

## Creative Corner:

# Fostering the Creative Spirit

By Charlyne Fabi, *Creative Director, Right Hat*

When asked to be guest columnist of this feature, I was struck by its title: Creative Corner. This may well describe what many in-house designers feel when looking for creative inspiration within the walls of a law firm—creatively “cornered.” That’s not to say that they can’t create good work, but being able to put a fresh spin on the firm newsletter or figuring out how to jazz up that all-important PowerPoint presentation can be daunting—especially if creative energy is running low.

Here are five suggestions for you and your team on how to fight the creative doldrums and produce more-inspired yet brand-compliant work.

### 1. Audit the Work

Conduct an annual audit of the creative team’s work. Look at the projects that have been successful and discuss why they were a success. Evaluate whether the materials support your firm’s vision or if they look as though someone has shredded the brand guidelines and gone rogue. Assess both print and online projects—e-alerts, invitations, proposals, sponsorship ads, data sheets, etc. Figure out what’s good and what can be better. A candid discussion as a marketing team about the quality of the work can provide insight on how to improve future projects.

### 2. Make a File for “Cool” (aka Best Practices)

Find out what’s going on around you. Knowing industry trends, new technologies, and what your competitors are doing can help spark ideas and ignite the creative soul. Collect collateral—industry-related or not—that is unique and smart. Save memorable e-communications and bookmark innovative websites so your team develops an aspirational reference point. There’s also a plethora of graphic design and

advertising publications, creative blogs, and websites that can help break through creative blocks. Some of my favorites are [www.commart.com/webpicks](http://www.commart.com/webpicks), [www.designer-daily.com](http://www.designer-daily.com), [www.creativemornings.com](http://www.creativemornings.com), and [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com).

### 3. End the Isolation

Creativity often suffers when working in small groups or alone. Organizations such as AIGA, the professional association for design, or the American Advertising Federation (AAF) provide networking opportunities that can foster peer review and critique. You can also suggest a monthly coffee klatch—formed with other designers, writers, and web developers—to energize the spirit and act as a sounding board for current issues. You can encourage networking by having staff attend design events, lectures, or conferences. This coming June, the inHOWse Manager’s Conference will be in the Windy City ([www.howdesign.com/howevents/](http://www.howdesign.com/howevents/)). Take advantage of it!

### 4. Encourage Constructive Competition

We’ve collaborated with other in-house design teams to generate multiple ideas for projects with marked success. Even though allowing the in-house team to participate in projects alongside outside vendors may stretch resources or feel redundant, it’s a safe way to test the capabilities of your

staff while maximizing the benefits of collaborative thinking. It can also work as a morale booster by facilitating healthy competition—especially if a common complaint is that all the “good” work gets outsourced. You can also elevate quality by entering projects in competitions specific to in-house designers such as Graphic Design USA's InHouse Design Awards and the inHOWse Design competition. Not only do these competitions act as carrots, they can also result in much-needed recognition for your team if you happen to snag an award.

## 5. Get Outside Help

Assess the needs of your creative staff. Do they need more formalized training or can a meeting with your outside creative firm be more helpful? We've hosted Q&A sessions and brand summits with some of our client's in-house teams where the

topics varied from how to find great stock imagery to ways to maximize the printing budget. Some of our clients allow the staff to send us work-in-progress so they can get timely art direction as well as ensure that the work is brand-compliant.

The success of your firm's marketing program depends in part on your creative staff. A client's brand experience is affected by every touch point—from the firm's website and ads to its white papers and invitations. Make sure that the creative staff is performing at its peak so your materials reflect the quality and consistency to best support your marketing objectives. ■

*This article was originally published in the Legal Marketing Association, Midwest Chapter's Winter 2011 edition of In the Loop (Volume 4, No. 1).*

---

### About Right Hat

Right Hat specializes in strategic brand consulting and design for professional services firms. We work with firms, large and small, to create marketing programs that are memorable and transforming.