

LAW FIRM MARKETING

Don't Get Left Behind

WHAT SMALL FIRMS CAN LEARN FROM WHAT THE LARGE FIRMS ARE DOING

BY STACY WEST CLARK

Have you ever stared out of your office window and wondered how other lawyers in Philadelphia were growing their practices? Have you ever sat through a partners' meeting wondering why your revenues were not growing as you would wish?

You are not alone. The difference is that other firms are actively getting at the heart of these questions by hiring marketing staffs and implementing full-blown marketing programs.

In 1986, when I went from being an associate at Morgan Lewis & Bockius to becoming its first director of client relations, there were a handful of marketing professionals in Philadelphia and they were all at large firms. Each of us had some portion of a secretary's time, lots of energy and a love for law firm marketing. I say this because some of my colleagues from the mid-1980s and early 1990s are still in the trade.

Mary Beth Pratt and Polly Warren at Pepper Hamilton, Pamela McCarthy at Klehr Harrison and Julie Meyer at Dilworth Paxson collectively have more than fifty years experience in law firm marketing. This is an amazing feat considering the average turnover of marketing directors at most firms is two years.

Today, more than thirty law firms in the Delaware Valley have full-time marketing professionals on staff. Within these firms, there are more than seventy staff members on the marketing team.

EMERGING TRENDS

Several new trends have emerged in law firm marketing in Philadelphia—trends that are echoed nationally. Namely:

- There are more men entering the profession. The marketing directors of Duane Morris, Drinker Biddle and Wolf Block are men. This is a very new phenomenon. When law firm marketing began in earnest it was gently called a "skirt" industry.

- No longer disguised in soft titles such as "director of client relations" or "director of client services," the new marketing professionals have titles such as "chief marketing officer" and "marketing director."

Moreover, they no longer have "back offices" on administrative floors, but instead have partner-size offices on lawyer floors.

- These CMOs have staffs. A typical staff at the largest Philadelphia firms includes a marketing director, a communications manager (who handles firm publications and external newsletters), a database and Web site manager, a client event specialist and at least one secretary/assistant. Earlier this year, Duane Morris hired a full-time, highly experienced, in-house media relations specialist.

- The senior marketing staff members may have MBAs and JDs. Many have years of marketing experience in non-legal industries.

- These marketing professionals are getting paid at the same level as junior to mid-level partners—depending on their experience.

WHAT IN-HOUSE MARKETERS DO

Marketing staffs are involved with:

- helping their firms and lawyers develop strategic marketing plans;

- training their lawyers and staff on client service techniques;

- doing extensive research on their competition and targeted potential clients;

- interviewing clients on their satisfaction with the firm's services;

- arranging client educational seminars and entertaining events;

- developing sophisticated hard copy and e-mail client communications; and

- providing story ideas to the media to secure press coverage for their attorneys, and much more.

Dilworth Paxson's marketing director, Julie Meyer, sends her attorneys a weekly "Marketing Tip." As she says, "in addition to the substantive content, the weekly tip is a subtle reminder to the lawyers to devote some time to practice development." Dilworth also arranges for clients to receive CLE credit for attendance at their firm seminars.

The catchphrase today in many savvy law firms is "industry-driven marketing." This means that instead of pushing their "litigation practice," firms are marketing their knowledge of legal issues affecting an industry. Visit the Web site of the King of Prussia firm Powell, Trachtman, Logan, Carrle & Lombardo. On every major page of their site you will see specific flags to the services they provide to design professionals, real estate developers and project owners, manufacturers and distributors, banks and financial institutions, investors, entrepreneurs, IT and commerce firms, and small- and medium-sized businesses. By having specific descriptions of the services they provide to each of these

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sectors, the firm is saying, "We understand your entire business. We speak (for example) architecture law."

Another huge trend is client satisfaction programs. Philadelphia firms are assessing their clients' satisfaction with their services—in person and by mail. In many more firms, attorneys are meeting with their clients (or having consultants meet with them) to identify ways of improving the relationship.

Finally, firms are pouring time, energy and money into creating innovative and interactive Web sites and blogs. Many firm Web sites provide news of attorney speeches and awards, and provide copies of firm press releases, practice-area newsletters and lawyer-authored publications. Pepper's recently revamped Web site earned the 2003 "Best Legal Web Site" award from the Web Marketing Association. Reed Smith and other firms have a Newsroom section for the press available on their sites. In addition, a Reed Smith intellectual property attorney has her own Web BLOG (Bag and Baggage, <http://bgbg.blogspot.com>) where she discusses a wide variety of legal and non-legal topics outside of her firm work.

MID-SIZED AND BOUTIQUE FIRMS

But marketing is not being done just in the largest firms in the Delaware Valley. Some of the most aggressive and innovative marketing is coming out of the mid-sized and boutique firms in Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey.

For example, the New Jersey firm of Cooper Levenson just went through a visual identity program that concluded with the firm's name being shortened.

Jacoby Donner, one of the city's most prestigious construction law firms, participates in the *Philadelphia Business Journal's* "Ask the Professional" column, assists its attorneys with the development of individual marketing plans and places strategic ads to congratulate its clients on their achievements in industry publications.

Capehart Scatchard recently launched a new federal practice area—via press releases to the media, letters to clients, postings to the firm's Web site and numerous public speaking engagements before trade and business groups. With a growing aging workforce and the frequency with which these matters arise, the firm instituted a Medicare Secondary Payer Statute practice to assist clients in handling workers' compensation matters that overlap with this Statute. The *Philadelphia Business Journal* picked up the story, and, to date, scores of clients have taken advantage of Capehart's publicized concentration in the area. In addition, the firm sends a weekly e-newsletter to close to 1,000 clients/contacts and friends of the firm summarizing new ADA, FMLA and workers' compensation decisions.

Others, including the 100-lawyer Klehr Harrison, are forming strategic alliances with firms around the country—notably called law firm networks or consortiums. According to its director of marketing, Pamela McCarthy, membership in the "Law Firm Alliance" network gives Klehr the chance to get referrals from other firms around the country and to share management and marketing information with member firms. "The Alliance gives Klehr clients the benefit of national connections with other top lawyers who can serve as local counsel, provide quick advice and office space whenever our clients need that kind of service," says McCarthy.

WHAT SHOULD SMALL FIRMS BE DOING?

Most law firms in Philadelphia do not need full-time marketing personnel or sizeable marketing budgets to accomplish much of what the large firms are doing. Marketing is still a contact sport. Clients still hire great lawyers, not marketing staff members.

In a small-firm setting, the following marketing programs can be implemented with great success, at a very low cost to the firm and with

little or no staff involvement.

- **Client Interviews:** At the completion of a matter, each client should be interviewed on his or her satisfaction with the representation and where his or her business is going.

- **Client Visits:** Each month, each lawyer should visit three clients at their place of business and brief them for free on a new legal development.

- **Stay in Touch:** A brief summary of a "hot" legal development should be sent to all firm clients every few months. When appropriate, reporters who cover the industry affected by the development should receive a copy.

- **Get Involved:** Firm lawyers should become active in associations in which their clients participate. Becoming "active" does not mean simple attendance. It means speaking, volunteering, drafting something and/or heading up a committee.

- **Identify Referral Sources:** Make a list of all sources of business to your firm for the past few years. Direct marketing and networking activities to those sources.

- **Outsource the Big Stuff:** When appropriate, hire outside consultants to help with specific projects like advertising, strategic planning, attorney training and corporate identity programs.

- **Share the Good News:** Share news about who is doing what with all of your lawyers. Announce and celebrate marketing successes.

WHAT SHOULD EACH LAWYER BE DOING?

- **Create a dossier of information on each client and use it.** Enlist your secretary to help you remember anniversaries, birthdays, events in their kids' lives and more. Work with your secretary to improve client service.

- **Write a one-page marketing plan that includes meeting with three clients, three potential clients and three referral sources each month.**

- **Identify all referral sources that have helped you or you have helped and use this information to direct future activities.**

- **Do something you are passionate about with clients/potential clients.** Play golf. Go on a museum or garden tour. Build a Habitat for Humanity house. Do something that you enjoy with a client every few months.

- **Constantly put yourself in your clients' shoes and try to identify ways to make your clients' professional lives easier—what problems are causing them stress, what is their work environment like, how can you help them succeed in reaching their goals?**

- **Create a mailing list that includes your friends, college and law school classmates, professionals you employ, relatives, neighbors and parents of your kids' friends—as well as your clients and potential clients.** Use this list to help direct your marketing activities.

- **Share victories and settlements with publications searching for this kind of news such as *The Legal Intelligence*, *Pennsylvania Law Weekly* and the online service VerdictSearch (www.verdictsearch.com).**

The biggest lesson small firms in Philadelphia can learn from the large firms is to do something. Get out of your office. Hang out where potential clients congregate. Spend time with your clients. Visit them at work. Every firm and every lawyer can engage in both institutional and individual lawyer-marketing activities. Get excited about something and share that excitement with a potential or existing client. In the words of Nike—"just do it." ■

Stacy West Clark, Esq. has been consulting small to mid-sized Delaware Valley law firms on their marketing needs for more than twelve years. From 1986 to 1992, Clark served as the first director of client relations for Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. Her e-mail address is swcconsulting1@aol.com.

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