

# Rumors of the Death of Client Alerts Greatly Exaggerated

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"I get over 50 client alerts e-mailed to me everytime anything happens in the law," one general counsel said during the Marketing Partner forum last week in Scottsdale, Arizona. "I don't have time to read them," complained another. "Unless the client alert comes from somebody I have a relationship with, I don't read it," said yet another. If nobody reads these alerts, why are we spending time and resources to produce them?

I shared these same quotes and this question with my subscribers last week, and monitoring the analytics I noticed that my open rate was well over 100 percent, so my e-mail was opened and then got passed on again and again. In short, my client alert suggesting the death of client alerts has been one of my most successful alerts ever. Did you follow all that?

Here are a few of the suggestions I laid out:

- Client alerts should be very brief (think blog posts).
- Client alerts that are industry-specific are rare, but will stand out and better position the lawyer not just in his practice area but as understanding the business realities faced by GCs.
- Include a personal message with the client alert and it will have a much better chance of getting read.

I guess the bottom line is, don't write anything that you wouldn't enjoy reading. Seems obvious, right?

I received some interesting responses from my subscribers.

Jason Craig, counsel with Colonial First State in Australia, wrote:

I believe that client alerts are a valuable way to attract clients and a way in which I select solicitors to engage. As they arrive in my inbox, unlike a blog post which I have to look up, I am more likely to read them ... provided they are concise.

(Note: In Australia, the term "solicitor" describes a non-trial attorney.)

OK, so some general counsel do in fact read them, but is this enough to make client alerts worthwhile? Steve Bell, chief client development officer at Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, thinks so:

I still see efficacy in client alerts. We get good comments. More importantly, they are automatically plugged into ACC's Lexology and the web analytics show good readership. So, I think they have been "winged," but I don't see them as goners ... yet.

Bell makes two valuable points here: The content created for alerts can be re-purposed and plugged into ACC's Lexology, JD Supra, blog posts, and any variety of other distribution channels. The second point, which is much more important, is to have analytics that show whether the client alert is being read. These analytics provide some extremely valuable information.

"The biggest problem with client alerts is that most major firms have no analytics in place, and the firms that do aren't looking at them," said Anthony Green, president of Concep, which provides digital services including analytics to large professional firms. "Firms have this 'blast' mentality that ends up annoying a lot of people," he said.

"Spray and pray," is how Lynn Foley, director of marketing and business development for Bull, Houser & Tupper in Vancouver, British Columbia, described this disfavored e-mail blasting approach. "We manage our lists very closely. Some attorneys send alerts to thousands of people -- one of our lists has just 72 people on it. We make sure to always send the alert to the 'correct list.' Then we look at open rates (open rates refers to the percentage of recipients who opened the client alert). Industry standards are about a 21-22 percent open rate, and we are at 35 percent. If our open rate is high enough [for a particular client alert], we put on a seminar about it."

The firms that track effectively know what their clients and prospective clients like to hear about. They know about their pain points and they have data to back it up. You may have great intuition about what your clients like to read, but wouldn't it be nice to have hard data to show your intuition is right?

Your client lists need to be pruned and cared for, just like you would for a prized rose bush. If you have people on your list that haven't opened a single one of your e-mails in months, perhaps it is time to take that person off your list. If another contact opens your message and forwards it to 100 people, perhaps a phone call and lunch is in order. Client alerts are just another tool, and they will prove a powerful tool if used wisely.

One final point about writing client alerts. "We work with our lawyers to create alerts that are easy to read," said Foley. "We put on a seminar for them where we start out by saying, remember everything they taught you about writing in law school? Now forget that -- we need you writing alerts on a 6th grade reading level, not an 18th grade level." This rule may not apply to all audiences, but it's important to limit the legalese in your writing.

Now, if you want to take a chance, you could just keep spraying out your client alerts and hope that when the GC gets 50 client alerts, yours will be the lucky one chosen. It could happen. The GC could read your blog post, pass it on to his friends and call you up to find out if you're available to take on his company's global portfolio. It could happen, but I wouldn't bet on it.

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