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MARKETING | OPINION

It's not law, it's business
 By: Rachelle Bricout



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Saying I'm a legal marketer often results in a surprised, confused and sometimes sympathetic expression (the dread of lawyers and all) but I have to say it is an exciting and ever-changing environment that is not for the faint-hearted. Law firm marketing has, over the past decade, become extremely competitive and it is no longer simply enough to look at a law firm as only a law firm but rather to acknowledge it is a business that needs to offer a value-added service to its clients.

Consistent service and listening

No longer does a client typically seek out the lawyer his father or grandfather went to; nowadays, that client is looking for the firm that can offer him or her the most as a commercial partner. Loyalty in business is often not found, which only makes the importance of consistent service and listening to your clients even more vital.

In fact, the responsibility of loyalty falls on the firm - it is up to you to create an environment that instils absolute loyalty in your clients. Never before has it been as difficult.

The way in which law firms are managed has changed dramatically over the past years and, while we are still behind overseas law firms, we have progressed at a rapid rate, with most of the larger South African law firms being on a par with their international counterparts. However, there is still much room for improvement in the legal sector as a whole.

Commercial business advisors

With law firm clients becoming more competitive and increasingly global, firms need to offer more innovative, diverse and integrated services and solutions. Lawyers need to be commercial business advisors and have the ability to anticipate their clients' needs, while having a clear understanding of the complexity of their issues and the sector in which they operate.

Many firms now use the services of experienced marketing or business development professionals and consultants as, with a typical lawyer's workload being excessive, it is difficult to focus on what is a vital area of any business; that is, looking after current, and seeking new, clients. Business development and marketing professionals have the ability to add real value to the relationship between the client and firm and therefore have the potential to play a significant role in the development of any firm.

Over the past few years, business development has become a client-focused approach where clients are targeted for the synergy that exists between them and the law firm. This means that marketing or business development managers need to truly understand the firm they work for and, while the fundamentals of marketing remain the same in any business or sector, it is imperative that they have a clear understanding of the language lawyers speak, as well as the legal environment.

Simply help clients

I have always maintained the easiest way to attract clients and keep them is simply to help them. While this sounds obvious and, perhaps, even seems too simplistic, it is true. Having an experienced marketing or business development professional or consultant is one way to ensure that clients are heard; nothing creates loyalty more than a firm that listens to their clients and, even better, responds.

Again, clients need a partner, someone who understands what they do and what they are trying to achieve. And once you, the law firm, achieve that, it would be very rare to lose them.

[30 Sep 2010 09:45]

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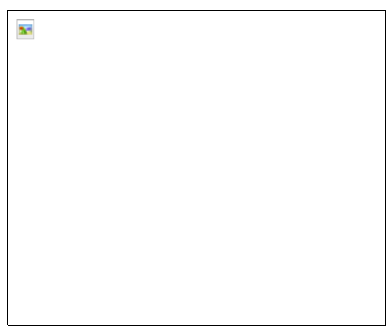
About Rachelle Bricout

Rachelle Bricout is the owner of Create-A-Stir (www.create-a-stir.co.za), a niche marketing agency with a special focus on law. She has extensive experience both locally and internationally, with clients varying from small law firms to the largest full-service law firm in Africa. Create-A-Stir offers a full marketing, advertising and media service, as well as legal marketing training. Email her at rachelle@create-a-stir.co.za.

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