



## Building a Sophisticated Marketing Function: Kyle Heath's Contribution to Foley & Lardner's Strategic Growth

**S**eemingly reserved on the surface, Kyle Heath proves that looks can be deceiving. Foley & Lardner LLP's CMO is, in many ways, the consummate people person—a professional who adds great value to his firm by interacting with and mentoring his team members, and by building alliances inside and outside the firm. “Building and developing teams is by far what I love most about my job,” says the 42-year-old former music student, who changed his major to business once he realized that his scholarship-worthy voice and piano talent might not lead to job security after college. “Marketing was a natural concentration for me because I needed an outlet for my creativity.”

When Foley & Lardner hired him as director of marketing in 2001, the firm was eager both to expand beyond its existing regional reputation and to deepen its footprint in certain practice areas, Heath says. Firm leadership knew that to help it pursue its national aspirations, it needed to build a centralized marketing department. Crafting that department was the task with which they charged Heath at the outset because, according to him, Foley & Lardner appreciated that a centralized department would provide the structure and the glue that the ten or so marketing staff on board at the time would need, given that they were spread across various offices. Heath had helped grow the advertising agency where he had worked previously, and on his watch, Foley & Lardner's marketing team has expanded to 45 professionals who work in concert to serve 1,000 lawyers in 21 locations. Early on, Heath assembled a creative services group within the Marketing Department, eliminating the need for Foley & Lardner to hire outside advertising agencies, and he followed that decision by also launching specialized internal groups for marketing, public relations, and database work.

From his office in Chicago, Heath recounts the evolution of Foley & Lardner's marketing function since his arrival at the firm, and it is readily apparent that identifying the firm's needs and building a team that could address those needs in ways that exceeded the firm's initial expectations was a learning experience for him as well as for the firm.



He had no idea what he was in for when he took the Foley & Lardner job, Heath confesses. “I had never thought about a career in legal marketing; I didn't even know such a field existed.” He recalls that when a recruiter called him at the advertising agency where he worked, he had no intention of leaving. “But I really enjoyed the people I interviewed with at Foley.” Soon after he joined the firm, the challenges

and opportunities confronting him became apparent. Less than six months after he was hired, Heath was promoted to replace Foley & Lardner's departing CMO.

Now eight years into the job, Heath recalls with fondness that one of the things he loved most at Foley & Lardner from the beginning was being privy to the firm's most strategic conversations. He had not enjoyed the same access to the inner workings of the clients he had worked with at the ad agency, so he set out to build and empower a marketing team that could contribute to Foley & Lardner's strategic conversations, not just listen in on them. He knew that building that kind of team would take work, because another early lesson for him had been that law firms often take longer to make decisions than most types of organizations with which he had worked before. “The decentralization of the power base slows down decision-making. That becomes a challenge when you want or need to implement change quickly,” he says, acknowledging this is a reality for most of his CMO colleagues industry-wide, and not peculiar to Foley & Lardner. Heath's instinct that he and his team had to learn ways to operate within the law firm's decision-making model was dead on, and he says he learned quickly that “Once the Foley partnership buys into an idea, it is extremely supportive and enabling.”

“Certainly, I didn't have full credibility starting out. It was an attitude of ‘Let's wait and see what Kyle can bring to the table,’” he recalls,

adding, “I saw very early on that to be successful, I had to cultivate relationships and make sure that my team’s vision was aligned with the firm’s vision.” To foster buy-in for his team’s initiatives, Heath developed alliances and close working relationships with firm leaders—both lawyers and business professionals. Heath singles out Foley & Lardner’s Executive Director and COO, Darrell Ohlhauser, as a particularly close partner. “Darrell really believed in the firm’s vision, and he saw that the solutions I was proposing supported that vision,” Heath says. “He and other key leaders became supportive and helped drive my initiatives through,” he adds, emphasizing his admiration for Ohlhauser’s fairness and thoughtful decision-making.

When Heath joined Foley & Lardner, the firm was eager for an expanded marketing function and for a team that would handle essential marketing initiatives. So at the outset, his growing department took a “blocking and tackling” approach. As the team delivered creative solutions that met Foley & Lardner’s basic needs, Heath gained credibility to advocate for an increasingly sophisticated marketing function. One of the department’s early creations was a firm-wide centralized call center to respond to lawyers’ requests for marketing materials. Any Foley & Lardner partner anywhere in the world could call the center and have his or her marketing need met immediately, be it a request for the marketing team to produce a customized brochure, make a revision to the lawyer’s biography on the firm’s website, or provide research assistance in preparation for a pitch, Heath explains. “The instant gratification of the call center was really an eye-opener for the firm. The partners saw it as a great solution and a great idea, and they were willing to let me work on other new ideas after that.” Recently, Heath helped launch an entirely new team at Foley & Lardner whose responsibility is to handle the hundreds of events the firm organizes worldwide. “It was great that we were able to respond in an innovative way that benefits everyone,” Heath says of the events team, which is helping alleviate the marketing department’s ever-growing workload, prompted in part by the recession.

Heath also worked diligently to earn the firm’s confidence regarding his staffing decisions. “I hire well,” says the CMO, which he considers one of his greatest managerial strengths, acknowledging his knack for hiring the right people and matching them with the right jobs. Gaining the freedom to assemble a strong team has enabled him to create a department that can make significant contributions to the firm, Heath says. “I want my team members to truly partner with attorneys and really add value to their discussions.” It is no coincidence that he assigned his team members to practice groups rather than to geographic markets. Heath believes that the more depth and expertise the marketers have in the particular practices they serve, the more they can contribute to and participate in meaningful substantive conversations with partners and other firm leaders.

As CMO, Heath allocates a significant amount of time to mentoring his department members, a task he enjoys greatly and considers essential to empowering his team members to seek out a place at the firm’s decision-making table. “I want to keep Foley’s vision alive in our department, and to help each person think through how he or she can bring value to the firm,” says Heath, who attributes his commitment to staff development in part to the lack of mentorship he endured as a junior staffer in one of his first jobs. Nowadays, he tries to lead by example, piping up with new ideas at the brainstorming sessions he organizes—sessions intended to help his team develop a sharp eye for strategy and a critical thought process.

Yet Heath is quick to admit that he also benefits a great deal from interacting with his team, which he describes as a “terrific, egoless team” that embodies a healthy model of collaboration. When brainstorming on his own, he misses the creative inspiration that comes from interacting with colleagues, he says. “However, if I pull two or three people into a room and we all start talking about different aspects of projects we could pursue, the ideas just start jumping out, and they are stronger and more interesting,” he adds.

His appreciation for teamwork and relationship-building expands beyond Foley & Lardner’s quarters. “I really enjoy building alliances outside Foley & Lardner that will benefit the firm, whether it’s with media organizations, consulting firms, or other groups,” he says, attributing the firm’s ability to gain space in new markets in part to the visibility it gains through these alliances. In Heath’s estimation, Foley & Lardner has achieved its goal of attaining national notoriety in some practices, such as intellectual property and energy; the work to expand its footprint in other areas continues, he says. “It’s a long process. We’re continuing to hire lawyers to achieve our national vision, and supporting our growth with marketing.”

While he counts on his marketing directors to spearhead relationships with the heads of practice groups at Foley & Lardner, Heath currently devotes much of his own time to interacting with office heads, working on budget matters, and staying close to his team members in order to keep them feeling secure and foster their productivity and creativity during the recession. He also is completing a revamping of his team’s public relations function, which he says he can focus on now partly because his team members manage the group’s day-to-day operations. “It’s a group that truly embodies teamwork,” Heath says.

Asked if a strong team allows him greater work-life balance now than when he joined the firm in 2001, Heath says it does. “But even when I take my teenage daughter out to dinner, I check my email quickly if she gets up from the table,” he offers as a more nuanced assessment. “So I guess it’s less about work-life balance than about work-life integration,” Heath concludes, clearly without a trace of regret about his workload and commitment to his firm.

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