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Paula Black has advised law firms around the globe on everything from powerful and innovative design to marketing strategy and business growth. She is an award-winning Amazon-bestselling author and the force behind **In Black & White** (inblackandwhiteblog.com), a blog dedicated to clear, straightforward advice and open discussion of legal marketing issues. For more information on Paula Black, her books and her company please visit paulablacklegalmarketing.com.

How To Choose A Legal Marketing Consultant

While, in the end, legal marketing success is very much dependent on the actions of the attorneys (or firm) involved, there are great benefits to working with an outside consultant. Not only can a marketing consultant bring you the latest ideas in the industry, they can help you focus, get you on track and put systems in place to help you create a marketing habit that will become part of your daily life. They can help you build the business relationships you need to grow your practice.

As a marketing consultant for over 25 years, I've had the pleasure of meeting some wonderful colleagues, and of hearing stories from clients around the globe about their experiences in the legal marketing field. My take? It's all about finding the right consultant for you and matching not only personalities, but goals, strategies and even energy. Below are my best tips for hiring (and working with) a legal marketing consultant.

Do your research. Google them. Read their blogs. Order their books. Get to know their ideas and strategies. This may all sound like common sense, but you would be surprised how many potential clients come into my office with no knowledge of my repertoire. If you're going to take advice from someone, know who that person is and how he or she gets their points across. Do you like their tone? Does what they preach make sense to you? If not, keep looking. Remember, you're entering into a relationship.

Look into their background. Do they specialize in legal marketing or marketing in general? How many lawyers or law firms have they worked with? While they don't need to have a J.D., it is a good rule of thumb to stick with people who have strong knowledge of and experience with attorneys and law firms. Marketing attorneys isn't the same as selling cars or other consumer products, it is a category all its own. It's about nurturing and building relationships. Furthermore, you may want to look at the types of firms the consultant has worked with. Someone who specializes in large firms may not truly understand the needs of a solo practitioner, and vice versa.

Evaluate their services and relationships. Look into exactly what it is you're getting for the money. I offer clients the options of both branding (with an in-house graphic design studio) and consulting, as I believe they work hand-in-hand. Others may see themselves only as coaches. Still others may offer public relations or advertising services as part of their firm. Think about what you need and how all aspects of marketing work together. If they don't offer a service you think is important, ask them if they have outside companies they work with regularly. My own firm has solid relationships with everyone from PR firms to printers—and because of that I can often not only offer clients special deals but also oversee those additional aspects of their plan firsthand.

Listen to what they're asking YOU. Every client is different. Each has their own way of handling marketing and business development depending on who their clients are, what they're comfortable doing and where their interests lie. Before embarking on a plan, your consultant has to know you inside and out. In your first few meetings listen carefully to what they're asking you. Are they asking the right questions to understand your daily business life? Are they delving into your clients, your referral sources, and your hobbies and interests to see where growth can be accomplished? Or are they simply skimming the superficial?

Monitor their discretion. While you should always look at samples of their work (especially with regard to branding and positioning or website development), think carefully about how much these consultants value discretion. Do they have a list of clients readily available? Do you want people to know that you're working

with a consultant? Most good consultants would be hesitant to name names without the consent of their client, but be sure to take stock of the information they hand out willingly when it comes to their other clients.

Go with your gut. As I mentioned above, you're entering into a relationship, and as with any relationship... you have to trust your instincts. Beyond the pitches and the samples and the strategy—do you LIKE this person? More importantly, do you TRUST this person with your business development future? If not... walk away. You must be completely open with your consultant... comfortable collaborating and discussing your everyday business life. You have to be willing to commit to taking advice and guidance before you can enter into a successful partnership.

Overall, hiring a legal marketing consultant can be a great boon to your business development. They can train and guide, strategize and even act as an adjunct CMO when you need one. They can motivate your staff, objectively evaluate your systems and practices, and oversee and execute programs and ideas that you may never think of. They can make your marketing and business development life easier. But simple as it sounds... it all comes down to choosing the right person.

One last piece of advice? Once you find the right person, give it time. I would say at least six months to build, formulate and nurture a strategic plan and get it going. Consultants aren't magicians... they need time and effort from clients to help you see results.

