

## LMA Hall of Fame's First Class Looks At Accomplishments and Challenges

A *Strategies* Interview



by Russell Lawson

*During the recent LMA Annual Conference, the first class of inductees was established in the new LMA Hall of Fame. The inductees in the inaugural class are: Ross Fishman, chief exceleration officer of Ross Fishman Marketing; Norm Rubenstein, principal of the Zeughauser Group; Sally Schmidt of Schmidt Marketing, Inc.; and Merrilyn Astin Tarlton, principal of Astin Tarlton. This first class of Hall of Fame members have all had significant careers both inside firms in marketing roles and as outside consultants and strategists. The week after the conference, Strategies caught up with the honorees to ask a few questions.*

**Strategies:** Tell us how you felt when you found out you were an inductee for the first class in the LMA Hall of Fame.

**Schmidt:** I was surprised because I wasn't aware of my nomination. I was curious because it was the first year and I didn't know who was getting in.

**Rubenstein:** I was immensely flattered and doubly pleased to be in the company of Sally, Ross and Merrilyn.

**Tarlton:** I thought, "Sally had better be in there!" Much to my surprise, I was also very embarrassed. It was a wonderful honor and I do have to confess it made me blush. The two people who nominated me took me out for a cup of coffee to announce it to me and I was stunned into silence.

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You think you're doing something innovative in a firm, but you have to be careful so that you don't trigger the firm's immune system.

— Merrilyn Astin Tarlton,  
principal of Astin Tarlton

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**Fishman:** Honored, flattered, grateful, excited, thrilled.

**Strategies:** Over the years, who or what do you feel has been the biggest influence on you personally?

**Rubenstein:** Although it sounds a little cliché, it's not one individual, it's all of LMA. We enjoy an unusually high degree of collaboration and supportiveness in the association. What I'm most aware of and impressed by is how generous members of LMA have been from the beginning.

**Schmidt:** I would ditto that completely. I feel that my contributions, such as they are, have been influenced by so many people. Everyone has been so open and sharing of their ideas and the trends they are seeing, people working in law firms and folks on the outside.

**Tarlton:** A lot of my inspiration comes from places outside of the legal profession. One of the things I've been focused on is how to bring in to firms the stuff that works so well in other places. So I think of people like Tom Peters, David White, but also of all of the lawyers I have worked with. You think you're doing something innovative in a firm, but you have to be careful so that you don't trigger the firm's immune system. You're working hard to make sure that what you are attempting isn't an irritant or will give the firm sort of a rash. And there is occasionally a person or a partner who says, "Why aren't you doing it this way?" and it takes you to an every more interesting place.

**Fishman:** LMA members. My friends, my peers, my clients—the nicest, smartest people I know are LMA members. They helped me every step of the way. They are supportive, encouraging, interesting.

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—Sally Schmidt of Schmidt Marketing, Inc.

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**Strategies: What do you think your most satisfying achievement has been?**

**Schmidt:** My satisfaction really comes from having built and sustained my business in this field and employing people, and I am enjoying my 20th anniversary this year. I really just still love what I do so much, and feel we are really just on the tip of the iceberg in what we might be able to influence and achieve.

**Rubenstein:** I would add to that, for me, there are really two satisfactions. One is really seeing the firms I have worked with enjoy the benefits of the strategy or the positioning in which I have been involved. The other is the incisive and extraordinarily accomplished legal marketers now practicing in the field, who started with me years ago.

**Tarlton:** It's two things. One is when I see movement because of something I have done, a strategy I have introduced to a firm and it works. It could be things I have started inside a firm and others have then implemented. Another is I have been able to work with incredibly creative people: other marketing people, technology gurus, lawyers, designers. You find creative people in the strangest places sometimes, and when you do, it's so much fun.

**Fishman:** I just love working with my clients, the one-on-one interaction. I love marketing directors coming back and telling me, "Boy, you make me look good." I like doing work for firms that help them have fun. We don't have enough fun in law firms; marketing often works better when it is fun.

**Strategies: What are you doing to learn more than you currently know, and keep your thinking fresh?**

**Tarlton:** One of the most enlarging experiences I have had in the last 20 years is when I took on the role of editor for the "Journal of Law Practice Management" of the ABA. That forced me to interact with lots of people in law firms who knew more than I did. I heard about document management, technology issues, staffing and other subjects and learned a lot from authors and editorial board members

**Schmidt:** When you are outside a law firm you have exposure to so many people and cultures and environment, you really learn a lot. I thought when I left my law firm that they were all the same, and that is definitely not true. When I look, I focus on practical applications and just try to read things. For example, when I saw a research firm won the Malcolm Baldrige [National Quality] Award, I looked them up and tried to see if there was anything I could discern for use in law firms.

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— Norm Rubenstein,  
principal of the Zeughauser Group

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**Rubenstein:** We all tend to function as sponges and try to absorb much of what we see working in law firms. I try to surround myself and collaborate with people who enhance my understanding and see what they bring to the table. A number of my group's colleagues have expertise in areas in which I lack experience. I also focus on what are called, for lack of a better phrase, best practices—ways that law firms are achieving marketing leadership, ways that those strategies or tools are used most effectively among law firms.

**Fishman:** I read everything. I read the new books. I read the new trends, I subscribe to dozens of magazines, looking for what good ideas are out there that we can adapt to our industry. There are no new ideas, but there is always a way to bring good ideas into our profession. The trick is to figure out how.

**Tarlton:** It has been a challenge for LMA for years to provide education for senior members. Sally, Norm and I are members of the College of Law Practice Management, and we also struggle with the same questions.

**Rubenstein:** Law is a precedent-driven profession and lawyers are now watching their competitors accomplish some ambitious marketing objectives. This makes it somewhat easier for all of us.

**Strategies: Tell us about the challenges you see ahead for legal marketing.**

**Tarlton:** Continuing to change the business model for law firms—there are just so many things wrong with the model we have seen historically. Up to 80 percent of law firms are now using some form of alternative fees. This kind of experimentation is far along from where we were years ago. But there is much room for other, positive changes.

**Schmidt:** When you are in this profession long enough, you see the pendulum swinging back and forth. We are seeing an incredible upswing in marketing now in terms of staffing, money and internal resources. I've noticed over the years that this is followed by firms sitting back and saying, "What are we getting from the investment? Are we getting anywhere that we've not gotten before?" That whole issue of measurement, finding metrics and letting lawyers know how and why we're measuring is terribly important..

**Tarlton:** And not always short-term, but also long-term.

**Rubenstein:** I think we're seeing a new generation at the helm of law firms, focused not on just management but on leadership. Hand in glove with that evolution is the need for law firms to inculcate a marketing culture. Overall, law firms have not placed the right expectations on marketing or done a good job of explaining its roles. I see an increased need to assure that marketers are duly informed about the work that their firms do and the industries they serve. And in that knowledge, they earn the credibility of the lawyers they work with and can play the strategic role that they always sought.

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**Fishman:** Continuing to raise the bar. It was easy a long time ago when there was very little good marketing. Now there so much that it is harder and harder to stand out. ■