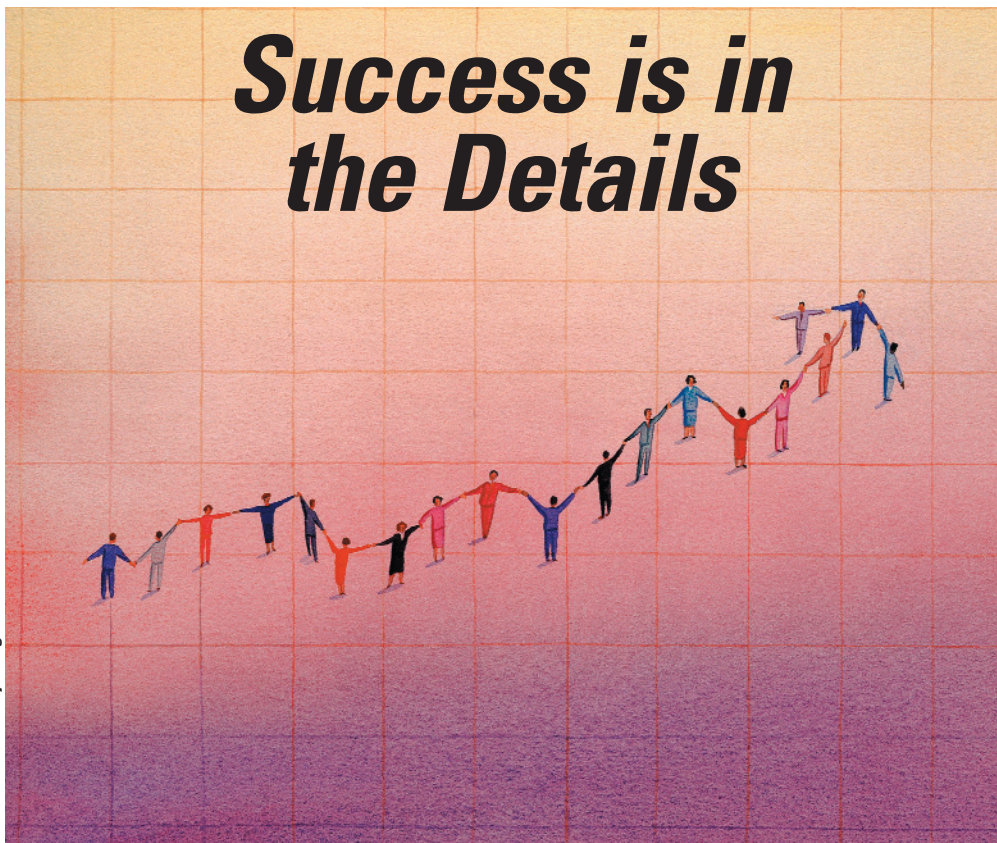


Law Firm Marketing:

***Success is in
the Details***

Illustration © Getty Images



BY DONNA ERICKSON

There is a common misconception in a large segment of the legal profession that marketing equates to advertising and spending a lot of money. That couldn't be more wrong. Marketing in law firms is all about sweating the details. The details cost you a little extra time and attention, but can deliver big dividends to your firm down the road. It is the best way to differentiate your firm from others.

Most important for every law firm are your relationships with clients. It's the trust your clients develop in you, your knowledge of their business and industry, your responsiveness, anticipation of

client needs, and, of course, the results you deliver.

Virtually every activity touches on marketing. Your firm's success in marketing and business development depends on many factors. While the following checklist is not exhaustive, it is a good gauge of major factors that impact marketing results. How does your firm measure up in these ten key areas?

Client Relationships

Are your lawyers focused on developing long-lasting relationships with clients? Are your clients happy with your responsiveness and results? Keep in mind

that while you are trying to secure new clients for your firm, your competitors are actively trying to get work from your existing clients.

Do your lawyers contact clients just to check in on how they are doing and inquire about their business? They should visit client offices and demonstrate genuine interest in their business. Do they read the clients' industry publications to keep current with the challenges clients face? Do they know their clients' hobbies and special interests and invite them on outings (sporting events, theatre productions, concerts, etc.)?

Have you asked your clients about your own progress? Repeat clients should be interviewed after each engagement. One-time clients should also be interviewed to gauge their level of satisfaction. After all, if they had a wonderful experience working with you, they may refer additional business your way. If they had an unpleasant experience, it is likely that they will tell ten of their colleagues why they should not use your firm! It is important that you understand any shortcomings so you can correct them as soon as possible.

Employee Satisfaction

Do your lawyers and management treat your staff as valued partners? Your employees spend eight or more hours of their daily lives helping you succeed. This is their career.

Are your employees happy working in your firm? Are your employees delivering great service to your clients? Happy, contented staff members will return dividends by the truckload by projecting positive attitudes and suggesting ways to improve service and reduce unnecessary costs. Profitability in a firm is not entirely the result of the lawyers.

How do you demonstrate respect for your employees' positions? One easy and inexpensive idea is to ask employees if they want business cards soon after they are hired. It is a small investment on your part that will allow employees to professionally promote the firm and demonstrate your respect for their contribution to the success of the firm.

Service Standards

Do your clients receive the same personal attention and high level of service regardless of which attorneys and staff provide service? If not, it is time to have a discussion with your lawyers and staff to establish service standards. Clients need to have a clear understanding of what to expect when they work with your firm — strive to exceed those expectations! Differentiating your firm from your competitors in superior service is critical in making your firm stand out in the eyes of current and future clients.

Further customize your service standards to specific clients by asking your clients for their preferred method of communication (email, fax, letter, telephone),

how they would like their invoices presented (what information to include), etc.

Understand their objectives for the work you are doing, their desired result, and then work to surpass their expectations.

How the World Sees You

The Internet is your firm's window to the world. Your website is your vehicle to convey a professional image to



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current and potential clients. Review your website from a client's perspective. Do you have content your clients would be interested in? Is the content easy to find and free of legalese? Do you have appropriate disclaimers for your attorney licensures and geographic locations?

Update your website regularly to keep the content fresh and give your clients and others reasons to come back and visit often. Better they find information of interest to them on your website than on your competitors'.

Does your URL make sense to others? Your website address should be intuitive and simple. For example, *www.briggs.com*.

Have a Plan

Does everyone in your firm understand the firm's goals for the next five years and what must be done to succeed? The plan serves as a roadmap that defines goals and measurable objectives which your firm then communicates to all personnel to strive to attain. Planning is important for your firm, practice groups, as well as individual lawyers.

Firm Plan — Critical to Every Firm. Regardless of the size or practice concentration of your firm, the firm-level plan identifies the goals and objectives that set the course for the future. It is from this plan that detailed objectives for practice groups emerge. The firm plan anticipates the future needs of your clients, and positions the firm to be on the leading edge of new services and opportunities that arise. It will also define specific areas to develop that will allow you to continue to build your firm in an atmosphere of respect and professionalism.

Practice Groups and Individual Plans. Group and individual attorney plans are designed to achieve your firm's overall goals. They are developed to relate specifically to an industry or practice and include objectives to support your firm's plan. Individual plans are tailored to a specific lawyer's long-term practice/career goals and support the practice group plans.

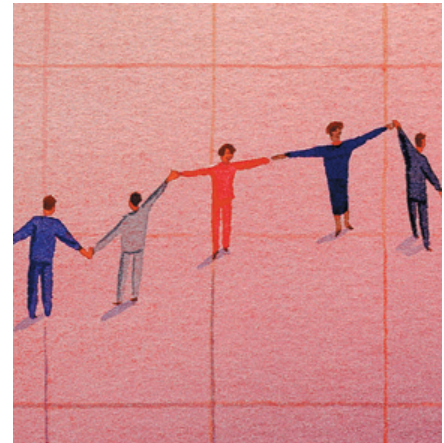
Your Brand

Does your brand convey your firm's desired image and message? Every firm has a brand, intentional or not. It is your firm's image, reputation and style. Visually, it is your font/logo, the colors you choose to convey who you are, and your tagline — those few brief words that describe your firm.

Consistency is important. All communication materials should have the same look and feel. Clients will become accustomed to your look and it will quickly become recognizable to them whenever they see it, whether it be on your communication materials, in advertisements, or listings in trade or community publications.

Be sure that your website URL is on everything that your firm uses to commu-

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nicate: letterhead, invoices, business cards, brochures, and promotional items.

Attorney Profiles

Are attorney profiles rich in content that have relevance to clients? Discuss how clients benefit from using this specific lawyer as opposed to just listing his or her experience and credentials

Are the profiles tailored to your practice? Remember, there is nothing wrong with having a profile that discusses your full practice, as well as individual profiles that focus on areas of concentration

Be familiar with the Rules of Conduct that apply to you, based upon your licensure. For example, many states require that lawyers be certified as area specialists in order to use the term in describing their practices. Don't refer to yourself as a real estate specialist unless you are certified in that area.

Contact Management

Do you have one current master list of every lawyer's contacts — clients, potential clients, referral sources, industry contacts, and former attorneys — that is shared by appropriate support staff? If an address changes, it is important that everyone has access to the updated information. It is incredibly embarrassing for a firm to send correspondence to an incorrect address when a client has previously notified someone in the firm of their address change. Worse yet is when a client contact dies, the lawyer knows it, but the database is not changed. The firm could send correspondence to a deceased client contact because the contact was still active on the firm's mailing list.

Is the information shared by all lawyers? A shared list, or database, will allow you to track existing relationships. Lawyers can then see who other attorneys know, which can help in the firm's marketing efforts. Personal relationships are key to marketing. If another lawyer in the firm has a relationship with a potential

client, you can work with that lawyer to strategize about a possible presentation on the services you would like to provide.

Are you tracking important information on the contacts? Doing so will provide great benefits for the firm's marketing efforts in identifying future service opportunities. There are three basic areas of information that you can easily track on all of your contacts: the person's occupation, the industry they work in, and their status (client, potential client, referral source, trade association colleague, etc.). Tracking personal information on the contact can also prove most useful. Hobbies and favorite sports are a useful tool to reference for future client entertainment opportunities.

Association Audit

Where does your business originate? Focus on organizations with members who have potential to refer you business.

Review the professional and trade organizations where the firm and individual attorneys are active members. Are there additional areas where the firm should be represented? Who in the firm would best fill that role, and has the time and interest to do so?

Community Involvement & Pro Bono

Compile a list of community activities of the firm and individual attorneys, as well as any financial support the firm may provide. Are there additional community organizations where the firm should be

represented? Are there attorneys in the firm with a strong interest in becoming involved in a new area?

What pro bono efforts did the firm and individual lawyers undertake in the last year on behalf of legal assistance groups or other nonprofit organizations? Should those efforts be stepped up? In what areas? Who will lead the effort?

Clients expect that your firm will do great legal work. Finding ways to continually improve your relationships with clients and the service you deliver will differentiate your firm from others and serve your firm well in the future. Firms that are complacent will see their profits and client base erode as competitors slowly chip away at seemingly loyal clients.

Successful law firms — those that continue to improve year after year — focus on people, service and communication. Deliver exceptional service to your clients and treat each one as if they were your only client.

Focusing on these ten key points doesn't require a big investment, just executing on the details.

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