

Marketing

SALLY J. SCHMIDT ■ SOLUTIONS YOU CAN USE

Finding the Right In-House Professional

Attending the Legal Marketing Association's 2003 Annual Meeting, I was reminded of the amazing growth in the number of marketing positions in law firms. Although in-house marketing professionals are no longer a new phenomenon, the numbers now would probably surprise more than a few lawyers. This year's LMA conference was attended by 600-plus firm marketers, representing several different countries and working in firms ranging from small and local to large and global.

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean these are always happy unions. Turn-over among marketing people is still more prevalent than most firms would like to admit. Too many of these arrangements seem to result in mutually unsatisfying relationships. It needn't, however, be that way. Based on experience in assisting law firms seeking in-house marketing personnel, here are thoughts for law firm employers and their potential marketing professionals that may help both parties in their search for the perfect match.



Sally J. Schmidt (sallyschmidt@schmidt-marketing.com), President of Schmidt Marketing, Inc., has counseled more than 300 law firm clients over the past 15 years. She was the first president of the Legal Marketing Association.

On Experience

Employers: Keep an open mind about candidates' backgrounds and experience. While "law firm experience" often makes lawyers more comfortable and reduces the risk that a candidate can't make it in a law firm, many of the most talented law firm marketers today came from outside the profession. In addition, too much job-hopping from firm to firm may send up a red flag about loyalty or personal ambition.

Candidates: Working in a law firm is different. There have been very bright and talented marketing professionals who could not stand, or survive, the rigors and realities of working in a partnership setting. Don't gloss over the differences.

On Expectations and Job Descriptions

Employers: Probably the most common reason for unsuccessful hires is a failure to clarify expectations. Some firms' marketing job descriptions are copied from other firms. Some contain everything from the highest, most strategic responsibilities (such as marketing planning) to administrative activities (like organizing files). If you want to hire the right person, make an effort to articulate what you are really hoping someone will do for you. If it's PR you want, say so. If it's business leads you expect, write it down. Your expectations and the job description should directly influence the types of qualifications, skills and experience you seek in candidates.

Candidates: Some firms spend a lot

of time and energy writing the job description; in those cases, it is fairly easy to ascertain the firm's priorities just based on the order of the "responsibilities." Other firms, however, don't really say (or perhaps even know) exactly what they want from the new hire. So don't rely on the job description to figure out what the firm really expects. Ask a lot of questions to ferret out the firm's top marketing priorities, what deliverables are expected and how the firm intends to measure the success of the position.

On Fit

Employers: Don't underestimate the importance of "chemistry." If you have a small (or one-person) marketing department, or if this is your first marketing hire, how the lawyers feel about the person will influence how they feel about the function.

Candidates: Every firm has its own culture and personality. The way someone might fit within those characteristics can be every bit as important as the skill set. So, although you might appear to have the perfect background on paper, you still may not be the final choice—or even make the list of finalists—for some very good reasons.

On Titles

Employers: There is something to a name. A director is different from a manager, which is different from a coordinator. These terms signal levels of responsibility and oversight to candidates, so don't use the titles arbitrarily.

Candidates: Don't get too hung up on the title. First, although many firms are flexible, some still resist certain words—"marketing" among them. Whether the function is known as client service, practice development or some other term or phrase, the more important question is what the firm expects the marketer to accomplish. Second, if you feel too strongly about a certain moniker (for example, chief marketing officer), it may signal that your quest to build your resume is more important than your quest to find a home for your skills.

On Salary

Employers: Be realistic about what it will take to accomplish your goals, then tie the compensation to the level of skills or experience necessary. Some firms shoot too low. For example, if you want a person to coach or advise the lawyers and to participate in key decisions, you need to pay a partner-level (or at least lawyer-level) salary. On the other hand, believe it or not, some firms affix a salary that is too high. If you want someone to coordinate seminars, you don't need to pay a director-level salary. If you do seek a more highly compensated person, understand that at various levels of salary, you also need to budget for staff. A \$100,000-a-year professional shouldn't spend his or her time typing documents.

Candidates: Just because a law firm advertises a salary range (such as \$75,000 to \$95,000), it doesn't mean you'll get the high end of the range—or that you'll be in the range at all. A smart employer will always factor in your qualifications and level of experience.

On Confidentiality

Employers: Information on candidates should be treated with utmost discretion. Don't let your partners call their

friends at candidates' current employers until you have made a decision. You can always make an offer contingent on obtaining feedback or references.

Candidates: Once you throw your name in the hat, despite people's best efforts, realize that information can be leaked. It's often out of our hands.

On Outside Help

Employers: If you use an outside firm to assist with your search, let the company do its job. This could range from allowing a reasonable timetable for identifying good candidates (many of whom are already employed elsewhere) to respecting the search firm's professional opinion on candidates.

Candidates: Don't pull an "end run" on the search firm. Most resumes will filter back through the company, anyway. Even if you have an "in" at the law

firm, it's best to work through the proper channels or, at a minimum, advise the search firm of your parallel efforts.

Learning from Mistakes

The existence of the law firm marketing position is approaching its third decade. There has been some trial and error regarding these positions in the past, but everyone can learn from it. Looking at the marketing staffing levels in law firms today, it's clear that the number of staff—and the commitment to staff—continues to grow. It's in everyone's best interests to identify the goals to be attained and the expectations to be met so that both the law firm and its marketing professional benefit from the relationship.

You can learn more by visiting the Legal Marketing Association's Web site at www.legalmarketing.org. ■