

Is This the Future for Law Firm Marketing?

Engaging clients today requires commitment from an entire firm.

By Sean Larkan

In small law firms, it is not uncommon to hear partners or leaders say, “Damn, we need a dedicated marketing person so we can get some marketing done and can get on with our work.” Or in large firms, “Why doesn't marketing sort that out and free us up to do some legal work?” It seems that for partners, things might be about to get worse before they get better.

Engaging clients today requires commitment from an entire firm (not just the marketing team) - and a different approach and structure for marketing. Law firm leadership - of both small and large law firms must understand:

- Simply adding extra marketing bodies to address things like websites, social media and strategic communications is not in itself enough.
- Clients no longer separate marketing from the practice group or industry sector specialty services we offer - marketing is the service.
- Everyone in every firm now needs to take responsibility for marketing.
- The buying practices of clients are now collaborative - more than ever based on word of mouth, website affirmation and objective advice about law firms that want to form relationships with them - it's now a dialogue not a monologue.

What are the implications of all this?

- One can no longer pay lip-service to engaging clients or potential recruits wherever and whenever they interact with a firm - in the reception, on the phone, responding to an e-mail or an account query, a blog post or interaction at a cocktail function. All of these are important and cannot be shrugged off as minor interactions. Ideally all these key areas should be identified, awareness created and consistency in treatment addressed. Too often these are shrugged off as minor things that "someone in management will attend to."
- Given that everyone potentially has to be involved in marketing, who is ultimately accountable? This will require careful consideration by law firm leaders and possibly some adjustment in structure and responsibilities.
- It is likely more activities will need to be distributed by marketing to non-traditional areas such as within practice groups or industry sector specialty groups (this has already been a common trend in many firms). As a result, marketing organization charts will have many new dotted-line relationships.
- There will need to be more group consultation between marketing and practice groups/industry sector groups or, in smaller firms, with individual partners.
- Marketing and firm leadership will need to be far more sensitive to how interaction at the various key touch points is impacting client perceptions and ultimately the firm's brand.
- Things like client and staff surveys will probably need to be adjusted to take these developments into account so that the right questions are asked, and the right data gathered.

[Contact the author, Sean Larkan.](#)