

Marketing

How to Make the Most of Your Lateral Lawyers

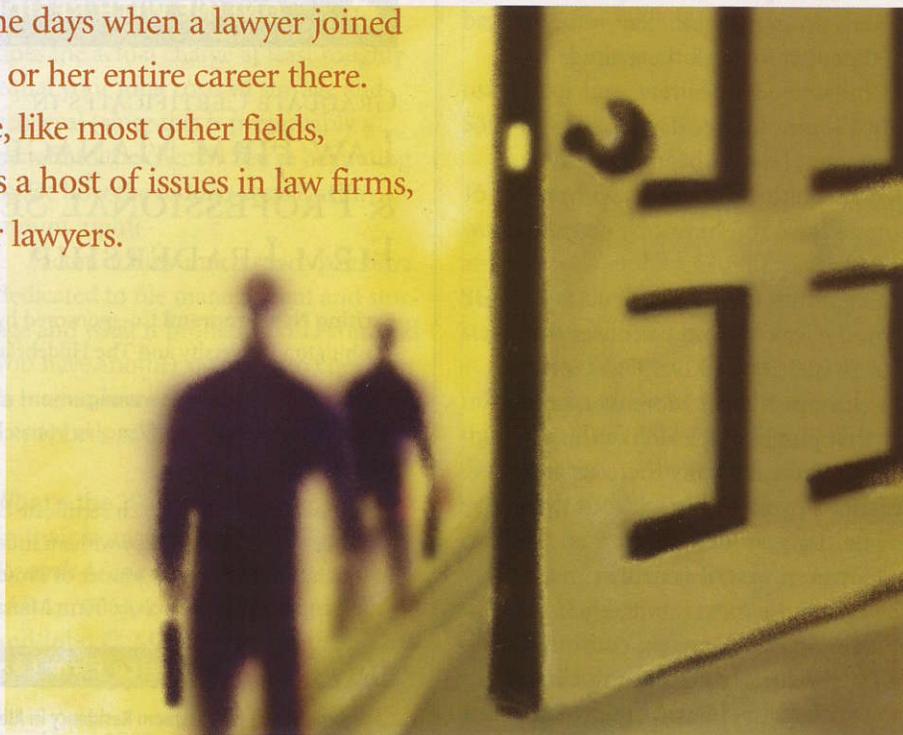
SALLY J. SCHMIDT | Gone are the days when a lawyer joined (or started) a firm and spent his or her entire career there. The legal profession has become, like most other fields, incredibly transitory. This affects a host of issues in law firms, including how they market their lawyers.

Partners, whether individually or in groups, move from firm to firm with increasing frequency. The movement among associates is perhaps even greater. In *Keeping the Keepers II: Mobility and Management of Associates* (2003), the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) Foundation reported that cumulative attrition rates for entry-level associates were at an overall rate of 8.4 percent within 16 months of employment. The cumulative attrition rates for lateral associates revealed that about one in five laterals—18.9 percent—had departed their law firm employers at or near the end of their second year of employment.

The lateral movement across firms raises challenges, of course, but it also offers marketing opportunities, both externally and internally.



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Opportunities and Challenges with Laterals

Changes to your lawyer staff can have a tremendous effect on marketing. In law firms, your people are your product. Time and again, clients will tell you they hire *lawyers*, not law firms. Accordingly, firms typically devote a great deal of energy and resources toward building the credentials and reputations of their lawyers by encouraging their efforts to develop relationships, sending them to conferences and meetings, supporting their marketing activities (such as speaking and writing) and, in many cases, paying for these activities.

Yet despite the investment they make in lawyers' marketing generally, many firms fail to maximize the unique marketing opportunities that lateral lawyers offer. Laterals may bring a new substantive capability or industry knowledge, or increase the firm's depth or breadth of services. They may come with client or other relationships that the firm formerly did not have, or that can be strengthened. Depending on their backgrounds, they may also add a new dimension to the firm's marketing efforts, such as a particular energy, savvy or experience with certain marketing tools and techniques.

What can your firm do to benefit

most from its lateral hires? Here are some thoughts on ways to improve the integration of laterals and make the most of the situation when new lawyers join your firm.

Marketing Your Lateral Lawyers Internally

Remember, marketing internally is every bit as important as marketing externally. Let's begin with some steps to promote your new lawyers in-house.

- **Introduce the lawyer as quickly as possible to other lawyers and to staff.** Make personal introductions, going from office to office whenever it is possible. Give lateral lawyers opportunities to introduce themselves at firm meetings and practice group meetings or, better yet, have another lawyer make the introduction. Have a welcome reception and make the atmosphere cordial.

- **Make an internal announcement.** Send around an e-mail or memo to everyone in the firm and include the new lawyer's bio. Put a big splash on the firm's intranet or in its in-house newsletter. You might conduct a Q&A with the new lawyer, focusing on the following types of questions: "What should others in the firm know about your experience or capabilities?" "What distinguishes you or your practice from others in your field?" And, "How can other people recognize opportunities for you?"

- **Set up a series of in-depth personal meetings.** Appropriate people to meet with in the firm could include other lawyers who have relationships with the same clients as the lateral hire, lawyers who work in the same

industry, or lawyers whose clients would benefit from knowing about the new lawyer's capabilities.

- **Deal with laterals as individuals.** Try to interview each of them about their needs and the kind of support they would like in their marketing efforts. Inquire about their existing clients and their targets for new business. Find out about their external activities (both current and prospective), such as meeting attendance, sponsorships or speaking engagements. Ask them to identify their best opportunities. In other words, how can the firm help the lawyer—and the firm—get maximum return from this new relationship?

- **Make laterals internally visible in a substantive way.** Invite them to give an in-house presentation to other lawyers, or to a particular practice group, on their area of expertise. Ask them to write an original article for an in-house newsletter or the firm's intranet about timely issues in their practice.

- **Provide a mentor or sponsor within the firm.** In addition to being a friendly face, the sponsor can facilitate internal marketing for the lateral by making the introductions, setting up the lunches, or inviting the new lawyer to the appropriate meetings.

Marketing Your Lateral Lawyers Externally

Now let's look at ways to promote laterals outside the firm.

- **Send an advisory about the lawyer's capabilities to appropriate people.** Working with the lateral lawyer, develop a list of people who would be interested in this new firm resource and send personal letters to them, signed

by the primary firm contacts. Focus on why the recipient should know about the new lawyer. For example, "Her experience working with the EPA should be very helpful to you if environmental issues arise for your company in the future."

- **Focus on priority targets.** Set up personal meetings to introduce the lateral lawyer to people who are perceived to have a need for his or her services. These could be clients, prospective clients or good referral sources, such as financial planners or accountants. In these sessions, be enthusiastic about the opportunities and capabilities the lateral brings to the table.

- **Make laterals visible externally.** For some, it might be appropriate to host a welcome reception with clients and other friends of the firm. For others, substantive opportunities may be more effective. You can ask laterals to write an article, or you can write a feature article about them, in firm newsletters or alerts that go to clients, prospects and others. You can also invite the new lawyers to participate in firm seminars, Webinars or blogs.

Mind Your Window of Opportunity

Adding laterals can be disruptive. They frequently demand a lot of administrative services and in some cases present other sticky questions, like where their names appear on the seniority list. In most instances, however, adding new lawyers presents a great marketing opportunity for the firm.

Keep in mind, however, that the window of opportunity can be small. Law firms need to act quickly to secure (or expand) client relationships and take advantage of new synergies. LP