

The Art Of Summer Seduction

How Greenberg Traurig changed its allure.

By Jessica M. Walker

MIAMI - Virginia Iglesia, a second year law student at Emory University in Atlanta, is exactly the type of talent Greenberg Traurig's aggressive new recruitment program was designed to lure.

Iglesia, who's from Miami, had offers to do summer associate stints in either Miami or New York City and felt torn. Greenberg was one of the firms that made her an offer.

She decided to go with Greenberg. The deciding factor was that Greenberg is allowing her to split her time between the firm's Miami and New York City offices without requiring her to reinterview with the New York office, as usually is required in such arrangements.

"I think for me the biggest difference is they were making decisions very quickly," said Iglesia, who noted that none of the New York firms were able to go anywhere in the country." offer her a similar split time arrangement.

Staying ahead in the intense battle to recruit the best young lawyers led Greenberg Traurig to a new, faster and more colorful approach on law school campuses.

During the recruiting season for 2005 summer associates, the 1,200 lawyer firm, which ranked 25 in gross revenues on this year's Am Law 100 list a ranking of the nation's wealthiest firms revamped its approach to recruiting summer associates and associates fresh out of law school. Greenberg's new approach included catchier written materials, on the spot callbacks and greater flexibility for prospective hires.

Snaring law students such as Iglesia who has a master's degree in mass communication and helped create a bilingual portal on the Internet is what the new recruiting approach was geared for.

"We want to attract someone who's entrepreneurial in nature, someone who's independent," said Matthew B. Gorson, the firm's national operating shareholder, based at Greenberg's Miami office. "This is not a firm with a bureaucratic environment. This is a firm that wants to give its younger lawyers a lot of responsibility."

The recruiting changes were spurred, by the increased competitiveness in recruiting that came in the 1990s and by the firm's new focus on law school hiring, as

opposed to lateral recruiting. Before that, Greenberg could count on scooping up many of the top law students coming out of University of Miami.

But the 1990s brought "the greedy lawyer, dotcomcraze, and the demand for law students became intense," Gorson said. "Big firms started hiring larger groups, and University of Miami graduates could at the same time that law school recruiting became more competitive, Greenberg began to grow, expanding from 300 lawyers in seven offices seven years ago to 1,200 lawyers in 22 offices.

The need to stay ahead in the intense battle to recruit the best young lawyers led Greenberg to a more colorful approach on law school campuses.

During that period of rapid expansion, Greenberg relied more on lateral hiring to increase its ranks. But when that growth stabilized, the firm renewed its focus on law school hiring.

Instant Decisions

Carol Allen, Greenberg's New York based chief recruitment officer, said the new program was partially born out of the firm's lateral recruiting tactics, which emphasized the firm's culture in luring candidates. While other firms focus on expanding through mergers, Allen said, Greenberg was looking to hire individual lawyers who could fit into the culture of the firm.

In its effort to expand law school recruiting, Greenberg last fall deployed senior attorneys to conduct interviews on 30 campuses around the country. And it let law students know at the end of the interview whether they were going to be on the shortlist.

The attorneys Greenberg sent out to conduct the campus interviews were "very senior" members of the firm who were empowered to make an instant decision. "One of the things our firm is known for is making decisions quick and lack of bureaucracy," Allen said. "We wanted that to show in the interviewing process."

In addition, all interviewees received a small, hard cover book, filled with photos and slogans illustrated by images. One such slogan was illustrated by splattered tomato. It read "Squash bureaucracy."

"You could look at it as being very juvenile, or you could look at it as being very different," Gorson said. "I think we got a huge buzz on campuses. It's an innovative way of sitting there and talking about the serious business of law."

The marketing and new approach to interviewing

had a dual purpose to reflect the firm's culture while appealing to the young law students.

Raffaele Murdocca, southeast regional managing director of BCG Attorney Search, a national recruiting firm, predicted that approaches such as Greenberg's could become more common in coming years.

"Years ago, I would have said [law firms] don't market very well," Murdocca said. "They would just come on campus and you have to know who they are. There was no real branding. I think in a lot of cases, young students end up in law firms where they really didn't know what the culture was."

Citing statistics that 40 percent of associates leave their first job in two years, Murdocca said that Greenberg's effort to get its culture out in the open could be a solution to retention problems. "I think it's something new. I think they are on the front lines of this. If they see it as successful, I think this trend will continue."

But not all law firms see themselves moving in that direction. John A. Camp, a shareholder in Carlton Fields' Miami office and a member of the firm's recruiting and retention committee, doubted that his firm would go in the direction of a nontraditional marketing campaign.

"It might be something that other firms are doing, but I don't see Carlton Fields doing it," Camp said. "We feel pretty comfortable with our place. We are who we market ourselves to be. I don't see us going to specific marketing gimmicks."

J. Thomas Cardwell, chairman of Akerman Senterfitt, said his firm also plans to rely on more traditional recruiting tactics.

"I don't see any dramatic changes from the fundamental idea that you go up there, you meet them and you try to find the best people for your firm and your culture," Cardwell said. "We don't have 'This is Akerman culture' brochures there, but we describe that to students as we talk to them."

Using its new campaign, Greenberg ultimately recruited 55 students as 2005 summer associates for 15 of its offices.