

[back to article](#)



Printed on page BM1

Flashy advertisements draw clients to Sarasota law firm

By [Todd Ruger](#)

Published: Sunday, October 18, 2009 at 1:00 a.m.

In one of the starchiest professions, lawyer David Haenel stands out like neon as the area's most innovative self-promoter.

His car glows at night with his firm's Web site, [fightyourtickets.com](#). The lighted vehicle wrap uses cutting-edge technology that the creator says has been installed on only 30 vehicles nationwide.

Almost every night, people roll down their window in traffic and ask about the car or tell of a friend who might need their help. Haenel tosses them a key chain with his firm's phone number.

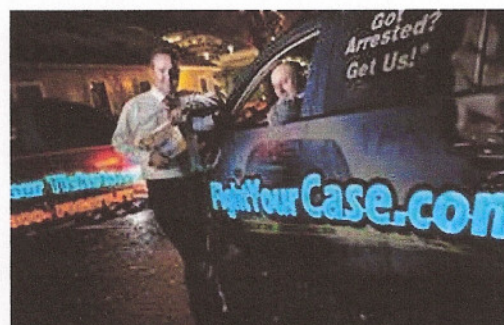
He has two Segway personal transporters displaying his firm's logo, has 30 Web sites, hired an in-house marketer focusing on blogs and registered a trademarked slogan: "Got arrested? Get us."

These are not the traditional, sedate phone book advertisements or television spots from lawyers in suits next to a Doric column. And they have drawn grumbles of criticism from some peers who say such advertising tarnishes the dignity of the profession.

But Finebloom & Haenel's marketing push has paid off. Since the effort began five years ago, the firm has expanded from one to five offices, even as the economic downturn has many law firms struggling.

Haenel's firm grew from two to six attorneys, and now he has a network of attorneys that lets the firm take traffic ticket cases statewide. Haenel wants to go nationwide.

"I never stop," Haenel said. "It's my hobby. I don't golf, I just grow my business."



STAFF PHOTO / THOMAS BENDER

David Haenel, left, and Darren Finebloom advertise their law firm's multiple Web sites with vehicle wraps that glow in the dark.

Haenel has a good reputation as a DUI and traffic attorney, and while showy, the advertising goes a long way toward educating the general public about their rights to fight traffic cases, said Sarasota lawyer Tom Hudson, a competitor of Finebloom & Haenel.

"The people who grumble about the way David does things are the people who can't compete with him, and they didn't think of the things he did," Hudson said.

Haenel, 38, and law partner Darren Finebloom left more traditional roles at the State Attorney's office and Public Defender's office to start the firm in 2004.

They focused on traffic tickets and a unique branding strategy. They turned their cars into rolling advertisements, and knew it worked when they parked outside the jail on weekends and started getting calls from DUI arrestees.

As the firm grew, so did the branding. Haenel's interest in computers and new technology gave him an edge.

Haenel got the idea for the Segways on a trip to California, convincing a company who had them to sell two to him for \$500 each.

"He is a little bit geeky," Finebloom said. "When he's on his Segway I always ask if he's got his pocket protector."

Finebloom & Haenel has more than 275 domain names, some aimed at stopping the copycat sites that have popped up across the nation.

While he is sleeping, his sites will generate five or six leads on potential clients because he pays a company to have a live person ready to chat with any visitor to his Web sites.

"This is the way of the future," Haenel said.

Haenel's aggressive online push even led lawyers like well-established criminal defense Derek Byrd to start their own Web sites.

Haenel says staking out prime territory online and with the phones will keep the success coming.

This story appeared in print on page BM1