

MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR LAW FIRMS— MARKETING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND SALES

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In today's competitive environment, law firms of all sizes must be forward-looking and up to the challenge to change. To be strategic and gain a competitive edge, firms must focus on building strong client relationships and providing remarkable service. But the strong analytical skills and risk-averse temperament that makes for a good legal practitioner are often different than those that foster successful marketing, business development, and client service. Since practice development and client service are not taught in law schools, the challenge for law firms is to cultivate relationship-development and marketing skills in all of their professionals, not just their lawyers.

In the legal community, marketing professionals have been leading the effort to link business development and client service. In the process, they are creating integrated services that help convert marketing strategies into revenue by supporting lawyers through all stages of the business cycle—marketing, client and business development, and client service and satisfaction.

Evolving Marketing Function

In the early to mid-1990s, law firm marketing focused on the client. In the process, marketing became less promotional and more strategic. Today, to lead strategic marketing initiatives, savvy firms are attracting and retaining strong marketing professionals, giving

them increased responsibility, authority, and compensation. Thus, despite recent economy-driven cutbacks in law firms, marketing departments and budgets generally have increased.

Sought-after marketing and business-development professionals may come from within the legal community or from other industries, but, regardless of background, the most successful are highly strategic and relentlessly client-focused. Many of these professionals bring years of related experience formulating strategies for developing new market opportunities and expanding existing ones. The result: these highly skilled professionals have a direct impact on strategic growth and on the way firms provide services to key clients.

Natural Progression to a More Effective Model

As law firms have evolved and clients have become more sophisticated, law firms have begun assessing the effectiveness of their marketing programs. Discovering that their business-development efforts have been less effective than their marketing and communications initiatives, they have begun to study how other industries and their own clients have approached the related challenges of marketing and communications, business development, and client service.

What is emerging from this reflection is a new model for the marketing function within law firms. There are many variations, and each firm must look at its culture, its practice mix, and its resources to determine the best fit for meeting its objectives. In some firms, marketing and communications, business development, sales, and client service will form the program's foundation; in others, training and professional development will be added to that platform. Regardless of the complexion of the marketing program, the focus will be constant collaboration among all contributors to the marketing process.

Functional Areas of a Marketing Program

Marketing and communications provide the services and products traditionally associated with professional services marketing—orchestrating the firm's branding and other visibility initiatives, including developing and managing collateral materials, and managing diverse client programs.

Professional and practice development will be responsible for formal training that helps lawyers become better practice planners and business developers, and will work with the sales professional(s) and practice group leaders to create industry or specialty practice plans.

Business development and sales will help lawyers qualify leads and prepare for sales

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calls (e.g., coaching, undertaking research). These professionals will focus on new and existing key accounts, attend appropriate sales calls, and manage and motivate lawyers' follow-up efforts. As firms develop and integrate this function, they'll need to keep in mind that the goal is to coach attorneys on effective business development skills—not just to hire a “salesperson.” Lawyers often are surprised to learn that it can take from twelve to eighteen months to progress through the “sales-cycle” and obtain the first assignment from a new client.

It is a significant development in legal marketing that law firm leaders are recognizing the importance of integrated marketing, professional development, and sales functions. The emphasis on highly skilled, experienced marketing professionals can only help foster stronger business development cultures and a better return on the marketing investment. Firms that respond to this progression by shifting their marketing strategies will be ready when their top clients are targeted by experienced marketing and sale professionals at other law firms—an increasing reality of a more sophisticated professional services marketing universe. ♦

Zeughauser Group is a consulting firm that collaborates with law firm leaders to increase profitability, enhance market position, and strengthen organizational culture. For more information, please visit www.zeughausergroup.com.

Mozhgan Mizban specializes in strategic marketing plans for law firms, their individual offices, and their practice groups, and in customized client service programs and interviews. She has led the in-house marketing departments of Cooley Godward; Nossaman, Guthner, Knox & Elliott; and Hopkins & Carley. A founding member of the Bay Area Chapter of the Law Firm Marketing Association, she served as its 1994 president. In 2001 she was honored with the Rella Lossy Professional Achievement Award for her contributions to the practice of law firm marketing.



Norm Rubenstein has twenty-five years of cumulative marketing and communications experience. For his work at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, he was honored with the 2002 Marketing Directors Forum/Spherion Marketing Director of the Year Award. Before joining Orrick, he headed Norm Rubenstein Marketing & Communications, consulting on strategic marketing planning, advertising programs, and organizational effectiveness. Norm has served as national president of the Legal Marketing Association (LMA) as well as president of its Mid-Atlantic Chapter.



Lonnie Zwerin has more than twenty-five years of experience as a consultant and an in-house marketing and communications officer. Prior to joining Zeughauser Group, she directed marketing strategy and implementation for Heller Ehrman White & McAuliffe and Pillsbury Madison & Sutro. In 1997 she was awarded the first Rella Lossy Professional Achievement Award from the Bay Area Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association (formerly NALFMA) in recognition of her contributions to the practice of law firm marketing.

