

Holiday Gift to Lawyers: Marketing Advice From the Experts

By Stacy West Clark

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Even though I have been advising lawyers and law firms for over 25 years, this "young" dog can still learn new tricks. To be the best I can be for my law firm clients, I read just about everything I can on law firm marketing, attend and host conferences, and speak to "real-life" clients — all with the goal of finding the latest and greatest techniques. This has been my practice for years.

Over time, I have found that there are some real giants in the land of law firm marketing. As my holiday gift to you, I reached out to some of them for their best advice to grow revenues in 2013. Here is what they said:

Sally Schmidt (Schmidt Marketing Inc.):

Start the new year on the right foot by establishing your marketing and business development priorities: First, develop some goals for the year — what do you hope to accomplish? For example, "Take steps to develop my reputation in the area of government contracts." Second, establish some measurable objectives — ways to keep yourself on track. This could be things like: "Schedule four lunches or get-togethers with people outside the firm every month" or "Contribute to two thought-leadership efforts this year (e.g., article, blog, speech, white paper, e-alert)." Third, tend to key relationships. Identify your top clients and referral sources. Then, take them out for a relationship meeting to: (a) thank them for the business; (b) discuss their plans for 2013; and (c) ask how you can help. Finally, better define your personal brand. Spend some time writing a succinct and personal statement about what you do, for whom you do it, how you help clients and what makes you different. Then use this statement to refresh your firm bio, your LinkedIn page and your elevator speech.

Burkey Belser (Greenfield/Belser Ltd.):

First and foremost, focus. Law firms have grown like social media analysis website Topsy, but they should clear up the garden and water only what their firm does best. More and more firms seem to understand this basic requirement of business.

Second, assuming you have a well-defined brand, go mobile. Everyone else in the world is. Make certain a client or prospect's mobile experience of your firm matches the desktop experience, because the desktop may be headed for the antique shop as the touch interface runs roughshod over the mouse.

Finally, put a client retention program in place. They pay the bills. Honor that. It's simple: Feed them new ideas for their business. After all, you know their business, right? You understand their industry, right?

Larry Bodine (editor-in-chief, Lawyers.com):

Now is the time for lawyers to update their online profiles, start or update their blog and get listed in a major online directory. There has been a sea change in the way consumers (including business clients) look for lawyers: Three out of four consumers seeking an attorney over the last year used online resources at some point in the process, according to new research from LexisNexis. (See

bit.ly/LexisConsumer.) The traditional way of finding a lawyer — by asking a co-worker, friend or neighbor — is fast becoming the old-fashioned way of finding a lawyer. Today's clients prefer to look up a lawyer in private by opening up their laptop, iPad or smartphone.

Not to say that in-person marketing doesn't matter — it does. But rest assured that every new client who contacts you will have thoroughly researched you online. Those with little to offer online simply won't get the call.

John Hellerman (Hellerman Baretz Communications):

- Thought leadership as a concept has been around for nearly 20 years, and while I have seen the positive results of many successful campaigns, I haven't seen the buy-in about its value that I'm seeing now. To succeed in attracting talent and business to a firm, more firms are realizing the necessity of getting more of their partners engaged in the process of creating and marketing their thought leadership. They need to take advantage of the ability of social networking platforms — especially, of course, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook — to open new networks and exponentially increase the reach of their thought leadership.
- Social media is to relationships like what a gas log is to a wood fire: an easy, convenient substitute but not real thing. Make a point to connect and collaborate with client.
- Generally speaking, people like to work with people like themselves. Humanize yourself and connect over shared personal preferences. An effective thought leadership campaign will cause prospects to assume you're competent, but only by sharing personal details about yourself will they come to understand you're similar and someone they'd like to work with.

Susan Saltonstall Duncan (Rainmaking Oasis Inc.):

- Let your clients help you. Engage clients in discussing their issues, challenges and, most importantly, how you can improve your services to them. Ask what other firms do for them that they value and how you can increase your value to them. Use the information to improve and enhance your service offerings.
- Treat your client's money as your own. Don't bemoan the fact that clients are trying to control their legal expenses. They are in a business and you are a cost. Bonuses of GCs are in part determined by how well they run their departments. Instead, initiate conversations about how you can help them better manage their costs and develop predictable budgets. Explore ways they can increase the work they give you and be more cost-effective in doing so.
- Keep your thumb on the pulse. There is a lot going on in the industry these days. Law firms are aggressively and creatively pursuing new delivery, pricing and staffing models. And there are new service and knowledge providers out there offering alternatives. Be sure you know who they are and what they do — then collaborate with them to your clients' benefit.
- Take a chance and innovate. Things are moving forward at a rapid pace. You can watch the train go by, you can get run over by the train, or you can jump on and drive the train (or at least ride it). Take new bold steps in the way you manage, package and price services, always with an eye toward differentiation and value creation.

Deborah McMurray (Content Pilot LLC):

Analyze the strength of your six most important client relationships. Start by answering these questions:

- Over the past five years, is the revenue attributable to you and your practice trending up or down?
- Over the same timeframe, is the profitability of each client trending up or down?
- Is the client in transition, and how? For example, new decision-makers, new private equity or hedge fund investment, change in ownership, merged/acquired, business units divested or added, etc.
- How many decision-makers at the company are directing work to you? How about to others in your firm?
- Have the quality and the frequency of the work changed? For example, more routine/commodity work, or higher end?
- Who else is each client hiring on work that you could be handling? Name these firms and the lawyers who also represent your clients.
- How many additional clients do you have that share the same industry, size, geography or work profile of your top six?

Write down your action plan to go up-market with each of these six clients.

Stacy West Clark (Stacy Clark Marketing LLC):

- Find the "pain" that is keeping your clients up at night. What do they see as obstacles to growing revenues and being successful? Are there certain new regulations, competitors, threats of lawsuits, product problems, market trends or other things preventing their business from thriving? Once you have identified the "pain," then consider ways to ameliorate it. Do things for them that do not appear on the bill — like a free audit, talk to their managers, compliance check, contract review, tour of their facilities and more to show them that you are all about fixing their "pain" and seeing them succeed. It works every time. More on this in the coming months.
- Ask every client how you can do better in every and any aspect of your representation of them. Listen and then remediate. It will bind your client to you. They do not want to change law firms. They like you. Just listen and grow with their advice. This, too, works every time.

Enjoy the new year. Keep sending those cards and letters. I would love to hear from you in 2013.

Stacy West Clark has been helping lawyers and law firms expand their practices for 25 years. She is a former attorney with [Morgan, Lewis & Bockius](#) and was its first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC (www.stacyclarkmarketing.com).