

# PRESTON GATES' Virtual Open House CAPTURES IMAGINATION

The video postcard branded the firm as one that understands and is comfortable with technology.

BY KATHRYN LEWIS

**N**OBODY EXPECTS a rock video to announce an office relocation. That's why Preston Gates' virtual open house and office tour developed for its new Orange County office was so effective in capturing the imagination of clients.

"Feedback from clients has been overwhelmingly positive," said Kathleen Peterson, Orange County office managing partner. "We created an open house that lasts far longer than a single evening, and effectively brands Preston Gates as a firm that understands and is comfortable with technology."

The entire project took just over a month from concept to completion and cost approximately \$5,000. It simply required creative thinking, a willingness to try something new and a skilled team working very well together.

## Departing from tradition

Preston Gates is a Seattle-based law firm with more than 400 fee-earners in nine offices located on the West Coast, in Washington, D.C. and Hong Kong. Like most law firms our size, Preston Gates has a centralized marketing department that manages the development and execution of firmwide promotional activities. Our regional offices also play a critical role in marketing, with an inside perspective on their markets and how they work in synergy with the entire firm.

When our Orange County office relocated this spring to a

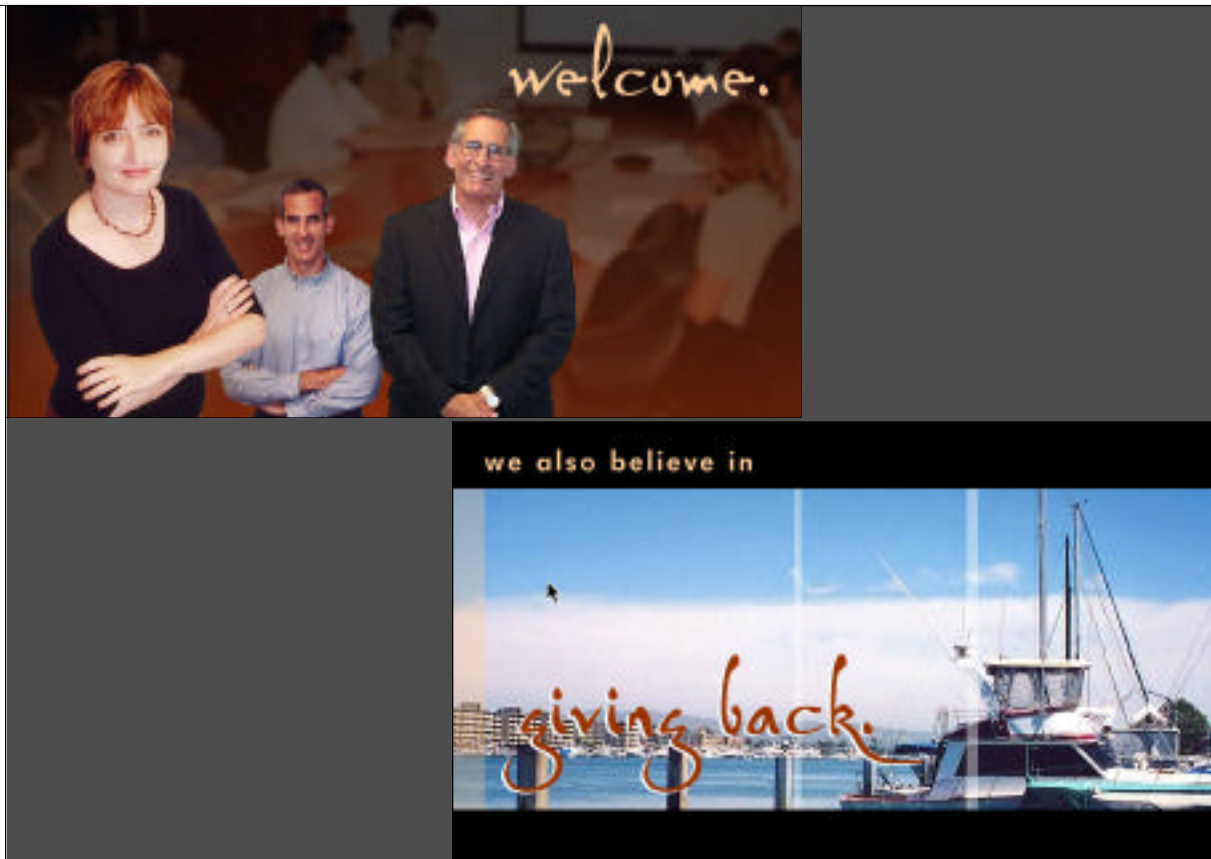
more spacious, state-of-the-art facility in Irvine, California, we began planning for an open house celebration. The event was slated for early fall, when clients were back from summer vacations and personnel were settled into the new space. Tradition dictated that the event include print and e-mail invitations to clients, targets and colleagues, as well as catered food and drink, which generally equates to a high price tag and a relatively low turnout.

But Peterson wanted to do something different. She started discussing ideas for the open house with other fee-earners, staff members and even her family. "My 13-year-old son suggested that we set up a web cam at the event so out-of-town clients could "attend" the open house as well," Kathleen said. "I thought it was unlikely that clients would tune in to a video of other people enjoying a party, but the idea of employing online video appealed to me."

Kathleen formed a task force consisting of Partner David Perry, Associate Carrie Quintanar and Office Administrator Lynn Gottwald to identify a contractor that could quickly create a high-quality, Web-based video announcing the office move.

## Big impact, reasonable price

Lynn told us, "We were looking for something that would make a big impact on a large audience for a reasonable price. At the same time, we wanted to break from the traditional stodgy law firm event and position ourselves as an innova-



Sample screens from the Virtual tour Preston Gates put together to announce their move.

tive, technologically savvy, forward-thinking group.” The task force interviewed two interactive media companies and selected Optional Design — located in Escondido, California — for their youth, creativity and enthusiasm about the challenge of making a law firm seem hip.

Optional Design started roughing out ideas that included quick cuts, animation and a rock-and-roll soundtrack. They visited the office and spent a day taking still photos of the new facilities, attorneys and staff at work. Meanwhile, Lynn worked with her Orange County colleagues to draft a script and develop content.

Jeff Stuhmer, Web Editor in Preston Gates’ central marketing group, worked with Lynn and Optional Design to edit the script, made sure the virtual tour technology meshed with our website and email systems, and obtained permissions from clients to use their names in the video. Jeff noted, “We helped expand the focus to be more than an office tour. We wanted to use the opportunity to re-acquaint clients and prospects with the kind of work we do in Orange County, the clients we serve and the community service organizations we support.”

Optional Design returned to the Orange County office and recorded Kathleen reading the final script for use as a voiceover. They put all the pieces together in Flash, laying the voice track down over the images and setting it all to a rock beat (from Seattle rock band, Fall City, which conveniently includes three employees from Preston Gates who

permitted us to use their music free of charge.) During the next two weeks, rough mixes went from Optional Design to Seattle and Orange County in the fine-tuning process. The challenge was to pack as much punch into the video as possible, while keeping the file size small enough for quick download and the length short enough to hold people’s attention.

### Imaginary camera flies

The final product has more in common with a rock video than traditional law firm advertising. It is an economically-sized (785K) Flash video file that was uploaded to the firm’s public web site (<http://www.prestongates.com>). Clocking in at less than two minutes, it glides from images of the attorneys to a CAD drawing of the new building. An imaginary camera flies through the building to give viewers an inside look at the new office space. It also features panoramic views of Orange County and logos of many of the firm’s major clients.

An HTML e-mail with graphics was sent to clients, prospects and colleagues inviting them to click on a link and take the virtual tour. Optional Design engineered in sniffing technology to detect when users need to download the latest version of Flash Player before launching the tour.

Now, we are looking for that next great idea, from wherever it may come. Take the virtual tour here ([www.prestongates.com/elerts/octour.html](http://www.prestongates.com/elerts/octour.html)) by clicking on the image at the left of the home page.

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