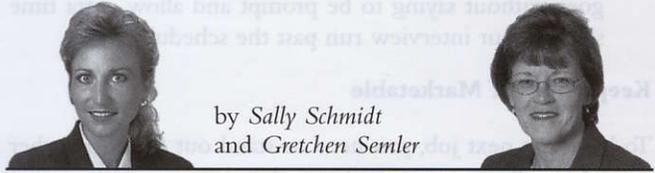


Landing Your Next Job



by Sally Schmidt
and Gretchen Semler

The number of vacant law firm marketing positions is on the rise, as is the level of responsibility and, in many cases, compensation. The stagnation in the industry that was economy-driven seems to be lifting. Law firms that had let people go or that had left positions unfilled over the last few years are feeling more comfortable about hiring. And marketing professionals currently in-house are feeling more comfortable about changing jobs.

There are several potential reasons for the upswing in the market. As the law firm environment has become more competitive, marketing has taken on more importance. In addition, despite a somewhat anemic economy, many law firms have had very good years in the recent past. And for some that haven't, they simply may feel it's time to move on and begin to staff up again, recognizing that a good marketing program might positively impact their bottom line.

Below are some of our top tips for job seekers.

Importance of Networking

Your odds of finding a good position increase if you are connected. First, you are likely to hear about opportunities earlier than other potential candidates, which is a distinct advantage. Second, there are many good positions that are never advertised generally, for a wide range of reasons. Finally, recruiters like us will pay more attention to a resume if a legitimate entrée is provided by someone we know (versus it being a cold call).

The Legal Marketing Association is an excellent resource for people already in the field and those who would like to enter it. The national LMA conference provides a great place to network, learn about hot issues and trends and even potentially find a job. For example, at this year's annual conference, professional placement organizations actually interviewed many marketers during the course of the conference. Based on conversations we had with various passersby at our booth, we also learned that several marketing directors attending the conference were actively seeking new staff members. Local LMA chapters are also an important networking venue, particularly if you are seeking a job in your present city.

Putting Your Best Foot Forward

In addition to networking, there are many other "dos and don'ts" from our perspective that we would like to share with job seekers:

- **Do** try to put your best foot forward. Remember, you are marketing yourself with your resume. If you really

want a position, take the time to customize your cover letter/e-mail to point out your relevant experiences or skills, and organize your resume to highlight the qualifications or accomplishments noted in the listing or position description.

- **Don't** get too cute with your materials. Sometimes people spend so much time and effort with the formatting or graphics on the resume that it won't fit the computer screen or print correctly. In this day and age, most candidate materials are e-mailed, so yours should open easily and be formatted properly, in Word.
- **Don't** try to impress us in your cover letter by telling us, "Three other firms are interviewing me." That information, if true, is important to us later in the interview process; at the early stages, you seem like a risky candidate for our client.

Prepare your cover e-mail like it's a letter, and before submitting your resume, proof it, proof it and proof it again.

- **Do** be a perfectionist with your resume and cover letter. For example, we've received e-mails expressing interest in a position but naming the wrong law firm or addressing the wrong person. We've had law firm clients refuse to interview candidates with typos or incorrect grammar in their resumes. So prepare your cover e-mail like it's a letter, and before submitting your resume, proof it, proof it and proof it again. You might even evaluate what your resume looks like on the computer screen (are there a million tabs that go nowhere?) since they will often be viewed that way.
- **Don't** pretend your relationship with someone who referred you is more than it is. We don't appreciate a call that implies you are friends with someone when in fact the person simply suggested you call us because we might be a good resource for you.
- **Do** be honest — about EVERYTHING! Don't fudge dates hoping we won't learn about the four months you took off between jobs. Don't change your titles; we actually had someone change her title from marketing manager to marketing director (after leaving the firm) because she thought that was the role she was playing. Don't err on the dates you went to college, embellish the degrees you obtained, or misstate the positions you held — once we spot an error, you have lost credibility as a candidate.
- **Don't** express anger or frustration if firms decide not to interview or hire you. It's their prerogative. People who are graceful in this situation almost always get a call from

us about another opportunity at some point. Many of the people we placed were applicants or finalists in previous searches.

- **Do** be respectful of the role we have been hired to play. Firms have retained us to use our experience and judgment to evaluate candidates and find the best match for them. Try to understand if we don't present you for a particular position, and don't do an "end run" by sending your resume to someone at the firm. Sometimes we are constrained by the firms' hiring criteria (e.g., the candidate must have law firm experience or an advanced degree); sometimes the position requires one skill (e.g., business development) more than another (e.g., communications); and sometimes we may feel a candidate would not be a good fit culturally. We will try to be honest with you about the situation and appreciate your understanding.
- **Do** your homework, but be flexible. In the course of an interview, you shouldn't have to ask us how many lawyers or offices the firm has. A quick look at a Web site will give you the basics on the firm. At the same time, don't act like you have all the answers. Many candidates have been rejected because they come into a job interview with a ready-made approach. Be a good listener and try to figure out what the firm is really looking for from its new marketer.

- **Do** go to a firm interview professionally attired in a suit (even if the firm is business casual). We have had candidates rejected because of inattentive grooming. And it goes without saying to be prompt and allow extra time should your interview run past the scheduled time.

Keep Yourself Marketable

To land that next job, you need to stand out from the other candidates. Keep current about the industry and market trends where you live and work. Learn new technology. Obtain an advanced degree. Obtain experience in another industry (e.g., an agency or an accounting firm). Or develop your skill set in a new area (e.g., sales or market research).

These are exciting and fast-changing times. Law firm marketing is continuing to grow both in the number of firms with marketing departments and in the size of the departments within a firm, providing marketers with wonderful opportunities and professional career paths. Law firm marketing is a great place to be.

Sally Schmidt is president of Schmidt Marketing, Inc., in Burnsville, Minn. She can be reached at sallyschmidt@schmidt-marketing.com. Gretchen L. Semler is recruiting and project manager of Schmidt Marketing, Inc. She can be reached at gretchensemeler@schmidt-marketing.com.