

## Planning your marketing

By Linda Julian

Successful practice marketing is based on careful research, and your marketing plan should be devised in response to research. But many practices fall into one of two traps: either not doing the research, or not using it to produce a practical marketing plan.

Your marketing plan should set out the results you expect. But the planning process shouldn't be an excuse for inaction - it's easy to spend far too long on planning and not get on with the action.

The best marketing plans carefully target marketing efforts. Closely-targeted efforts will increase effectiveness. Link your marketing and client service plan with your practice strategic plan.

Client service is the basis for marketing in all legal practices. Otherwise, marketing plans are just a lot of words.

In preparing your marketing plan, don't overemphasise paper marketing.

Many law firms have fallen victim to spending far too much time, energy, and money in producing a firm brochure: a firm profile or brochure won't win you the business. The brochure really is no more than the sophisticated 1990s equivalent of the business card.

Be careful not to devote too much of your limited resources to paper-based marketing.

Your marketing plan should reflect your overall framework of common goals.

The value of a marketing plan is enhanced by confining it to a particular business area, or to a particular industry.

Separate marketing plans should be devised for each business segment - different business segments will have different competitors, different cultures, and (most important of all) diverse client characteristics.

The best marketing plans go down to an individual level. Individual plans are essential - by planning at an individual level you will create "buy in" and accountability.

Individual plans can be "rolled up" into group plans, and finally firm-wide marketing plan.

In creating your marketing plan, keep in mind the realistic opportunities among your clients, prospective clients, and their businesses.

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The most important area to focus on is your existing clients. How can you keep your existing clients, and develop them? Your marketing plan should clearly set out the strategies you have in mind to retain the existing clients and grow your business with them. It should then outline strategies to attract further clients or other business from within those market segments.

Remember, most of your business will come from your existing clients.

In developing a marketing plan to attract new clients, be sure to set out your strengths - those unique skills or differentiating features of your practice which are especially appealing to new clients within your target area.

Be realistic. List your strengths apropos the competition. The most convincing strengths are those based on track record.

Take a strategic look at your practice - you'll discover that there are unequal areas of expertise. Skill is not uniformly spread over all of the areas of your firm. The best areas to attract new clients those where you are already truly strong. Also, look at areas where you can attract further business from existing clients.

Decide which of these four styles of work are your targets for each individual and practice area within your firm.

**Commodity Work:** This is generally price-sensitive, high-volume work of a routine nature. It depends upon being a highly efficient, low-cost producer of satisfactory quality.

**Bread and Butter Work:** This routine work is also fairly price-sensitive, and long-run success will depend upon being a cost-efficient producer. However certain service or reputation elements are important in attracting and keeping bread and butter work.

**Work Based on Your Reputation or Track Record:** Work of this kind will not be nearly as price-sensitive as the two above - it depends on excellent results, demonstrable track record and current experience in the field.

**Complete Service Work:** This depends on having an established reputation. Even more importantly, a detailed and thorough knowledge of the client, its business or industry, and distinct ability to add value into the relationship is essential for this kind of work. It is generally not price-sensitive.

Then the promotion phase comes in to your plan. Start with the question "Why would the target client want to engage our services?" (Most practices fall into the trap of asking "Who do we want as clients?")

The market is competitive, and becoming increasingly so. Its near enough to a buyers market now, and in future may be even more so.

Law firm marketing is based frequently on the mistaken belief that targeting is about working out who you want as clients. That type of targeting works in a sellers market, but you need to turn it around and get to the tough question of differentiation.

What differentiates you from other firms? Why would a prospective client want to hire you?

The best way of finding this out is to discover what your current clients so value about you. You will often learn about a great deal from your current clients about how they see you vis-a-vis competitors, and in this area depth research with key clients is invaluable.

Constantly ask the question "What makes us different?" Be rigorous in your assessment. This will give you a big hint about what your clients value in you, and where to target your efforts.

Ask "How are we distinguishable from others in a way which is meaningful and valuable to clients?"

Develop a broad consensus about what makes you different. In doing this you'll isolate what makes you relevant and valued by your clients.

By closely targeting your marketing efforts to the clients best suited to the profile of your firm you will achieve the optimal results from marketing.

The best clients you have are those whose cultures closely mesh with yours, and where a synergistic relationship can develop that results in the "partnering".

Remember, plan for results. Do your research. But don't use the planning process as an excuse for inaction today - your competitors won't.

#### **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.