

Marketing

SALLY J. SCHMIDT ■ SOLUTIONS YOU CAN USE

Outsourcing Your Marketing Projects

In a slow economy, law firms of all sizes can be reluctant to bring on permanent staff, especially for marketing. Even though they may recognize the need to maintain or, better yet, increase their investment in marketing, firms may lack the confidence or bottom-line resources to hire the help needed to ensure effective implementation.

On the bright side, however, there is a panoply of freelancers, consultants and vendors that can make marketing easier for your firm. Here are some ideas on how and when you can outsource your marketing projects.

A Wide Cast of Characters

Everyone knows that a P.R. agency can help with media relations and a Web designer can put polish on a firm's site. But regardless of what other marketing tools your firm wants to employ, there is probably an organization that can help with the project. Here are examples.

Newsletters and client alerts: Substantive mailings, whether via e-mail or snail mail, remain an effective way to enhance your credibility while reinforcing your market presence. If you are interested in

sending a regular communication to your contacts but are concerned about the time commitment, there are many ways to obtain help:

- Freelance writers or P.R. personnel can interview lawyers about subject matter, do related background research and provide draft articles for review.

- Graphic designers can create an electronic template into which you type your newsletter or alert copy. The resulting document can be e-mailed to clients or posted on your Web site. This gives you a professional-looking, easy-to-use publication and, in the long run, is cheaper than printing.

- Some companies offer "off-the-shelf" newsletters on specific substantive areas. The content and production is handled entirely by the company, which customizes the newsletter to include your firm name and contact information. Some vendors will provide the written copy in electronic form, so you can insert information specific to your clients, your state's law or your law firm.

- Information services companies can provide you with customized mailing lists based on preselected criteria. Some will even maintain your contact database for you.

- **Seminars and events:** Professional event planners can save a firm enormous time and effort when organizing a special event. These planners can do much of the legwork for you, from identifying possible venues or speakers, to selecting meals and wines, to making follow-up calls to invitees who haven't

responded yet. Also, because of the leverage they gain by working with multiple clients on similar events, they can often save you money by obtaining discounts on rooms or food.

- **Client surveys:** Marketing experts will tell you that surveying your clients is one of the most important business development tactics you can employ. If you agree it's a good idea but can't seem to get it done, you can call on consultants and research firms for assistance. They can develop a recommended process (e.g., Web-based, mail, phone or personal interviews); put together a survey for your review; implement the survey (e.g., mail it, call clients, conduct interviews); and compile the results. They can also send out follow-up thank-you letters to participants.

The Law Marketing Portal's Resource Directory, at www.lawmarketing.com/publications/resourcedirectory.cfm#ideas, can give you other ideas on outsourcing options, as well as vendor lists and links in several areas.

Evaluating an Outsource Relationship

There are a number of questions you may want to ask potential vendors or consultants before engaging their services in a marketing project. The nature of the task, of course, will determine the lines of questioning. Here are some ideas.

Services and experience:

- What experience do they have in the type of initiative you want to undertake?



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■ What specific services do they propose to provide? What results do they expect?

■ What do they see as their role in working with your firm?

Clientele:

■ Do they have experience working with professional services firms?

■ Do they work with other law firms? If so, will they represent other law firms while they have a relationship with you, and do they anticipate conflicts?

■ Will your firm be a “big fish” or “small fish” in their agency or company?

Relationship:

■ What process will they use to assess your needs or opportunities? How long will it take them to understand your goals and obtain enough

information to do the job?

■ How do they anticipate working with you?

■ What will be required of *you* to make the relationship successful?

Staffing:

■ Who will be your firm’s primary contact at the company? What is his or her background?

■ How will they ensure continuity of the people assigned to your account?

Fees:

■ How do they structure their relationships with clients—retained basis, project basis or hourly basis? Which is their preferred arrangement, and why?

■ How do they propose to bill you for their services?

■ How are their disbursements or

out-of-pocket expenses charged back—at cost or a markup?

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Outsourcing marketing efforts certainly has benefits. It is, however, important to remember the truth that most business comes through building relationships. As a result, any outsourced or arm’s-length activity will not be effective unless it is bolstered with personal involvement on your part. Be sure to sign invitation letters, for example, and personally follow up with clients who return a survey expressing a concern or indicating an opportunity. Even if you outsource part of your marketing, you want to put your personal stamp on the final product to generate the best return. ■