

Better Marketing, One Container at a Time

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I heard an expert on organizing say that the biggest mistake people make, whether they are tackling their closets or their desks, is to buy baskets, bins and containers. Her advice was to take an inventory of what you have, figure out what you really need and determine how you use it. Then—and only then—do you buy containers.

I thought it sounded a lot like a law firm approach to knowledge management (KM), perhaps the hottest trend in professional service firms. Knowledge management is the discipline of managing the firm's intangibles and "intellectual capital"—which includes experiences, relationships, ideas or processes—and making them available throughout the firm. Many people believe that using this internal knowledge effectively can determine a law firm's future competitiveness and success.

Yet law firms often start the process of knowledge management like organizing a closet. They look for the software or system that will tidy it up neatly, instead of taking a realistic assessment of how the firm can capture and share information.



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How Knowledge Management and Marketing Intersect

While the jargon may come and go, knowledge management is more than a passing trend. The concept can be an integral part of how your firm operates. Knowledge management has enormous implications for the effectiveness of a firm's marketing program. For example:

Referrals. Have you ever seen an internal memo or e-mail inquiring, "Does anyone know a litigator in Des Moines?"

Client service. What process is in place to ensure that all lawyers assigned to a particular client's matters are educated about the client's quirks and requirements, such as billing guidelines?

Mailings. Has the firm ever sent two, three (or 25) holiday cards to the same client, each signed by a different lawyer?

How can a law firm capture and share its intellectual capital and turn it into marketing strategy? By taking stock of its needs, first.