County, Calif., office of Preston Gates & Ellis, which turned a sow's ear into a silk purse when it promoted an office move (how mundane) with a high-tech video postcard with homegrown words and music (how fun!).

After five years in one location, Preston Gates, a 400-attorney firm with nine offices worldwide, moved its office in Irvine, Calif., to a new building. Granted, the new location is beautiful, with saffron walls, red plaid chairs and mahogany trim. But take my word for it, promoting a move to the 6th floor of 1900 Main St., off the I-405 isn't exactly dramatic news, and it can be a real chore to market.

At first the marketing staff considered holding a traditional open house event, but decided it would not work because many of the clients are not from Orange County. Preston Gates represents clients from all over the country, such as Microsoft, the California Public Employees' Retirement System and BP Amoco, with the Orange County office focusing on securities, mergers and acquisitions, life sciences, intellectu-

al property, litigation, employment law and business consulting.

The next idea was to throw a party and do a live Webcast of the party for people who could not attend, but it became immediately clear few people would watch this virtual event.

Flash Video Postcard

Finally, according to the firm's Web editor, Jeff Stuhmer, the partners and staff hit on the idea of a Flash video postcard, which could be e-mailed to the clients. It

Peterson was all for it." In fact, Peterson, the managing partner for the office, agreed to do the voice-over for the video. The firm engaged Dave Gottwald, creative director of Optional Design Group in Escondido, Calif., (www.optionaldesigngroup.com) to create the Flash file, while the marketing staff wrote the script, which was partly an introduction to the office and partly an announcement of the relocation.

The final file is 790K and can be viewed by visiting www.prestongates.com/elerts/OCTOUR.html. A link to the video was e-mailed to 1,100 clients, stating, "You are invited to take a Virtual Tour of our new Orange County office." The one minute, 45-second tour requires Flash Player Version 6.0 or higher, and will detect if viewers need to download it.

Peterson appears in the video, describing clients the firm represents, summarizing the practice areas housed in the office, and listing the service organizations for whom firm employees do volunteer work, such as the Kidney Cancer Foundation, Healing Odyssey, the University of California, Irvine, Girls Inc., and the Orange



would be an effective way to convey the office has tech-savvy attorneys who do cutting-edge legal work.

"The partners were really excited about it," Stuhmer said. "Kathleen

County Bar Association. The tour concludes with a map to the office, a link to the firm's Web site and an e-mail link to set up an appointment to come to the new office.

Playing in the background is an electric guitar instrumental called "Firefly" by the band Fall City (www.fallcityrock.com), which happens to include



Seattle associates Jason Patrick Holtman and Athan E. Tramountanas, as well as Kathy Gehrig from Preston Gates' information technology department. "This way we knew we would not have copyright issues," Stuhmer said.

Digitized Zoom and CAD

Optional Design visited the offices and took numerous photos. Using digitized still photos, the company created a dramatic zoom-from-the-sky view of the offices, and computer-aided design animation to make the graphics snap across the screen. From start to finish, the file took less than a month to complete, according to Stuhmer. Most of the time was spent in touching up graphics and sound, as well as getting permission from clients to use their names on the postcard.

There was no template to follow, Stuhmer said. He said he had not seen any other law firm create a Flash postcard with sound, although he had seen a Flash video created by an architectural firm, without sound. The reaction was uniformly favorable. "We got overwhelmingly positive e-mails from dozens of clients who liked it," Stuhmer said. "It remains to be seen if we get new business from it, but meanwhile it's been a great promotional piece for us."

Now, he said, lawyers from the other eight offices want Flash postcards created for them, too. "We have created a monster!" Stuhmer said.

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