

LAW FIRM MARKETING



BY SALLY SCHMIDT

Technology's Impact on Marketing

Technology can make marketing more efficient and even more effective, but it will never replace personal contact

As technology continues to evolve, it is having a profound impact on marketing. Websites are last decade's news. Today, holiday cards arrive via e-mail. Seminars are offered via webinars or podcasts. Legal news and substantive advisories are available instantaneously in the form of e-letters or blogs.

There is no question that technology can make marketing more efficient and, in many cases, more effective. At the same time, it seems that some lawyers or marketing professionals may erroneously believe that technology is a substitute for good, old-fashioned personal contact. It's not. In fact, good results in marketing (i.e., new business) often come in direct proportion to the amount of personal effort made.

This article will take a look at a few of the more popular new uses of technology in marketing, along with their benefits and challenges.

E-newsletters/E-alerts vs. Printed Newsletters/Advisories

Many law firms have converted their traditional printed newsletters into pdf files or electronic newsletters that arrive via e-mail. Similarly, printed advisories now arrive as electronic e-letters. Electronic newsletters/alerts arrive instantaneously; the firm can be the first to advise someone about something that affects them or their business, a decided advantage in marketing. With a little work, these electronic bulletins also can be personalized, so readers see a message from a lawyer, not a generic firm address. From a user's perspective, they are easy to deal with (i.e., delete), and can also be forwarded to other people who may find the topic of interest, a definite plus for the law firm.

On the downside, some recipients' systems view these e-mails as spam and block the message entirely; even if they aren't flagged as spam, if they contain too many graphics or are not targeted, they may be perceived as spam by the reader. Too many graphics in the body of the e-mail may make it slow to load or take up too much room on the recipient's computer or hand-held device. And readership often

depends on the mood of the recipient; if he or she is busy and doesn't read the message immediately, it may not be read at all.

Bottom line: Electronic advisories are a very good way to get information to a targeted group of people very quickly, and can provide distinct advantages over traditional printed pieces. Done well, however, published newsletters may present a nicer graphic image of the firm and may have a longer shelf life.

Webcasts/Podcasts vs. Seminars/Roundtables

Law firms are now making seminars and substantive programs available in electronic formats. Some are organizing webinars, where speakers deliver their presentations over the telephone, with slides (and, in some cases, speaker images) viewed on a computer. Other firms are recording programs and speeches and offering them as downloadable podcasts via the firm website.

Offering programs electronically can expand the firm's audience for the information. Additional listeners may include people not able to attend a seminar because of geography or schedule, as well as others who will attend due to the convenience. For example, several people from the same organization will often attend a webinar. On the other hand, attendees sitting at their desks are frequently distracted by phone calls, e-mails and piles of work. They may split their computer screens and do other things during the program. Podcasts, while offering the recipient tremendous flexibility in determining when to listen to the program, also require less commitment from the listener, who may or may not listen after having downloaded the presentation. And both forms lack opportunities for face-to-face contact.

Bottom line: If you are presenting the program anyway and can offer it to people unable to attend via some electronic method, it simply expands your reach. However, much of the benefit of a seminar comes in the personal interaction between speaker(s) and audience.

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Client Relationship Management Systems (CRMs)/Databases vs. Mailing Lists

A well-designed and populated database or CRM will allow you to select targeted lists of people to receive firm communications, from seminar invitations to substantive advisories. The same system can help the firm track attendance and contacts, to measure response or return on investment. It often allows the firm to "mine" data, by running myriad analyses, such as clients by services used or top referral sources for each practice. And these systems help lawyers manage their own business development efforts and relationships by tracking their contacts.

For some law firms, however, a CRM system may be the worst investment they ever make. Many law firms acquire systems that are far more sophisticated than their needs, resulting in frustration or wholesale abandonment of the effort. Firms often fail to realize the human resources necessary to both implement and maintain a CRM (e.g., data stewards, data entry personnel, etc.). And they often have miserable results with their "roll outs," expecting too much cooperation from lawyers who are either too busy to see the value or who traditionally have been very protective of their relationships.

Bottom line: There is no question that organizing your firm's contact information through a good CRM or database system will make your marketing efforts immeasurably easier. However, the firm needs to have the proper commitment (e.g., staff, resources, education) to make implementation successful.

Conclusion

Technology can make your marketing efforts far more efficient and effective. However, as the old saying goes, "Too much of a good thing is still too much." Law firms should be careful to ensure that technology is used to improve their marketing efforts.

In addition, technology will never replace the need for interpersonal relationships and personal contact in the legal profession. A printed holiday card with a hand-written note inside will be put on a credenza and appreciated far more than its technological equivalent. Similarly, an intimate gathering of general counsels to discuss governance issues at a firm-hosted roundtable will provide many times the benefit of a webinar. ☐

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for legal services at least once a year, and to anticipate some demand for unique projects, complex work and crises on a contingency basis;

- understand the inter-relationships of the five profitability variables (volumes, rate, leverage, expenses and realization) in the law firm business model and their application to different legal specializations;
- predicate cost-competitiveness for external counsel on total price rather than hourly rate;
- be proficient in case and matter budgeting methodologies and in evaluating detailed estimates for legal matters; and
- master non-hourly based pricing protocols designed to stimulate efficiency and to provide incentives for successful outcomes.

The role of informed purchaser of legal services cannot fall to all 10 lawyers in a 10-lawyer law department. The knowledge, skills and time to manage procurement must be concentrated and practised. Many law departments would do well to configure the responsibilities of team members to reflect the need for progressive management practices. ☐

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