Marketing tips

Cherishing your clients

Making the most of client interviews to bring in new work, BY STACY WEST CLARK

One of the most overlooked but easiest ways to win new business is to ask your clients for feedback on the job you are doing or have just completed for them. Asking them how you did and what you could have done better is a clear message to the client that you care about their business and want to provide them with the very finest service.

Why bother? Because it is three to four times more expensive and time consuming to find a new client, than it is to get more work from an existing one.

So why don't more lawyers ask their clients for feedback? There are several reasons. First, they may assume that the client is happy because the results achieved were good. Second, and even more likely, lawyers (in fact all humans) are afraid to ask for feedback for fear they may be criticised. Third, and I am hoping this is the real reason, lawyers do not realise that this kind of conversation can bring them new work.

So, how should you get started?

Arrange a meeting

Ask if you can visit the client at their offices, or take them to lunch, with the sole purpose of providing you with feedback on your services. The venue should be a comfortable one to the client – one that provides privacy and little noise.

- Assure the client that they will not be charged for this time;
- Explain that you want their feedback because they are a very important client to you and the firm, so you want to make sure that they always receives the very best service you can provide.

Research thoroughly

Before you go to meet the client, do your research. Run a search on the client and the organisation and educate yourself on their business, their industry and what their legal needs may be.

The interview

During the interview, you should cover three areas:

1. The client's satisfaction with your services. In this regard, ask for their views on the value they felt they received, the way the bills were prepared, communications from your office, how accessible you and your staff were, whether they liked the staff or team assigned to the case and whether they were attentive enough;
2. Based on your research, ask about where the client's business is going (expanding or downsizing), personnel changes occurring, regulatory challenges the company might be facing and more. Probe and use your research to explore the legal issues that may need to be addressed by the client in the future to increase revenues, expand, diversify, see profits grow or enter new markets;
3. Use the discussion to understand how the client selects outside counsel, (who they use and why) and to gather marketing intelligence. For example, do they like to receive firm newsletters and if so, on what topics? Do they go to firm websites and if so, for what kinds of information? Would they like you to perform a complimentary seminar for their company's staff? Find out whether they use directories – and which ones.

Follow up

If you ask for someone's thoughts and opinions, be prepared to implement their suggestions right away. No one likes to be asked for their views only to have them ignored.

Thank the client for their time. If you have done these steps correctly, you should get more work from them soon.

Feedback should be sought after the conclusion of any matter or once a month in the case of lengthy litigation or negotiations.

What about clients who have not given you work for several years? Should you meet with them? Yes – find out what happened and what you could have done differently or better. Let them know their business (and their own personal success) matters greatly to you.

The bottom line: stay on top of the client's concerns and address them. It will mean more revenue to the firm if you do. ■

Stacy West Clark is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC. She can be contacted at stacy@stacyclarkmarketing.com