

Play to Win

[**Look Outside the Legal Biz**](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/look-outside-the-legal-biz/)

By [Sally J. Schmidt](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/author/sally-j-schmidt/) | Sep.17.13 | [Daily Dispatch](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/articles/), [Law Firm Management](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/management/), [Legal Marketing](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/legal-marketing-2/), [Play to Win](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/play-to-win/)



In my early years, when I first started working as a law firm marketing director, I was preaching the benefits of obtaining client feedback but running into major resistance from management. About two years later, however, one of the senior partners came to a meeting extolling the customer survey process that one of his clients had implemented. Lo and behold, we launched a client interview process; the partner was a hero and I was thrilled.

**Look Elsewhere for Answers**

I have worked in law firm marketing my entire professional career so, when presenting a novel idea, I am never surprised when lawyers say, “But law firms are different.” Of course they are. There are ethics rules, issues of propriety, complex client relationships, unpredictable outcomes, quirky cultures and complicated partnerships. There are many, many things that make law firms “different.”

Still, there is so much to be learned from other industries. Maybe we can’t take a concept or program and apply it whole cloth. But, with thoughtful modifications, many marketing and business development initiatives from other service (or even product) companies have some merit for law firms.

Here are some timely examples:

* Exploring project management? Engineers have used Gantt charts for years to manage their projects, schedules and costs.
* Trying to keep clients updated about fees? Contractors use construction change orders to communicate when the scope and price of the project change.
* Learning how to prepare effective proposals? Architects get nearly all their work through this process.
* Developing thought-leadership tools? Accountants have generated proprietary information, white papers and research on industries and trends for years.
* Considering a client survey? Hospitals survey their patients on the quality of care; chambers of commerce survey their members about their benefits; even auto dealers ask customers about their service.
* Implementing client retention and expansion strategies? All the best-run businesses have customer tracking and loyalty programs.
* Wondering how to penetrate an industry? Most sophisticated companies have “vertical market” strategies.

So how can you break free of legal myopia?

* **Interview people.** Take a consultant or accountant to lunch and ask, “What marketing or business development techniques have been most effective for your practice?” Meet with an engineer or contractor and ask, “What project management or pricing tools have worked best for you?”
* **Enroll in a weekend MBA program.** Spend some time learning general management theories, exploring business best practices and meeting leaders in other industries.
* **Expand your discussions.** When talking to clients, ask about their companies’ marketing, business development (or sales) and customer relations strategies.
* **Attend a non-law conference or program.** Sit in a room with practitioners or marketers from a range of industries to hear the state of the art in service delivery, pricing or marketing.
* **Read management books.** There are few lawyers who have read *Good to Great,* for example, who haven’t found something applicable to situations in their own firms.

Yes, law firms may be different. But in almost all successful business practices, there is at least a nugget of an idea that can be modified and applied successfully to law. Those who don’t think so are naïve or arrogant.

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