

Magazines in the law office

by Evan Loeffler

First impressions are important in the legal profession. Clients want to know that the person to whom they are about to entrust their problems at great personal expense is competent, intelligent, and well-informed. Many lawyers, therefore, spend great amounts of time and money worrying about their personal appearance: expensive suits and shoes are purchased to complement monogrammed shirts and silk ties; hair is permed, dyed, and carefully brushed; makeup is fastidiously applied and checked just prior to meeting a prospective client.

What most lawyers do not realize is that while all this personal primping may help, it misses the boat by whatever amount of time the client spent waiting in the lobby. Clients will form their first impression of a lawyer and his or her law office by what they see in the waiting room.

I have heard of one personal injury lawyer who decorated the walls of his waiting room with copies of judgments he won for his clients. This is cute, but it, too, misses the mark. While waiting for the lawyer to make an appearance, clients will usually be seated and looking through whatever reading material available. This, the choice of magazines left for clients' reading enjoyment is important.

This became clear to me recently when I began receiving various bizarre magazines at my office. Someone, apparently not a fan, subscribed me to a number of publications with such unlikely names as *Nun's Life*, *Astrology Today*, and *American Cheerleader*. I immediately canceled these subscriptions, but not before receiving several back issues. Rather than simply throw them out, I put the new magazines in my waiting room. I felt they would add variety to my collection of *De Novos* and the *Bar News*.

This thinking, I learned soon after, was in error. A friend entered my office holding a copy of one of the magazines as if it were raw sewage.

"Why," he asked, "is there a copy of *American Cheerleader* in your waiting room?"

I explained my reasoning. He listened patiently, looking at me as if my head were slowly turning into an avocado.

"Let me get this straight," he said when I had finished my explanation. "You're trying to make a favorable, mature impression on your clients while advertising the fact you read a publication devoted to high school cheerleading?"

"You don't think this would help my image as an advocate?"

"Here's an idea," he said sarcastically, "why not put out magazines about pretentious, fancy sports cars to impress your indigent clients with how you can relate to their financial situation?"

He had me there. I threw out the new magazines and brought my back issues of *Porsche Panorama* (which my friend hadn't noticed) home. I then set about the task of finding more appropriate reading material for the waiting room. This search led me to compile the following list of considerations for choosing the periodical right for your office.

The first thing to consider is how often you want to be bothered with renewing your supply. Newspapers have a shelf life of zero (unless there's a story about you winning a big case in there), so unless you have the time to update on a daily basis you should avoid daily publications. No one is impressed by walking into a law office and having to climb over a dune of newsprint.

If you do decide to subscribe to a newspaper, there are other considerations. There are five choices of newspaper, each with its own advantages and drawbacks:

The New York Times. Advantages are that it's prestigious and instantly recognizable as a highly respected publication. It also has a good crossword puzzle. Disadvantages are that almost all the news it reports on is about New York City, which does a West Coast practitioner little good. More importantly, it has no comic section. Anyone who has visited New York knows that New Yorkers tend to read *The Daily News* instead.

The Wall Street Journal. Another highly recognizable and prestigious publication. The accepted premier source of information for people who invest in the stock market. However, it has neither a crossword puzzle nor a comic section. Also, it is obsolete since everyone with serious interest in playing the stock market gets up-to-the-minute information through their computer on-line service.

USA Today. Advantages are that it is colorful. The crossword is too easy and it has no comic section. The publishers tried to make up for this by making the news coverage a joke in itself.

The National Enquirer. Not a daily publication, but still strangely considered a newspaper. Can be fun to read, but its reputation for accuracy is, shall we say, somewhat in question.

Regional newspapers. Local newspapers are the best bet. They will cover issues that may interest you and your clients, although probably not as well as the *New York Times* would if they had any interest in your particular region. Regionals tend to have decent crosswords and comic sections.

If monthly magazines are better for your office, the following--admittedly incomplete--list of suggestions may be beneficial:

Trade Journals. These publications are only interesting to the practitioner. Anyone who has found himself in a dentist's office with nothing but the latest issues of *Cuspid World* or *Denture Life* to pass the time will understand. By this token, it is bordering on cruel and unusual treatment to only provide the *ABA Journal* and the *Bar News* to clients. Consider also that the *Bar News* has a nasty tendency to fall open to the page containing a list of the recently sanctioned and disbarred.

Newsweek and *U.S. News and World Report.* These news magazines are associated with representing the liberal and conservative viewpoints in their reporting. Matching your choice of publication to your clients' bias is a near impossibility because no one is exactly sure which publication represents which extreme.

People Magazine. A good magazine for those who are embarrassed by the *National Enquirer* and like their photos in color.

Time Magazine. Used to be a good newsmagazine, but has degenerated into a cross between *People* and *USA Today* in its news coverage.

Sports Illustrated. Sports fans have to be pried from the pages to discuss their case. Attorney-client relations tend to be strained with male clients when the annual swimsuit issue goes missing.

Vogue, Elle and *Cosmopolitan.* Women read them for the articles. Men like to look at the pictures. The office ends up smelling like a perfume factory from all the samples embedded in the pages.

Esquire and *GQ.* Men read them for the articles. Women like to look at the pictures. The office ends up smelling like a cologne factory.

National Geographic. These magazines have an indefinite shelf life, as there is a law forbidding you from throwing them out. I can't remember the exact cite. If money is a problem you can subscribe for a year and leave them in the waiting room forever.

In my own case, I finally gave up and decided not to keep my clients waiting. Just in case, however, I left a book of lawyer jokes in easy reach.