Law Society of British Columbia

Ethics Advisory

Law firm names

EA-2025-01[1] August 18, 2025[2]

Introduction

When setting up a law firm or practice, there are many decisions to contemplate. Choosing a name is an important step to develop not only an identity for your law firm, but also convey the services and specialties offered. A name may influence your reputation in the community and help, or hinder, potential clients' ability to find you.

Lawyers must take care to avoid firm names that may mislead the public. This ethics advisory provides some additional context in regard to the ethical requirements and practices arising when choosing a name for your law firm.

Professional responsibility considerations

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia ("Code") rule 4.2-5 requires that any marketing activity by a lawyer must not be: false, inaccurate, unverifiable, reasonably capable of misleading the recipient or intended recipient, or contrary to the best interests of the public.[3] Further, Code rule 4.3-0.1 allows lawyers to express a preference for practising in specific areas of law in their marketing activities. However, the lawyer must regularly practice in each field highlighted.

Names conveying more than one lawyer

It is improper to select a name that suggests more than a single lawyer comprises the law firm when the firm is composed of only one lawyer.[4] For example, including plural words in your law

[1] This Ethics Advisory represents the amalgamation of Ethics Committee Opinions on law firm names. Ethics Advisories are reviewed and approved by the Ethics & Lawyer Independence Advisory Committee.
[2] Inaugural publication of this Ethics Advisory.
[3] Commentary [1] provides examples of marketing activities violating this rule, if it: (a) is calculated or likely to take advantage of the vulnerability, either physical or emotional, of the recipient, (b) is likely to create in the mind of the recipient or intended recipient an unjustified expectation about the results that the lawyer can achieve, or (c) otherwise brings the administration of justice into disrepute.
[4] Original consideration: EC April 2007, Item 6. Original summary: "List of example names that are improper since they suggest that more than a single lawyer comprises the firm or when the firm is comprised of only one lawyer."

firm name, such as "partners," "associates" or "Barristers & Solicitors," when only one lawyer is present would be misleading and therefore improper. If others work at the law firm and they are not lawyers, the term "Barrister and Solicitor" or "Lawyer" must follow the name of the individual with that designation. For example, "Singh, Jones and Brown, Barristers & Solicitors" is improper if Jones and Brown are not lawyers, however "Singh, Barrister & Solicitor, Jones and Brown" would be acceptable. Further, the word "group" may be used since it does not necessarily convey partners or associates. For example, "Lee and Associates" is improper whereas "Lee Law Group" is not.

Names conveying official approval

Law firm names should avoid implying they represent the province or have any official status beyond that of a private legal practice. For example, while the majority, if not entire, practice of a law firm may occur in the province of British Columbia, lawyers must take care not to convey a false sense of official approval of the practice.[5] Accordingly, the use of the term "BC" in the name is misleading. Such names might suggest a connection to or endorsement by the provincial government, which could confuse the public.

Names sufficiently similar to another firm

When choosing a name, lawyers have an obligation to review existing law firm names to ensure the new name is not too similar to one already in use.[6] For example, if "Chan and Company" already exists, it would be improper for a new law firm to use "Chan Lawyers." The similarity in both names, with only minor differences, could cause confusion. Lawyers must select a name that avoids this issue.

Names representing an area of law

Naming a law firm after a specific area of law, without any other distinguishing features, has the potential to mislead the public into believing that the firm has some official accreditation or unique expertise not shared by other firms providing similar services.[7] For example, a law firm named simply "Family Law Office" could create the false impression that it holds special recognition or exclusive qualifications in family law. This concern applies whether the office is

[5] Original consideration: EC June 2006, Item 2. Original summary: "A law firm name such as BC Forestry Law or BC Forestry Law Services is improper. The use of the term BC in a law firm's practice is misleading because it conveys a false sense of official approval of the lawyer's practice."

[6] Original consideration: EC April 2006, Item 3. Original summary: "Lawyers cannot use a firm name that is sufficiently similar to another name in use by an existing firm if it may cause confusion to the public. A lawyer cannot use the firm name B Lawyers to practice in Vancouver where another firm B and Company already exists in North Vancouver. It may be reasonably confusing to the public. And, the use of the term lawyers implied there was more than one lawyer at the firm. Since B was a sole practitioner, the use of the name was misleading and improper.""

[7] Original consideration: EC October 1998, Item 7. Original summary: "It is improper for a lawyer to operate a firm named after a particular area of law and bearing no other distinguishing features."

operating as a traditional law firm or is only providing referrals to other lawyers. To avoid confusion, law firm names should include additional elements to clearly distinguish them and avoid implying exclusive credentials.

Names with preferred area of practice

It is proper to incorporate a preferred area of practice into the law firm name, provided the firm is entitled to list that area as a preferred area of practice.[8] For example, a law firm that regularly practices tax law may use a name like "Smith and Wong, Tax Lawyers Law Corporation." Code rule 4.3-0.1 supports this by allowing lawyers to state a preference for a specific field of law in their marketing, as long as they regularly practice in those areas. The same reasoning applies to law corporations.

Conclusion

Setting up a new practice or law firm is an exciting milestone, and choosing the right name is an important part of the process. With a bit of thoughtful research and planning, you can select a name that reflects your professionalism and avoids misleading the public. Remember to check relevant directories and conduct broader web searches to ensure your name is distinct from others. Be mindful that plural words or titles can suggest multiple lawyers when there is only one, and avoid names that might imply official endorsements or accreditations. If you regularly practice in a specific area of law, it is perfectly fine to highlight that in your law firm's name. By approaching the naming process with care, you will set your practice up for success right from the start.

Questions

If you would like to discuss a specific professional responsibility issue regarding firm names, feel welcome to contact a practice advisor.

[8] Original consideration: EC February 1999, Item 7. Original summary: "It is proper to incorporate an area of practice into the firm name provided the firm is entitled to list an area as a preferred area of practice (see Law Society Rule 9-1)."