

VOIR DIRE

November 30, 2009

It's the thought that counts

Clients of Los Angeles-based litigation boutique White O'Connor Fink & Brenner know to expect the unexpected when it comes to holiday gifts.

The 20-attorney firm prides itself on giving gifts that are playful, funny and, most important, unique.

Three years ago, the firm ordered more than 1,000 customized nesting dolls — wooden dolls that open to reveal a series of ever smaller dolls inside. The outer doll was painted with the view from the firm's offices, the inner ones with the visages of the firm's partners, accurate down to eye color and lawyerly ties.

"We want to articulate that we're a different kind of firm," said Andrew White, who co-founded the firm in 1996 with attorney Michael O'Connor. "We're serious about our work, but we don't take ourselves too seriously."

The fact that the firm is relatively small and has many clients in the entertainment industry gives it some leeway to take chances, White said. Last year, the firm sent out small plush heads that, when squeezed, played recorded messages. ("The only kind of party I like is an ex parte.") In 1999, the firm had a "Create-Your-Own-Lawyer" flip book made out of attorney photos that could be mixed and matched with hilarious, even grotesque, results.

"A lot of people really get a kick out of it," White said of the firm's tradition of out-there holiday gifts. "We hear from people who appreciate that we do something different."

Most law firms play it safe when it comes to holiday gifts, said Gail Paul, managing partner of Boston marketing company Next Level Promotions. Food and wine are the popular choices, but there's something to be said for thinking outside the box.

"If you do something unusual, people remember that," she said.