

## *Client Care*

*By Sally Schmidt*

**B**y now, most people involved in marketing the legal profession have figured out that existing clients are a key to the firm's success and survival.

According to various sources, a law firm's current clientele can be responsible for up to 80 percent of the firm's revenues through ongoing business as well as referrals. Also, clients are a law firm's best sales force. Their recommendations and support provide benefits that no marketing, public relations or advertising program can match.

How can a law firm ensure that relationships with its top clients are maintained and nurtured? One possible tool is a key-client action plan. The primary purpose of a key-client action plan is to ensure that important existing clients are retained and satisfied. The second objective of the plan is to develop additional work from major clients. The action plan identifies a number of discrete activities to be undertaken with a specific client over a one-year period, complete with assigned attorneys and deadlines.

The first step in developing a key-client action plan is to develop a team or task force to work with the client and on the plan. This probably would include the originating attorney, if he or she has continued a close relationship with the

## Client Care

Continued from page 1

company's decision-makers, the billing or responsible attorney and others who have frequent contact with the client. Depending on the client, the client's business and the amount of work being done, the attorneys on the team most likely will include both partners and associates and possibly paralegals. The team for a large financial institution, for example, should include people who interact with various representatives of the bank on all levels, from loan officer to the bank president.

Once identified, the members of the client team would be asked to meet as a group to discuss the client's relationship and history with the firm, and then determine appropriate activities, timetables and assignments for contacts (see chart above).

In determining which clients to include in the program, a law firm can use the 80/20 rule as a guide. Most professional service firms derive 80 percent of their business from 20 percent of their clients. The key-client action plans can be done for that important 20 percent.

Firms for which that group of clients is too large or politically impossible can use action plans in a number of other ways: with a particular practice group or department which is more receptive than others; with specific partners who are more receptive than others; or with a few clients whose business is paramount to the firm's success.

At a very busy point in my own business, a wise man told me that it is better to have one client who thinks you are terrific than 10 who think you are okay. That is a piece of advice that I took to heart and pass along to attorneys every chance I get. By developing and implementing plans to cultivate

relationships with important clients, a firm can ensure that its key clients are receiving the attention and recognition they deserve. ☐

*Sally Schmidt, NALFMA's first president, is president of Sally Schmidt Consulting, Inc., in Burnsville, Minn., and author of What Clients Say: A Lawyers Guide to Better Client Relations.*