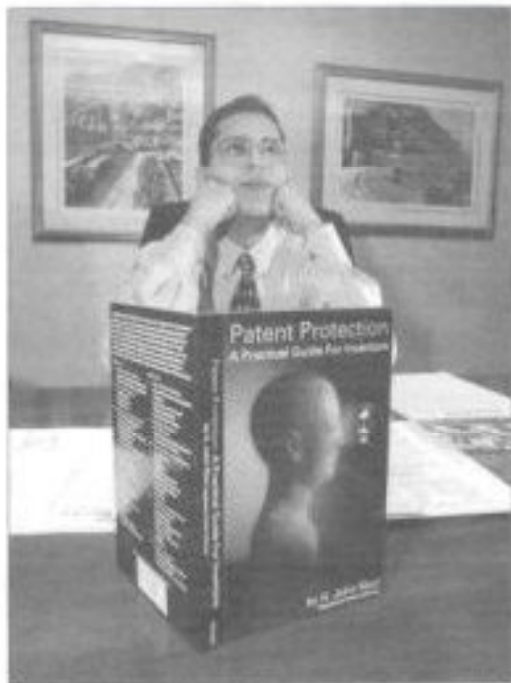


## Branded: Firm braces for new idea economy



Attorney H. John Rizvi wants his firm to be well known for intellectual property law.

BY JOHN T. FAKLER

First came spin doctors. Now come spin lawyers.

For Plantation attorney H. John Rizvi, turning ideas into patents and trademarks is a no-brainer. But making branding work for entrepreneurial lawyers like himself is a bit more muddled. It's an "idea" that's raised questions - and certain obstacles - especially in Florida, where the Bar has imposed limitations on how client business can be drummed up.

Rizvi's firm, which specializes in intellectual property law, hopes to become known by its registered trademark, "The Idea Attorneys," and its Internet domain, [www.ideaattorneys.com](http://www.ideaattorneys.com), instead of by the last names of the partners.

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Effective brands for lawyers are coming of age, Rizvi said. It's just taking a while. But that's given Rizvi and partner Glenn Gold a jump on the competition.

**'We try harder, we're smarter or we're better. That doesn't establish yourself with an identity where you get referrals.'**

H. John Rizvi

Partner, The Idea Attorneys

"In any other firm, you have people that practice real estate law, divorce law, commercial law, criminal law. Any time you try to brand a firm, somebody objects," he said. "One of the reasons we can cut through and brand ourselves better is the synergism that we have working together. We're friends."

Generic brands for firms don't work, he said. "We try harder, we're smarter or we're better. That doesn't establish yourself with an identity where you get referrals," he said. "Lawyers are actually referring clients to us because we are branding ourselves as specialists."

While brand marketing brings to mind a variety of images such as soft drinks, restaurants, laundry detergent and tennis shoes, few envision law firms.

That may soon change.

It wasn't until the 1977 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Bates v. Arizona* that restrictions on attorneys advertising were eased. Tough advertising rules of The Florida Bar, and most other states, as well as conservatism within the legal profession - particularly at larger, established law firms - have held back the pace of law firm branding efforts, Rizvi said.

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"As an intellectual property attorney, I am constantly protecting the rights of companies to exploit the value of their brand identities," he said. "I think it's time my firm cultivates a unique branding strategy of its own."

That's been an uphill fight, however. A compromise of sorts was reached with The Florida Bar that allows Rizvi and Gold to trademark "The Idea Attorneys," but only after citing their two last names.

Not everyone thinks it's a novel idea.

"Branding for lawyers is already being done," said Jim Cassel of Capitalink, an investment banking firm in Miami. Cassel was a managing partner of the Miami office of the law firm Broad & Cassel, where he was also on the executive committee and led that firm's corporate and securities practice.

The Ticket Clinic is one example of a branded idea for a law firm. In Miami, one intellectual property firm goes by the name of

Invention Submission Corp.

Rizvi acknowledged that questionable motives of some firms may have led to tough rules by the Bar. But old values, where last names are prized recruiting vehicles, is holding back the rest of the profession from making "names" for themselves, he said.

"Difficult Cumbersome and Long, P.A. is not an effective branding strategy unless you have a hundred years to wait."

Patent work makes up the bulk of his firm's business, Rizvi said. It's one of the few specialties where you need an engineering degree and a law degree to practice.

Gold, who worked for Motorola before partnering with Rizvi, said the recent stock market slump and dot.com bust hasn't shaken the confidence of attorneys practicing "the law of creativity."

"The legal arena relating to protecting new ideas has practically exploded overnight."

### A road less traveled

H. John Rizvi, an adjunct professor at Nova Southeastern University's College of Law and author of "Patent Protection: A Practical Guide for Inventors," gave up big bucks at one of those prestigious New York law firms.

Cutting his teeth in the trade at the 120-year-old intellectual property firm Fish & Neave in New York City, the father of two young girls chose to leave the firm and relocate. It was a tough decision.

"Fish & Neave's client roster goes back to such well-known inventors as Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and the Wright Brothers. We don't have that kind of history behind our new firm. We need to distinguish ourselves immediately."

Rizvi took the usual harassment when he left.

"People at the firm – the partners, the associates – were like, 'you're making close to \$200,000 a year. What the hell are you doing? You're leaving, you have no clients, you don't even have a firm and you're going down to Florida.'"

New Yorkers view Florida differently than natives, Rizvi said. But the attorney, who later teamed up with Gold, an old University of Miami law school buddy, said the region has certain advantages. Rents are cheaper than in Manhattan. And much of his business is done over the transom. There's no need for power lunches or fancy offices anymore. His greatest tool, he said, is his laptop.

"The hours, and how hard I work, has not changed," he said.

– John T. Fakler

Gold said, adding that more than half the intellectual property firms in the state were non-existent even six years ago.

Business method patents that include previously unpatentable software and Internet-related patents have taken off, he said.

That's taken up some of the slack in South Florida, a region devoid of a strong manufacturing base, Rizvi said.

"As a matter of fact, the recent downturn in the economy is actually making legal protection of new ideas even more important as startups try to snare limited venture funding for their business plans."

Florida never attracted a lot of patent attorneys, Rizvi noted.

"While the client base has quadrupled, the attorney base is slightly greater than it was."

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