

From the Editors

Taylor's Perspective . . .

A Way with Words: Sally Schmidt Succeeds with Her Latest Marketing Book

What is it about the Midwest and law firm marketing?

For some reason, several of the legal profession's best law firm consultants who have a particular expertise in marketing hail from the heartland. From the Chicago area alone, there are three marketing maestros who are well-known from coast to coast: Ross Fishman, Larry Bodine, and now, with his departure last year from Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw, Jonathan Asperger, who has formed his own consultancy. Head north to the Twin Cities and you'll find consultant Sally Schmidt, the first president of the Legal Marketing Association. In her latest book, *Business Development for Lawyers: Strategies for Getting and Keeping Clients*, Schmidt shows why she's one of the best in the business.

In 16 chapters, *Business Development* offers readers a blueprint for generating new business and retaining and, importantly, satisfying existing clients. Virtually everything in the book steers lawyers and law firm CMOs to one crucial goal: differentiation. In today's legal market, competition is fierce and law firms, or for that matter solo practitioners, must find a way to distinguish themselves from others. Marketing can help do that.

Since the famous *Bates* Supreme Court decision 30 years ago that allowed attorneys to advertise their services, many people have written books about legal marketing. Frankly, most could cure insomnia. While the title of Schmidt's book may be prosaic, *Business Development* is anything but boring. Unlike many such guides to law firm marketing, Schmidt somehow avoids stating the obvious, padding the prose, or spewing the jargon.

On that last point, Schmidt implores readers, in a chapter entitled "Satisfying Clients and Building Loyalty," to "Speak and write in plain English. Clients don't like jargon." Clearly, Schmidt practices what she preaches as the book is clear and concise as well as colorful and well-crafted.

In that same chapter, Schmidt provides several other tips—the book is loaded with the sort of practical advice she's been offering clients for more than 20 years—including one that is simple yet surprisingly overlooked: "Call the client after key events to 'check in.' For example, after a day of meetings for your client, leave a message about how things went." A little of this checking in goes a long way; it lets the client know that, well, frankly, you care.

Business Development doesn't romanticize marketing efforts or offer promises that if you put in the time, you'll get results. As early as the introduction, Schmidt shows her candor. She writes that most rainmaking attorneys estimate that they spend anywhere from 250 to 500 hours each year on marketing. She then adds, "What can you expect from this investment in time? Unfortunately, the answer is not always clear"

What is clear is that the author knows her readership. She knows how lawyers think and how, increasingly, they feel pressure to develop business. While she advocates strongly for comprehensive law firm marketing—of course, that's her bread-and-butter—and outlines many different ways to interact with clients and potential clients, she doesn't push attorneys to be something they're not. That is, if an attorney doesn't enjoy public speaking, and yes there are more reticent lawyers

than you might think, they shouldn't engage in this often productive marketing approach.

Listen and Learn

What's one of the more common refrains that emerge from law firm surveys, whether they're conducted by a firm in a client audit or by an outside consultancy or research organization like BTI Consulting Group? That's easy: Clients complain that lawyers don't listen well and don't learn enough about their businesses and industries.

In Chapter 10, "Cross Selling and Expanding Client Relationships," Schmidt addresses this with several "active listening" pointers, that include "make good eye contact" and "paraphrase or summarize what the client has said." This may seem obvious, but apparently attorneys need to be reminded of these skills. More importantly, the chapter includes a check list of questions to which an attorney who hopes to expand relationships should find answers before engaging a client: "How many employees does [the company] have? . . . What is its annual revenues? . . . Who are the key players or executive at the company?"

Similarly, in the following chapter, Schmidt advises lawyers to interview clients to help build relationships, and she provides a wonderful list of interview tips. Here's the first one: "Don't assume you know everything about the client; you'd be surprised how much you don't know." (Incidentally, replace the words "the client" with "your wife" or "your husband" or "your kids" and you've got sage advice for developing personal relationships as well.)

Schmidt also drops in quotes from people outside of the legal profession that liven up her prose. While this technique can often seem forced, or worse, the quotes sometimes come across as non sequiturs, Schmidt does this well. For example, in a chapter that urges lawyers to get involved in outside institutions, she writes: "Be visible in the organization. Woody Allen once said, 'Eighty percent of success is showing

up.' When it comes to organizations, he's right. Participate in telephone conferences. Contribute to member list-servers. Attend meetings and social events."

Here's another thing about *Business Development*: Look at that passage again. Note how Schmidt uses the imperative voice to direct the reader in short, snappy sentences. This style is one of the reasons that the book is both enjoyable to read and useful to apply.

It's very apparent that Schmidt values good writing. Early on in the book, she devotes an entire chapter to "Writing for Publication," in which she delivers general advice on the merits of writing as a marketing tool and some fundamental writing tips that would make William Strunk and E.B. White proud. "Write in the active voice and use strong verbs . . . Write in the positive . . . Avoid superfluous words." This last tip should appear as the screen-saver on the computers of all verbose attorneys; they can't be reminded enough.

Thanks, Sally

Finally, a word of thanks to Sally Schmidt. In Chapter 4, "Dealing with the Media," she shows lawyers how to conduct themselves when talking to reporters. "Be accessible," she writes, as well as, "Find out the reporter's deadline" and "Be prepared" for an interview. We couldn't agree more wholeheartedly. Despite some reports to the contrary, journalists are people too, and we appreciate the common courtesies that Schmidt suggests lawyers offer us.

Now, all of this is not to say that this is a *New York Times* best seller, soon to be turned into a major motion picture and headed for an Oscar; after all, it is what it is—a guide to law firm marketing. But the topic is important, Schmidt's a wizard at what she does, and she's adept at transforming her expertise onto the page. *Business Development for Lawyers: Strategies for Getting and Keeping Clients* gets and deserves the proverbial two thumbs up. ■

—Steven T. Taylor