

Targeting your marketing effort

by Linda Julian

Every law firm faces the economic problem: finite resources and seemingly infinite calls on those scarce resources. In the marketing area, this is especially true. So, careful planning is mandated. Plan for results, but not for inaction. Carefully target efforts for maximum effectiveness: plan for client service and marketing. These must be linked with your strategic plan.

Client service is the basis of marketing. Otherwise marketing is just so much "fluff".

You won't get business on the basis of a brochure alone. A brochure is little more than the modern equivalent of a business card.

And, be careful not to absorb too much of your scarce marketing resource in planning.

The overall framework of your marketing plan must be common goals: it is important that goals be shared. The value of a marketing plan is increased when it is linked with your business plan. The marketing plan must be brought down to an individual level.

Separate marketing plans should be established for each business segment: different segments have their own unique cultures, different competitors, different price sensitivities, and require different promotional techniques.

It's essential that marketing plans be individual - this way you will get personal "buy in" and accountability.

Realism about clients and business prospects is vital - you should be realistic about the business you can attract and keep. Most business will come from your existing clients.

The old four "Ps" of marketing have to be taken into account: product, place, price, and promotion.

If you are after new clients, have a hard look at your strengths, your position apropos the competition, your track record, and your real ability to win the business. Don't spoil the opportunity with ill-conceived activities.

Your firm will have unequal expertise in various areas and it's important to attract new clients to your strong areas. New practice areas to offer to established clients are different from those which you may choose to offer to new clients.

It's like an upside down triangle: at the top of the upside down triangle is commodity work. That's probably the volume of work you offer. Then comes "bread and butter" work. After that it's reputation work. And after that it's high value service work.

www.julianmidwinter.com.au

Tel +61 2 9968 4168
Fax +61 2 9960 4480

Suite 16 357 Military Road
Mosman NSW 2088
Australia

Email julianmidwinter@julianmidwinter.com.au

Your marketing needs to go into the promotion phase. Many practices make the mistake of putting the promotion phase first. First comes the targeting phase. Recognise that it's already a buyers market - a highly competitive market. Targeting works best in a seller's market.

You have to turn it around to a tough question. The tough question is differentiation. The question goes "why would they want to hire us?". Questions shouldn't start "who do we want as clients?".

Start by asking "what makes us different?". From this, proceed to action. Ask "how are we distinguishable from others in a way which is meaningful to our clients?".

It may be hard work, but you need to get agreement about what makes you different from your competitors, and even more importantly, what makes this relevant or of value to your clients.

Here are 10 rules for good marketing:

Client service is the foundation of your marketing

It's important to have technical competence, good service and good work product. The client assumes technical competence, but without foundation levels of service, marketing is just fluff.

Practice management is an important differentiating strategy

It may not always be a useful differentiator, and using practice management as a differentiation strategy means not just paying this service to it. Use practice management to improve your work quality.

Always ask the question, though, as to how sensitive your clients are to this improved work quality. Get really efficient about doing the work.

Evaluate your work product and client service quality constantly. Use peer reviews. Use client surveys. Use expert help. Use whatever you can to evaluate your work product and check your client service quality.

Most importantly, check client assessment of your work quality.

Clients hire specialists and practice groups, not law firms

From client service comes relationships, and through the contact of relationships comes image. Don't throw money at fixing your image, especially a whole firm image.

Remember, no electronic super-highway ever replaced a pair of shoes get into face-to-face contact with prospective clients.

Clients want quick answers - they don't want heaps of research to get to an answer.

Substantive marketing is our preferred approach over pure image activities. Use seminars, presentations, articles, and all manner of substantive tools rather than entertainment to win clients.

Most lawyers are not that great at "pressing the flesh" or winning clients by wining and dining. Put your substantive expertise on display.

Take a look: what aspects of your competitors marketing works ?

There is a trend in major companies to discourage entertainment of senior executives. Of the Fortune 500 companies, in 1994, seven simply banned entertainment of their senior executives by suppliers. In 1994, 12 more Fortune 500 companies put in place policies limiting acceptance of entertainment by senior executives. The trend continues.

Get busy with credibility marketing, then relationship marketing, and personal marketing.

Credibility building is important. Once you have built credibility, the client will be receptive and you can build a relationship. A mix of credibility building and direct marketing is what you need - but the mix must change at different stages of the marketing process.

Different tools work with different clients at different stages

Paper marketing isn't enough. Clients may notice an absence of paper, though.

Seminars have been effective for a long time, and remain effective. If your seminars aren't as effective as you had hoped, get some expert independent counsel on what you can do to improve their impact.

Team marketing works more often

Loan wolf marketing doesn't work very often at all. You will probably win more often as a team. Clients will be sensitive to your teaming.

Communication is the missing link in many firms

It's the number one source of client complaints.

And, clients expectations continue to grow

Accountability is key

You are not doing your people a favour by dispensing with accountability. It simply ends up in discouragement. You need to constantly ask "why are we doing it?" and "what follow-up is required?". Constantly ask "what is simply a waste of time or a waste of money?" - "does it really make a difference?".

If you are continuing with entertainment, ask who's doing it, why they are doing it, and what follow-up is happening as a result.

Many of your contacts will bring in business. But many lawyers give up far too soon.

If you want to improve the effectiveness of your marketing, take a look at how lawyers are compensated for marketing. Examine how budget is allocated. Look at peer pressure within your firm to market and report on marketing activities. Use it.

Keep it simple

Keep your marketing moving and be prepared to take a risk. It's not always about the best plan - rather about the best action.

Keep in mind "black hole" marketing. What are the key black holes to watch for ?

Staff

Have clear expectations of your staff about marketing, and even more clear expectations of your marketing staff. Provide clear direction to your staff. Ensure that their responsibilities and accountabilities are also clear. Whoever marketing staff report to must have clout within the partnership.

Advertising and sponsorships

Only advertise if you can measure the results from it. If you can't tell whether your advertising is paying, don't do it.

Reactive activity

Watch for marketing opportunities like "sponsorships offered". It's easy to waste a whole lot of money on things like sponsorship or opportunities that someone else presented to you rather than techniques you decided for yourselves.

Underutilised resources

For example, you may have a database which is underutilised. Perhaps people have put some time and energy in, but decided it was too difficult to collect the data or maintain it.

Another underutilised resource to watch for is third party research. Practices are starting to spend money on third party research. Asking yourselves first, "what would we do with it?" and "will we act on it?" before spending any money on third party research.

Unrealistic objectives

More marketing plans fail because there was never a realistic possibility of them succeeding than for any other reason.

Brochures

Too many firms spend far too much money and far too much time on producing brochures. Internal energy absorbed by producing a brochure is enormous. Watch for this "marketing black hole".

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.