



Feature

Law Firms Hire Marketing Consultants to Increase Business

By Kim Paton

Back when Sol Linowitz was a young attorney in the 1940s, law firms followed a cardinal rule. "It was considered shockingly bad behavior to solicit legal business," Mr. Linowitz, author of *The Betrayed Profession* and former senior partner at Coudert Brothers wrote, "The young lawyer was supposed to conduct himself in such a way that his telephone would ring."



However, rules change, and few more dramatically than the prohibition against lawyers soliciting business. As more law firms have opened, the practice has become highly specialized, associate salaries have risen, and concern about profits-per-partner has intensified, competition among firms for business has become fierce.

The legal marketing "industry is not going away," says Stacey Pilcher,

founder of Stacey Pilcher, et al., a marketing and business development firm in Phoenix, AZ. Indeed, since its founding in 1985, the Legal Marketing Association's membership has grown to more than 1,800. Seventy-four percent of the largest law firms in the United States now employ association members.

As a former marketing director at the Phoenix firm of Streich Lang P.A. (which has since merged with national firm Quarles & Brady LLP), Ms. Pilcher saw law firms turn to marketing consultants in the early 1990s to increase market share. Replicating the practices of the big accounting firms and other businesses, law firms began to focus on "branding" (how to distinguish themselves from other firms to potential clients) and on business development (how to expand the client base while simultaneously keeping existing clients happy). Firms began to bring full-time marketing help in-house in order to accomplish such goals.

Basically, law firms began to develop a "greater appreciation for marketing as an investment, rather than just another cost," said Clara Boza, chief marketing officer of Kirkpatrick & Lockhart LLP. In Ms. Boza's 19 years of experience, much has changed since the days when law firms tended to use savvy paralegals for the earliest marketing efforts. Now, firms hire dedicated marketing professionals.

Yet, "cookie-cutter staffing solutions" have never worked in the legal industry, said Nathan Darling, the Marketing Manager at Kirpatrick & Lockhart's Washington, DC, office. Instead, firms suit their particular needs by creating specialized staff positions to cover everything from event marketing to proposal support. These days, senior-legal marketing executives are often hired from other realms, such as pharmaceutical sales or professional consulting firms. Some law firms even have broken the traditional taboo and specifically hired a "sales" director. As a result, legal marketing is changing rapidly.

During the course of this evolution, Brigitte Herschensohn, President of Herschensohn Strategic Development in Los Angeles, has noticed a "dramatic shift" from the use of outside marketing consultants to the employment of in-house marketing staff. Even the smallest firms may employ one person with various responsibilities that include marketing-related tasks. How much a firm devotes to marketing depends on the personality and leadership of the firm, experts say. Ms. Herschensohn said, "The investment that is made in both marketing staff and marketing consultants ultimately comes down to the vision and objectives of the firm's leaders."

Law firms that prioritize marketing typically allocate anywhere from two to five percent of firm revenues to a marketing program. Perhaps the largest variable is whether this range includes staff salaries. Average salaries for a marketing director or manager at a large, big-city firm can well exceed \$100,000; marketing coordinators typically can earn anywhere from \$30,000 to \$70,000. A chief marketing officer may earn in excess of \$250,000 at some firms.

The wide variety in staff titles and responsibilities corresponds with the variety in marketing plans today. While goals vary, Mr. Darling distinguishes the various efforts: marketing plans operate on a broad scale to achieve general name recognition, while business development and sales are used to make contact with specific clients—of course, all with significant interplay.



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Michelle Hart's experiences illustrate the legal marketing scene today. Ms. Hart began marketing work at the Los Angeles office of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, LLP, when she became burned out there in her human resources position. Eventually, Ms. Hart became a director of marketing at the San Francisco office of Nossaman Guthner Knox & Elliott, LLP, a mid-sized law firm of 135 attorneys.

Nossaman has had a marketing department for 15 years and currently has a marketing staff of six people. A public relations position was brought in-house after the firm hired a public relations firm that was extremely successful in increasing business, Ms. Hart says. The firm also has hired Hildebrandt International, Inc., a large consulting firm, to help with major projects.

Overall, Ms. Hart is very positive about the role that she and her department fulfill at the firm. "It's exciting," she says, "to think that you play a hand in getting business for the company." The attorneys agree. "It's nice to have marketing people so close," says partner Stephanie Hopkins. "You can just walk down the hall and ask for help."

However, a frustration that Ms. Hart notes is that it is often impossible to track directly the return on the firm's investment in a marketing program. For example, it may take two to five years of attorneys speaking at the same conference before the firm obtains a new client through that effort.

Use of both in-house and outside marketing consultants within the legal profession parallels marketing plans in other professions. David Gleit is the Marketing Associate for Aronson + Johnson + Ortiz, LP, an institutional investment advising firm in Philadelphia. He says much of that firm's marketing work is accomplished in-house, with the use of outside consultants to help with specific tasks, such as revising graphics.

The genteel days when Sol Linowitz and other attorneys of his era waited by their phones for clients to call are clearly gone for good. Nathan Darling predicts, "The evolution that the legal marketing profession has experienced over the last five years will no doubt continue." So, no matter what you call it, experts say legal marketing is here to stay.

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