

Business development and sales skills for lawyers

By Linda Julian

The coming year promises increasing client pressures, as well as even more competition between law firms, with corporate legal departments, and other professions.

Astute practices and practitioners recognise that marketing will be a key ingredient in their success. And, business development or marketing is a complex area in which everyone has a part to play - it can't simply be left to a marketing partner or manager.

Marketing campaigns will be vastly more effective if supported by a practical personal marketing or sales programme.

Whatever we call it, if a prospective client is to be converted to a new client, if a potential matter is to become an actual matter, it will involve some degree of selling.

At the moments of truth, it is the lawyer who must play salesperson - he or she has to persuade the client that they will add value, and show how the problem will be solved.

Many practitioners still feel uncomfortable with the concept of active personal marketing, and want to avoid becoming "salespeople" at all costs. However, those same lawyers usually want to deliver great service in the environment of a thriving and successful practice. They're often interested in better meeting client needs, and working to convert business opportunities into satisfied users of their services.

You may be blessed with strong natural sales aptitude and many advantageous characteristics: if you're intelligent, articulate, and confident, it's a great start. Strong analytical skills are also beneficial in constructing a proposition and weighing the arguments. Well-honed advocacy ability is another boon.

Perhaps like many other practitioners, however, you carry handicaps: an adversarial approach, professional detachment, lack of empathy, and legendary arrogance can present serious drawbacks. Some lawyers react badly when their recommendations or advice questioned. And, the best lawyers are not necessarily good team players.

Possibly you can identify some of these strengths and weaknesses in yourself. But there's often a big gap between personal marketing aptitude and putting skills into practice.

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Try this quick quiz to rate your personal marketing skills - score yourself out of 10 on each item.

- You are regarded as an authority in your field
- You understand the industry environment and business problems or challenges of each of your clients and prospective clients
- You read relevant business and industry publications (as well as legal press) to keep abreast of trends and issues which affect your clients
- You can clearly explain what your chosen field embraces, and its relevance to clients
- You succinctly describe each of the services you provide, and the benefits which they'll deliver to your clients
- You can list at least five convincing reasons for a prospective client to entrust you with their business
- You are aware of your competitors, the services they promote, and who their major clients are
- You understand the policies and procedures of your firm, and can readily explain them to clients
- You constantly seek feedback from clients about their satisfaction with your advice and service, and you act on it
- Your clients look to you for advice beyond the normal bounds of the matter/s at hand
- Your clients keep you informed of developments in their businesses or circumstances
- You consistently look for information and ideas which will be helpful to clients, and assist you to service them more effectively
- You understand the full range of services your firm offers and what differentiates these from competitive approaches
- You know the marketing resources at your disposal, and understand the firm campaign in support of your own efforts
- You feel comfortable making presentations to clients and prospective clients

Now, add your scores, divide the total by 150, and multiply the result by 100. This is your personal marketing skills rating. If you scored 85% or better, you're probably already a personal marketing star; if you scored less, you can work at becoming one.

Each month, this column will offer practical advice to help you become more effective - it will include tips to improve your sales skills, establish your credibility, network, present proposals, and develop strong bonds with your clients.

Cultivating personal marketing or sales skills is now an integral part of high-quality professional service delivery. And, it's worth the effort: it will help you to win business, satisfy clients, and increase the satisfaction you derive from practice.

About the author

Linda Julian is acknowledged as a leading authority on strategic practice development and how to win business for law firms. Since 1979, she has consulted with lawyers and other professionals throughout Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, and Asia on a wide range of business acquisition, client retention, and strategic management issues.

Her book *The Passionate Professional: creating value, success, and prosperity* has sold in 13 countries and has received wide acclaim. Linda lectures in strategic management and marketing professional services at post-graduate level. She leads the small and highly specialised Julian Midwinter & Associates consulting practice.

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