

Of Counsel: Ross's Reflections: A Long-time Leader in Legal Marketing Discusses His Craft



Ross Fishman has long been known as a **highly regarded pioneering professional** for his decades-long career in shaping how law firms understand marketing, differentiation, and strategic communication. But in recent years, as generative AI has swept through the legal industry, Fishman has engineered one of the savviest pivots of his career—**building a global speaking and training practice that helps lawyers, leaders, and entire firms navigate the fast-moving world of ChatGPT, AI governance, and technology-driven change.**

Part Two of our interview picks up where the first left off, exploring how a career spent decoding the psychology of lawyers and law firms uniquely prepared Fishman for this moment. His AI programs—which combine humor, urgency, and hands-on demonstrations—have become some of the most in-demand sessions in the profession. Whether he's guiding a small partnership retreat or addressing thousands at a conference, Fishman has developed a rare ability to demystify emerging tools while grounding his message in the practical realities of law firm life.

Fishman's transition into AI education isn't a departure from his branding work, but a natural evolution of it. Effective marketing has always required understanding the forces reshaping the marketplace, and today no force looms larger than artificial intelligence. In Fishman's view, the firms that thrive will be those that pair smart adoption with thoughtful messaging—ensuring clients see them not just as competent practitioners, but as

future-ready business partners. His AI workshops, therefore, are as much about culture change and client development as they are about technology.

In this installment, *Of Counsel* delves into how Fishman approaches AI training, what he's learned from speaking to thousands of lawyers on the topic, and why he believes this technological transition offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity for law firms to reinvent themselves. We also explore the craft behind his presentations—how he tailors

complex material to skeptical audiences, why humor matters more than ever, and how he keeps his programs fresh in a landscape that shifts by the month.

Whether readers are AI enthusiasts or cautious adopters, Fishman offers a perspective rooted in experience, curiosity, and optimism. Part Two shows a professional who hasn't just kept pace with an evolving industry—he's helping to lead it.

Seeing A Need ... and Filling it

Of Counsel: Let's talk about your speaking career. You've delivered more than 500 programs worldwide. How did that become such a central part of your work?

Ross Fishman: I love teaching, and you know how much I genuinely like lawyers. They're smart, curious, skeptical—exactly the kind of audience that keeps you sharp. Early on, I realized that if you could get an entire firm in one room and teach them how to think differently about marketing, you could change the trajectory of the firm overnight. That's so powerful.

I've presented to lawyers in perhaps 75 countries, and I still get excited every time. I've been invited back by many organizations twenty or thirty times, which is the best compliment you can get. My goal is always to make the conference organizer look brilliant for hiring me.

I spend more time than I should preparing—learning about the firm or organization, customizing every slide, and adding their firm's materials. One of my former college teaching assistants once told me, "*When they pay you to speak, they expect a show.*" That stuck. Lawyers can find accurate information anywhere, they can read an article—they come to conferences to be engaged. So I work hard to combine solid content with humor, stories, and real examples.

Sometimes I'll project screenshots of the attendees' own websites—30 or 40 of them—to show that 80% of them are dull and interchangeable. I have learned to do it without hurting anyone's feelings—it's really funny actually, so they laugh, and they learn. Using a joke, I've taught them that their bland brand and lookalike website isn't helping them stand out. That mix of education and entertainment is what keeps me coming back. And it's what keeps them inviting me back too. A little shtick can be used to make a powerful point.



OC: So much of your work is educational: branding, training, speaking. What drives that approach?

RF: I think it's respect. Lawyers are smart; they just haven't been taught marketing. If you show them the evidence—if you literally line up 30 screenshots of their competitors' skyline websites and ask, "Which one stands out?"—they get it instantly.

That's why my programs work. I don't sell them anything—I teach them. Once they understand the principles, they'll make the right decisions themselves. When I present extremely bold brand concepts, I get approval over 95 percent of the time, even from conservative firms, because by then they've learned the framework. They see that it's the right answer.

My job isn't to tell them what to do; it's to teach them enough to choose well.

OC: Your AI presentations have been especially popular lately. What's your approach?

RF: My approach is practical and positive. I try to make AI human. Most AI programs for lawyers focus on fear—hallucinations, plagiarism, ethics nightmares. That's not helpful. My message is,

"This is the most powerful tool developed in a century. Here's how to use it safely."

I take the opposite tack. AI is already here, it's here to stay, and it's an extraordinary tool. If we learn to use it safely and creatively, it can make us more efficient, more competitive, and even more profitable.

I've given 50 or 60 AI webinars and presentations in the past couple of years. I show lawyers how to use ChatGPT for drafting legal materials, analysis, correspondence, and marketing, step by step. And I keep the mood light and fun. Once people laugh, they relax. Then they're open to learning the real skills: how to draft an effective prompt, how to use it without breaching confidentiality, how to make it work for their practice.

I'll take a volunteer's bio and have ChatGPT rewrite it as a kindergartner, a limerick, a haiku, a pirate song, an Eminem rap, and a Taylor Swift ballad. The room *roars* with laughter—but they're also learning that the technology is powerful, accessible, and fun.

The older lawyers *always* come up afterward to say, "I signed up for ChatGPT during your session." That makes my day. That means I helped them get past the fear and feel empowered.

Ethics Education: Nothing to Groan About

OC: You've become known not just for marketing and AI presentations, but also for your ethics CLE programs.

How did that start, and what makes your approach different?

RF: I love speaking about ethics. In fact, most of my presentations qualify for ethics CLE credit. It's funny—when people hear "ethics CLE," they groan. I've heard it from thousands of lawyers over the years: *"Those are the programs we save for the end of the reporting cycle because they're so painful."* And

I get it. Too often, ethics presentations are either delivered by dry presenters who lecture lawyers as if they're misbehaving children, or by lawyers who just want another line on their resumé and haven't put in the work to make it engaging. It's all steak and no sizzle.

That's a shame, because ethics topics can be fascinating. They're full of drama—real stories, real mistakes, real consequences. They should be riveting. I try to make them that way. I tell stories, use humor, show examples. There's an endless

supply of wild and cautionary tales about what lawyers have done over the years, and you can learn a lot more from those than from someone who's reading their text-heavy slides out loud.

I also like to teach marketing within the context of the ethics rules. That way, lawyers know exactly where the boundaries are—what they can do safely and what crosses the line. Most of my audiences are lawyers at business firms that are extremely risk averse. They're the least likely people in the world to violate an ethics rule. But they're often so cautious that it holds them back from doing effective marketing. If I can show them how to be bold and ethical, that's a win.

And the truth is, ethical scrutiny varies across practice types. Consumer-facing practices like personal injury, criminal defense, or family law draw greater regulatory attention, as they should—those clients are more vulnerable. Corporate clients don't need that same level of protection from advertising abuses. But regardless of the practice, every lawyer benefits from understanding where the bright lines really are.

All of my artificial intelligence presentations also qualify for ethics credit, because the ethical issues surrounding AI are so important—and evolving so quickly. I walk lawyers through how to use ChatGPT and similar tools safely, how to avoid plagiarism, confidentiality breaches, or misrepresentation. I want them to walk out confident, not fearful.

For me, ethics presentations shouldn't be scolding; they should be empowering. When lawyers leave saying, "That was actually fun," I know I've done my job.

OC: You're unusually passionate about teaching. What keeps that spark alive after all these years?

RF: Gratitude. I have spent 35 years with the incredible gift of getting to do work I love, with people I deeply respect, in an industry that's endlessly fascinating. I've helped countless firms turn around their reputations, attract better clients, make tons of money, and recruit the lawyers they most want to keep. I've spoken to tens of thousands of lawyers from more than 150 countries and watched the lightbulb go on when they "get it." That's incredibly rewarding.

When I'm on stage, I feel responsible for the organizer's reputation. If I do my job well, they look great, the audience learns something that helps them make more money and enjoy their practice more, and everyone leaves energized. That's a privilege. I never take it for granted.

And honestly, I just like lawyers. They challenge me. They're my people. I enjoy their company. They're bright, analytical, funny. When they relax and start laughing, you know they're learning.

Fractional CMO

OC: You've recently expanded into something you call "Fractional CMO" work. Can you explain what that is and why it's become such an important part of what you do?

RF: Sure. Over the years, I kept meeting smaller and midsized firms that wanted serious, strategic marketing—but couldn't justify hiring a full-

time chief marketing officer or a large in-house team. The partners might handle marketing themselves between client matters, or delegate it to an assistant who also does HR and billing. They were competing against AmLaw 100 firms with 100-marketer departments—web teams, PR professionals, data analysts, social media staff,

entire departments who were focused exclusively on entering awards and directories—and no matter how talented those smaller-firm lawyers were, they couldn't match that machine.

Fractional CMO work solves that problem. We essentially give them a world-class marketing department, but only for the slice they actually need. My team and I act as their outsourced CMO, marketing director, and creative agency rolled into one. We handle strategy, branding, websites, social media, PR, recruiting materials—everything a big-firm marketing team would do—on a part-time or project basis, at a price they can afford.

It's powerful because it levels the playing field. A 25-lawyer boutique can now compete head-to-head with firms one hundred times their size. They get the same depth of strategy, design, and analytics that the big firms have, without the overhead. And because we've worked with hundreds of firms—from solos to 1,000-lawyer giants—we can bring proven ideas, templates, and systems that work.

The results have been amazing. Firms that used to rely solely on word-of-mouth are suddenly building real visibility—winning 10 times more new-business competitions, dominating their markets, attracting better laterals, raising rates. They're finally able to tell their stories the way they deserve to be told. I find it especially satisfying because these are firms filled with great lawyers who just needed the right platform. Watching them grow and thrive after decades under the radar—that's incredibly rewarding.

OC: Looking back, what would you say to the young litigator you once were?

RF: I'd say, "Follow what excites you." I was lucky enough to stumble into a career that feels like a perfect fit for who I am. I get to combine strategy, creativity, and teaching. I get to help enhance the success of people I really like.

After 35 years, 75 countries, 200 brands, and 500 speeches, I still feel like the luckiest guy in the world.

—Steven T. Taylor

The logo for Fishman Marketing features the word "FISHMAN" in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. A white fish silhouette is integrated into the letter "A". Below "FISHMAN" is the word "MARKETING" in a smaller, bold, dark blue sans-serif font.