

Add Value to Marketers

Six Ways to Help the Firm's Professionals to Help You Build Your Practice

For decades, the legal profession was removed from the challenges faced by other industries. No hostile takeovers. No need to do much marketing or obsess about the bottom line. In fact, generations of attorneys prospered despite not having any significant business development skills. They won business the old-fashioned way: they inherited it.

Today's highly competitive business climate has changed everything. From pressures to reduce costs and improve work product quality to risk sharing and the use of technology, clients are demanding that their law firms bring business principles to the practice of law. At the same time, law firms have seen associate salaries skyrocket, making it extremely challenging to provide law firm clients with high-quality, reasonably priced services.

In this climate, law firm leaders are justifiably increasing their emphasis on marketing initiatives and their marketing departments. Evidence of this new emphasis on marketing can be seen in the change in the size and caliber of firms' marketing departments. Just a few years ago, marketing departments of one or two people were the norm at even the largest law firms. Today, it is fairly common for a large firm's marketing department to have up to 20 staff members.

As the size of marketing departments has grown, so have the caliber, influence, and compensation of its members. The LawMarketing Portal, an online job listings resource for the legal marketing community, lists salaries as high as \$250,000 for chief marketing officers at the largest law firms. The influence of marketing professionals within their firms has also increased dramatically. For example, a recent press release from O'Melveny & Myers announced that the firm's new managing director of business development will play a significant role in the firm's overall strategy as a member of the firm's "office of the chair," the executive body that manages the firm. Up until a few years ago, the idea of having a marketing person play a substantial role in the management of a firm was rare.

Law firm leaders are also focusing more intently on their attorneys' ability to expand existing client relationships and to develop new business for their firms. Unfortunately, when it comes to sales and marketing, many accomplished attorneys lack the skill set needed to effectively develop new business and use existing client relationships

to expand their practices. This is where an effective marketing professional's expertise can prove invaluable. In fact, there are many ways in which members of your marketing department can help you save time, expand your practice, boost your reputation, and, in general, make your life a whole lot easier.

As is the case in any relationship, however, the value that you receive depends largely on the value that you give. Here are six ways you can help your marketing department help you:

1. Know what they do. Many larger firms have formal orientations for new associates and laterals that include meeting with members of the marketing department. In addition, many firms regularly ask their marketing staffs to make presentations to firm practice groups to inform them of the marketing and communication services available.

If your firm doesn't do this, take the initiative and schedule a meeting to learn about your marketing department's capabilities. While their roles and responsibilities can vary dramatically from firm to firm, most law firm marketers can help you:

- Develop a personal business plan that ties your career goals with those of your practice group and your firm;
- Build your practice by focusing you on the right opportunities;
- Solidify existing relationships by surveying clients and overseeing any necessary follow-up;
- Set up monitoring and measurement functions to capture the information needed to prove return on investment;
- Learn more about your clients and their industries before important meetings and on a regular basis thereafter;
- Differentiate your practice and your firm from the competition;
- Save time by improving, organizing, and coordinating responses to requests for proposals;
- Increase your success ratio by ensuring that you deliver the right message during client presentations;
- Plan client-focused seminars and events;
- Schedule and prepare for seminars, speeches, and media interviews;
- Let the rest of the firm know about new clients, new matters, and your successes;
- Participate in trade and industry organizations;

- Coordinate related press releases, articles, firm newsletters, and client mailings; and
- Increase cross-selling opportunities by developing a centralized database of valuable business development information and by facilitating the exchange of information between attorneys and practice groups.

Take the time to learn more about each of these collateral marketing activities and the economics behind them. How much do they cost? When is it appropriate to use them? Do they reach the right target audience? Do they support your firm's objectives? Asking these questions and taking the appropriate steps will help you put your business development efforts and your firm's marketing activities into proper perspective. You'll be perceived as a team player by management and the marketing department. Most important, these efforts will increase the chances that you'll get the marketing support you deserve when you need it most!

2. Know what they don't do. With all of the benefits that marketing departments provide, it is not their responsibility to develop business directly. Still, many attorneys fall into the trap of relying too heavily on their marketing departments to help them grow their client base. Unfortunately, there are no short cuts to successful rainmaking. It requires a commitment from you, and that means face-to-face networking, client development, and client relationship management.

3. Understand your position and theirs. As you begin to develop expectations about how the marketing department can help you, keep in mind that your marketing department can't be all things to all attorneys. For example, early in your career, the marketing department might help develop your biographical information, place this data on the firm's Web site, distribute announcement cards, and schedule business development and client service training for you. They might also help you build your network, join associations, and improve your speaking skills. For partners, in addition to helping you with your own activities, the marketing department will also be involved in determining the strategic direction of the firm.

Also, bear in mind that the members of your marketing department are trained professionals, not clerical workers. In many instances, they are involved in planning and implementing the strategic objectives of the firm as a whole. Consequently, the most senior members of firm management often perceive them as highly valued advisers. Although they may not possess a law degree (many of them do, however), they have particular experiences and skills that most attorneys do not. They may not be able to negotiate a leveraged buyout, but many of them can perform scenario-based strategic planning to help you and your firm get to where you want to go.

4. Speak a common language. Just as you might be forced to choose among a number of competing client opportunities, so too must your marketing director choose among a number of competing projects. The difference is that your marketing director is probably working under a much more clearly defined budget than you are. This means that they must consider the costs and benefits or return on investment of every marketing activity. So before you ask them for help with your next big marketing idea, analyze it from your marketing director's perspective: How much is it going to cost? What is the return that you expect to achieve on this investment? You may not know all of the answers, but by asking the questions, you show that you understand the business of practicing law. You also make it much easier for your marketing director to make apples-to-apples comparisons with several other potential marketing activities.

5. Get them involved early. You preach to your clients to involve you in important deals or litigation as early in the process as possible.

Now, change hats and heed the golden rule: Do unto your marketing director as you would have your clients do unto you. Whether it's firmwide strategy or an individual attorney project, the earlier you involve your marketing department, the better the product you will receive.

For example, before you begin to chart the course of your firm's future, your marketing staff can perform a wide range of market research and arm you with the information you need to make intelligent decisions. Also, when you receive a request for proposal, make sure the marketing department knows about it and has a copy well in advance of the due date for your response. If you schedule an important meeting with a prospective client, your next call should be to your marketing director, who can help you research the company and prepare for the meeting.

6. Spread the word. Let's face it: Whether it's the adoption of new technology or creative marketing solutions, the last place you'll find most lawyers is on the cutting edge. Like dedicated missionaries slowly spreading the gospel from person to person, most law firm marketers must work their magic on one attorney at a time. You can put yourself ahead of the pack by making the marketer's job easier. For example, if your marketing department hits a home run on an important proposal or runs the best seminar you've ever had, make sure you go out of your way to tell other attorneys in your firm about it. You ask your clients for testimonials—give one to the members of your marketing department.

Also, if you're a new attorney or recently hired lateral, consider volunteering to interview firm veterans and write success stories or case studies about interesting matters they've handled.

The experience will be invaluable for you and for the firm. You'll quickly acquire important knowledge that you can use during business development meetings to better match firm capabilities with client needs. You'll establish relationships with influential individuals within your firm, which can't hurt your career development. And the marketers will be able to use the stories you write to develop a fertile cross-selling program and to train the next generation of new attorneys. Ultimately, by helping your marketing department spread the word, you're really helping them make your business development efforts that much easier. In the words of Harry Beckwith, author of *Selling the Invisible*, "Marketing is not a department—it is your business."

In an industry known for its conservative ways, marketing directors have often faced an uphill battle to effect change within their firms. However, with the proliferation of multidisciplinary practices and the consolidation of outside counsel by Fortune 1000 legal departments, attorneys and their firms are increasingly relying on their marketing departments to keep them ahead of the pack. If you haven't done so already, get to know the members of your marketing department and discover the many ways in which they can help your practice succeed.

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