

LAW OFFICE MANAGEMENT

By Sally J. Schmidt*

In a recent survey of law firm marketing the question was posed: "What is your firm's one biggest concern in the area of marketing or new business development?" Nearly one-quarter of the respondents answered, "Developing and implementing marketing plans."

Why are so many firms having such difficulty in this endeavor? One reason is that most firms are trying to develop their marketing strategies on a firmwide basis. Each practice area gets its work in a different way, and in order to be effective, marketing plans must acknowledge and reflect these distinctions.

Marketing planning is most effective when done at the practice group or industry level for a number of reasons:

(1) It is easier to identify and target the appropriate audiences, whether they are clients, prospective clients, referral sources or the media.

(2) Marketing strategies will be more effective when they are targeted to a more distinct group.

(3) Marketing efforts will be less expensive, because less time, effort and money will be wasted reaching inappropriate people.

(4) Surveys of clients consistently show that among the most important criteria when selecting a lawyer are specialization and expertise.

(5) It is easier to identify competitors

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Marketing Law Firm Specialty Practice Areas

by practice area and, consequently, the ways in which the firm can position itself to compete effectively.

(6) Firms will be able to measure the results of their efforts more easily.

Examples of appropriate planning groups are health care, high technology, financial institutions, colleges and universities, commercial real estate development, immigration, international and insurance. In some cases, such as non-profit law, the practice area narrowly defines the targeted market. In others, such as emerging businesses, the tar-

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geted group may be less identifiable. follow the same planning steps as the practice group in a larger firm: The difference would come in selecting the marketing strategies or activities.

Whether marketing planning is done at the firm, office, practice or individual level, it is commonly defined as answering three questions: Where are we now? Where are we going? How will we get there?

Marketing planning is most effective when done at the practice group or industry level, and the planning process for boutiques is essentially the same as for the practice groups of large firms.

Situation Analysis

In order to develop plans for a specialty practice, the firm must first understand the marketing planning process. A boutique or specialty firm would

weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This means analyzing such factors as the practice area's level of competence and experience, reputation in the community, depth or strength of expertise, efficiencies, clientele, personnel, competition and the marketplace and industrial base.

For example, a commercial real estate practice in a midsize, litigation-oriented firm might develop the following situation analysis:

• **Strengths:** The senior partner has 20 years' experience in real estate. The new lateral partner was former general counsel of a major real estate developer.

• **Weaknesses:** The firm's reputation is primarily in litigation. It has no visibility or recognition in the real estate industry. Only three lawyers have any significant experience. The firm represents no large commercial developers.

• **Opportunities:** The firm's legislative practice learns of new real estate development projects before they are public. The firm has experience representing construction companies in litigation matters.

• **Threats:** The commercial real estate market is slowing considerably. Many developers are building their legal staffs and taking work in-house. Another law firm in the area has developed a significant reputation in the industry.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the situation analysis is the identification of opportunities. This involves asking lawyers in the firm — both inside and outside the practice area — for their help in identifying:

(1) Existing clients with cross-selling potential. These might be groups of clients, such as construction companies that might need help from an environmental practice, or specific individuals or companies.

(2) Prospective clients. Once again

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