

Title: Happy Differentiated New Year

Subtitle: *You need good answers to client questions like “Why should we hire you?” and “What makes you different and better than anyone else?”*

By Jordan Furlong

Readers of a certain age will remember when U2 first sang: “Nothing changes on New Year’s Day.” Not the most uplifting message, perhaps, at this happy time of renewal and fresh starts.

But we all know that it’s largely true nonetheless. Resolutions break; old leaves turn back over; life on January 2 tends to go on much as it did before.

Something, however, does need to change within your law firm over the course of this upcoming year. Specifically, your firm must visibly differentiate itself from its competitors in its key markets.

Clients believe, with good reason, that law firms are all the same. Every law firm has very good lawyers, does fine work in most areas, computes fees by the hour, communicates with clients sporadically, anticipates client needs not terribly well, can’t really manage time or budgets effectively, and so forth. These features are common to almost all modern law firms.

Nonetheless, you might believe, as your website asserts, that your firm stands out in the market for its “excellence” and “expertise.” Well, it doesn’t. Every other firm in your market says the same thing. From the client’s perspective, the outside counsel sector is a giant aquarium filled with all the same basic fish.

You need a good answer to these client questions: “Why should we hire you? What makes you different and better than anyone else?” Poor answers include:

- *“Because you’ve hired us before.”*
- *“Because of our excellence and expertise.”*
- *“Because we’ll do your work for a bargain-basement fixed fee even though we have no idea how to turn a profit on it.”*

Here, on the other hand, are some great answers to those questions:

- *“Because we use qualified low-cost providers for basic legal work and pass the savings on to you.”*

- *“Because we implement legal project management to improve process efficiency and communication.”*
- *“Because we know our business so well that we can fix a reasonable price for your work ahead of time.”*
- *“Because we will convene a one-hour legal risk management session with your senior leadership every month at no charge.”*
- *“Because we’ve invested in software that streamlines our operations and we’ll share it with you.”*

All these responses, and others like them, have two things in common:

1. They positively differentiate you from other firms that can’t (yet) say the same, and
2. They can be accomplished, or can at least start to be implemented, this year.

You cannot let 2013 go by without using your leadership and influence to differentiate your firm — to create an identifiable, remarkable, memorable narrative that sets you apart from the faceless law firm crowd. And if you can pull it off, then by January 1, 2014, you’ll be able to tell Bono just how wrong he was.

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