

# Marketing

SALLY J. SCHMIDT ■ SOLUTIONS YOU CAN USE

## An Idea That Works: Organize Around Your Clients

In the spirit of the “Good Idea!” theme, I put on my special thinking cap to come up with the subject of this month’s column. As I batted about possible strategies and activities to cover, it occurred to me that good ideas aren’t necessarily new ideas, or bold ideas, or even particularly exciting ideas. They are ideas that work.

Yet it seems that law firms are often distracted by the hot “new” marketing phenomenon—sales, branding, competitive intelligence, chief marketing officers, client relationship management systems. There are always marketing “flavors of the month.” Some quickly fade from view, while others are (and always have been) important pieces of an overall marketing strategy. But to paraphrase the moral of the fable of the tortoise and the hare, victory in marketing comes to those who implement and *sustain* important fundamental programs.



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My good idea is to organize your firm around your clients. Not in practice groups or even industry teams—but rather in client teams with client-specific programs and initiatives.

### Identifying Your Firm’s Key Clients: The Way to Loyalty

Most law firms have some very important relationships. For corporate and commercial law firms, this might be a handful of clients who contribute significant, ongoing revenue. For firms with episodic clients, this might be referral sources who feed the firm a steady stream of business. Essentially, the notion is to identify your important relationships and build a program around those relationships to ensure satisfaction and loyalty.

Remember, loyalty and satisfaction are two different things. In a remarkable finding reported in *The Loyalty Effect: The Hidden Force Behind Growth, Profits and Lasting Value* (Harvard Business School Press, 1996), between 65 and 85 percent of people who had defected from a particular service provider said they were actually satisfied or very satisfied with the services performed by the firm.

To ensure loyalty, a firm needs to be more *intentional* about building its relationships. To do so, you must begin by identifying those clients who are key to your success. Frequently, these clients match the following criteria:

- Have work in a number of different substantive areas (or the potential for this)
- Have relationships with a number of different people (or the potential for this)
- Use the firm year in and year out for their legal work
- Are good sources of referrals or recommendations
- Provide annual revenues that would be hard to replace

### Building a Key Client Program: Team Strategies

Once you have identified your firm’s most important relationships, you need to think about activities to ensure their future with your firm. Here are strategies to consider.

**Client teams.** Create an official “ABC Manufacturing” team, for example, which includes lawyers from all the substantive areas used—or needed—by the client. Include members of the staff as appropriate—secretaries, paralegals and even administrative people. If it’s a technology client, you might include your IT person; if it’s a large employer, you might include your HR manager.

**Team meetings.** Have the official team meet on a regular basis. Use your meetings to discuss everything related to the client. Ask, Where do we stand on projects? What news have we heard about the client? Have any people come or gone? What problems have we faced? Are there