

Focus on:**MARKETING
BACK TO THE BASICS***By Sally J. Schmidt*

Recently, I was asked to provide a "fresh look" at a law firm's marketing efforts. In the course of my discussions with the firm, I discovered a set of underlying tenets which I believe are fundamental to the success of a law firm's marketing program. I reduced these thoughts to eleven principles.

1. Building in rewards and accountability.

This is such a complex issue and so essential to marketing success that it is difficult to tackle in one short paragraph. However, the keys are to:

- ◆ Find ways to motivate lawyers to market. People can be motivated by many things, including fear, status, power, money, or even the greater good.
- ◆ Scrutinize your compensation systems to determine which aspects of marketing, client service or teamwork they reward and which ones they discourage. Determine if alternative reward or recognition programs need to be implemented.
- ◆ Hold people accountable for their marketing efforts and their use of resources.

2. Play with those who want to play.

In my experience, it is futile to seek 100% cooperation or to drag lawyers into marketing projects. There are plenty of willing participants. Start with one partner, a practice group, a satellite office, the associates—anywhere you find a friendly reception. Then hope that those who are resistant, recalcitrant or downright hostile will, if nothing else, stay out of the way.

3. Use clients to help you.

Most firms' clients are savvy business people who regularly engage in the same marketing activities that law firms find unfamiliar or even objectionable. When introducing an image program, show slides of clients' logos and printed materials. When proposing client surveys, bring in samples of the surveys clients use with their customers. When scheduling strategy or marketing meetings, ask clients to attend and comment on activities under discussion.

4. Report on good results.

Every law firm's internal newsletter or administrative memo should have a section devoted to successes achieved in the areas of marketing, client retention or client service. Summarize, for example: a cross disciplinary proposal effort that resulted in a new client; a roundtable that resulted in a new matter from an existing client; or concerted contacts with an in-house counsel that finally paid off in the first file. Success breeds interest, and descriptions of effective efforts can be instructive to other lawyers.

5. Integrate marketing into the practice.

Marketing cannot be the responsibility of a marketing department, a marketing committee or a marketing partner; marketing is everyone's responsibility. Marketing cannot be done on a Friday after the lawyer is no longer busy; it must be an integral part of each lawyer's practice each day. For marketing to succeed, it needs a continual presence within the firm, in communications, on agendas, and underlying systems.

6. **Educate the lawyers.**

Bring lawyers into the marketing fold, one at a time if necessary. Send a different partner to each marketing conference. Route articles about specific practices to the lawyers in charge of those areas. Send a lawyer an example of something his competitor is doing.

7. **Personalize communications.**

Most law firm marketing efforts would be far more effective if they were personalized. Instead of a printed announcement, send clients a letter describing the capabilities a new partner brings to the firm. Instead of putting a seminar advertisement in a local paper, send personalized letters explaining how attendees will benefit. Put a handwritten note on newsletters. Send handwritten notes of thanks or congratulations.

8. **Communicate results.**

Law firms do not report good results nearly as much as they can or should. Prospective clients are very interested in what the firm has done for others. List successes in newsletters. Publish an annual report of litigation results or completed transactions. Use vignettes in firm brochures. (Be discreet with client names and matters, of course.)

9. **Decentralize strategy.**

Marketing strategies and activities should be determined by the people closest to the market: the practice groups, the offices, the individual lawyers. And everyone should be included in the effort—senior partners, first year lawyers, accounting personnel. At the same time, realize that each person plays a different role in the development or execution of the marketing program.

10. **Seek management support.**

Without top management approval, it is difficult—if

not impossible—to have a successful marketing program. One firm scheduled a presentation to its lawyers on marketing: the only people absent were the three members of the management committee. How important would you perceive marketing to be in that firm?

11. **Look at everything through the client's eyes.**

Finally, every firm's marketing efforts would be more successful if it paid more attention to clients' perceptions or reactions. For example, how would you feel receiving an invoice that is twice the amount expected? Waiting two days for a call to be returned? Not being notified when a deadline will be missed? From office decor to tangible documents, from telephone systems to invoice formats, everything a law firm does makes an impression on clients. What kind of impression is up to you.

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