

Success Story: Anne Gallagher: From Media Law to Legal Marketing – and Acting with Nicolas Cage

Interview with JD Bliss

JDB: You went to journalism school as an undergraduate. Why did you decide to enter law school?

Gallagher: I'm a "double Bucky" – journalism and law degrees from the University of Wisconsin, where Bucky Badger is the mascot – and got my J.D. in 1988. I think all journalists are in some way fascinated with law, and I went to law school with the intention of focusing on media law. My law school internships were with the legal department of the National Association of Broadcasters in Washington, and with the Wisconsin Supreme Court, where among other things I tracked all the communications and media cases in the state.

JDB: You say that you wanted to practice media law. Did you actually practice in that area?

Gallagher: I came close, and almost landed a position as a lawyer with the Federal Communications Commission until a job freeze came into effect. **But I was ambivalent at the time about entering practice anyway. Media law is a litigation specialty, and I'm a collaborator not a litigator.** I decided that while I was still interested in the law I was just as open to law-related work. Years later, when I was talking with a client, the Managing Partner of one of the world's largest law firms, he asked me, "How could you go to law school and not want to be a lawyer?" I replied, "How could you go to law school and think you could only practice law?"

JDB: You didn't practice law, but haven't you worked with law firms from the start of your marketing career?

Gallagher: Yes. I'd always kept up my journalism contacts, and the then-dean of the UW Journalism School suggested I follow up on a lead that the Edelman public relations agency in Chicago was starting a new professional services group and looking for people with journalism and law degrees to staff it. I became one of three journalism/law practitioners in the group, and got my first opportunities to craft marketing and public relations programs for firms in the law, financial services, accounting and consulting fields. Since then I've worked with hundreds of lawyers and in-house counsel on marketing and service quality programs.

JDB: How did you move from a large PR agency to your own legal marketing practice?

Gallagher: There was actually an interim step in which I went in 1990 to a small, independent marketing consulting agency in Chicago that specialized in law firms and financial institutions. I felt I knew the PR end of things but wanted to be much better grounded in a wide range of marketing disciplines. A principal there, Debbie Bianucci (who is now executive director at the Bank Administration Institute), guided my efforts and gave me a better understanding of the full marketing mix. At that time I met Dave Baum, a well-known media personality in Chicago, who provided media and presentation training to corporate clients. He asked me, based on my journalism background, to join his group.

JDB: After working at various agencies, what practical steps did you take to become an entrepreneur and start your own firm?

Gallagher: **The most important thing was that I started out with two clients in hand. A law firm and a bank that were my clients both told me, "If you go off on your own, you've got our business."** Another important factor was that Merry Neitlich, a colleague who started in professional services marketing at the same time I did, was serving with me on the board of directors of the Legal Marketing Association, and we were able to form both a friendship and a consulting relationship. So I was able to start on my own with ready-made clients and a solid foundation of professional support. We formalized our partnership by founding [Extreme Marketing](#) in 1996. **The whole process was one of evolution, and in particular keeping my eyes and my mindset open to new opportunities.**

JDB: In your role with Extreme Marketing, what is your ongoing work with law firm clients?

Gallagher: My main work involves strategy, marketing consulting and client feedback. Through Dave Baum, I've retained the focus on media training. I've also been involved in developing branding platforms, marketing strategy and tactics, and training programs. I've worked with a variety of professional service organizations, but law firms have been my primary emphasis. I've also kept a strong external presence in the legal profession by writing for publications like *Legal Week*, published in London, England. I've also spoken frequently before professional organizations, and maintained an active membership in the Wisconsin Bar Association. All of these things keep me informed and involved in the latest trends, and of course they're also great networking and business development opportunities.

JDB: With all these activities, your career has recently taken a substantial new direction as well, hasn't it – specifically acting roles?

Gallagher: Well, it goes back to the point I made earlier on being open to new opportunities. As I did more media training, corporate clients began asking about my interest in doing voiceovers, specifically in things like training videos, streaming web video, public service announcements and commercials. I enjoyed the work and developed the talent for it, and soon it gained a momentum all its own. **I've had a six-year progression that's involved creating a voiceover demo, taking acting and improv classes, getting headshots and agents, appearing in TV and radio commercials and infomercials (seen and heard in ads for everything from Coca-Cola to George Foreman products), and appearing in several independent films.** People, including clients and potential clients, enjoy hearing about my acting career, especially recognizable things like being in *The Weatherman*, a Paramount/Gore Verbinski motion picture due out at the end of the year. I'm in a group therapy scene (paired with an Asian

"husband") with both Nicolas Cage and co-star Hope Davis. At this point I don't know where things will lead – but I'm loving every minute of it and enjoying development of this talent. Anyone who is interested can hear my voiceover demo online at www.annegallagher.com.

JDB: Not every J.D. can wind up in the movies, but do you have some final general advice for someone considering a career change from the law?

Gallagher: I've already emphasized openness to opportunity, and my opportunities have often been suggested by clients – in directions I might not have considered otherwise. The key to business development is to be *interested* in what others are saying, and not try so hard to be *interesting* to them. **I would add that as your career evolves you should try to understand your own personality and find ways to express it. For example, I learned early on in law school that, despite some aspects of litigation that didn't agree with me personally, I loved the fact that litigators ultimately are performers.** The way I've been able to combine that training with my original interest in the media has shown me that law school is ultimately about possibilities.