

# Marketing

## Professional Development: It's Not Just for Lawyers

**SALLY J. SCHMIDT** | The professionals working in a law firm marketing or business development capacity need to be continually improving their skills, acquiring new information and building their credentials—just like the firm's lawyers do.

Lawyers must refresh their substantive skills regularly through continuing legal education; even if their jurisdictions don't require it, all feel a professional duty to stay abreast of developments in their fields of law and other areas that can boost their careers. But professional development is important for anyone in any position. One could even argue that, to enhance effectiveness, professional development is perhaps more important for law firm marketing staff than for many lawyers.

So if you're an in-house marketing professional, following are a number of professional development activities you might consider, depending on your level or function in the firm. Or, if you're a partner in the firm, you might encourage your marketing people to implement some of these tips starting today.



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### Building Credibility

Credibility is hard to earn and can be lost in an instant. Truth be told, a typo appearing in a major client communication has derailed the career of more than one marketer. Mistakes will happen, of course, especially in a function that is so visible. But it is imperative that in-house marketing staff take great care in how they and their work product appear to lawyers and clients. Some thoughts on building credibility:

- Critically assess your appearance. Ask yourself, are you someone that a partner would feel comfortable introducing to a client—each and every day? If you err with your attire, err on the more formal side.
- Be conscious of how you present yourself in meetings. Do you stand up when you give a presentation? You should. Do you twist your hair or sit with your leg tucked under you? You shouldn't.
- Assess how you present information. Are you prepared with an agenda for meetings? Have you prepared background information? Have you anticipated what other issues might arise or what data might be needed?

■ Consider the persona you project. Self-conscious or confident? Defensive or helpful? Nonverbal communication can speak more loudly than anything you actually say.

■ Examine your work product. Proof, proof and proof again. Your work must be accurate and dependable.

■ Be discreet. You will come into contact with a lot of internal information and data, much of it confidential, most of it at least sensitive. Be careful what you disclose to whom.

■ Become an authority on marketing. Share things you have learned at conferences or seminars. Circulate information you have found on competitive or client activities. Invite lawyers to accompany you to industry meetings or webinars. Distribute articles or other resources you find valuable. Set up demos so partners can learn about marketing-related resources, from CRM systems to Web site redesigns.

■ Submit firm initiatives for awards. Organizations like the Legal Marketing Association (LMA) give out awards for activities; other groups, from public relations to communications, do the same. Awards can bring prestige to the firm and shine a light on you. The caveat, of course, is that they must bring as much value to the firm as they do to your personal portfolio.

### Building a Network

The goal is to be seen as a person who is connected, involved and invested. The more people you know, the more likely you can provide intel-

ligence or assistance when someone else in the firm needs help. Here are steps that will help achieve that goal:

- Network continually. Whether you do this through in-person events or social media, the goal is to stay in touch with people and build your network.
- Join a professional organization. This could be the LMA, the American Marketing Association, the Legal Sales and Service Organization or any number of other groups. Attend the group's meetings, too—whether they are national conferences or local chapter meetings, you can learn best practices, meet peers and learn about new innovations.
- Get involved in community activities. Marketers can be effective firm representatives in groups like the chamber of commerce or local Rotary chapters.
- Participate in industry groups. For example, if your firm has a significant practice in health care or life sciences, you can be a firm representative to a niche group meeting to learn the players and more about the field.
- Meet with vendors and suppliers. Some marketing professionals treat vendors like lepers. But it is your responsibility to be apprised of products and services that may make the firm's marketing or business development efforts more effective.

#### Building Credentials

Lawyers are credential-conscious, and they pay attention to things like schools attended, honors and awards. Why do you think there is such a proliferation of directories, rankings and listings for the legal profession?

Marketing and business development professionals should also build

their credentials continually, by doing the following, for example:

- Go back to school. Take a class to learn about something in which you are weak, like reading financial statements, or that will help you in your job, such as business law. Don't rule out an MBA.
- Use an outside activity to learn a new skill. If you want to learn how to coach lawyers in business development, for example, volunteer for a fund-raising committee to learn how to call for donations, a skill you can apply elsewhere.
- Showcase your expertise and build your resume. Publish articles or give presentations.
- Become a leader of an organization. Head a committee or run for the board.

#### Building Client Relationships

Marketers need to nurture client relationships, too. For members of the marketing or business development staff, clients are inside the firm—the lawyers and others who use the department's services. To this end, here are tips you can use:

- Get out of your office. Meet face-to-face with people whenever possible. Go to lunch with partners.
- Be a good listener. Ask a lot of questions.
- Tailor communications. For example, if there are partners in the firm who have their secretaries transcribe all voice-mail messages (yes, these folks still exist), why leave a voice mail?
- Communicate frequently. Give reports on your activities or the activities of your group. Copy people on e-mails or correspondence that will keep them up-to-date. Report on successes and results.

#### Building Value

Finally, everyone in the marketing or business development area should be looking for ways to add to the firm's bottom line. Lawyers often complain that marketing is an expense item—so what can marketing staff do to contribute to the other side of the ledger? Here are examples:

- Get intimately involved in efforts to win business. Help with big pitches or proposals. Conduct research, discuss the strategy, gather up materials and conduct rehearsals with those who will be involved.
- Establish business development training or coaching programs for lawyers. Find ways (or resources) to build skills.
- Identify and follow up with opportunities. Help the lawyers look for new business opportunities. For example, set up electronic alerts (Google or Lexis-Nexis) to get notified of developments with target companies or industries.
- Set up ways to follow up. Whether it involves seminar attendees or Web site inquiries, make sure targets are continually tracked.
- Understand the economics of the practice. Learn on what basis partners get paid and track return on investment.

#### Practice What You Preach

Marketers ask the firm's lawyers to enhance their resumes, contribute to thought leadership, network and participate in organizations. As a marketing professional, your efforts to do the same will bring value to the firm while also enhancing your professional opportunities for the long term. The bottom line: Practice what you preach. **LP**