



OUTSOURCING LEGAL MARKETING FUNCTIONS: SMALL FIRMS LOOK OUT AND PLUG IN



By Elizabeth Mell

With attention to managing overhead in the post-recession marketplace, small and mid-size firms are embracing innovative ways to achieve the benefits of comprehensive marketing programs without costly staff additions. One smart move is outsourcing. In the past, smaller firms often made the mistake of shortchanging themselves by hiring one or two mid- or entry-level marketing professionals and expecting them to have the full range of skills needed to support the full gamut of firm marketing and business development needs. Successful firms have come to recognize the value of a strong marketing infrastructure and are making strategic investments in higher-level staff and experienced consultants.

Small and mid-size law firm leaders assert that their primary need is growth—i.e. developing new business. Assembling the right team to support partners in expansion of their business means hiring executive-level professionals for firm administrative roles. Law firms that have separated themselves from the pack have raised the bar in terms of hiring seasoned administrators. Hiring knowledgeable marketing professionals is part of raising that bar, but can be cost prohibitive.

Everyone knows better than to hire a commercial real estate lawyer to draft a custody agreement. Administrators, like lawyers,

are not interchangeable either. An excellent event planner, for example, is not likely to be the best person to design your firm's web site. As enticing as it may be, re-purposing existing staff is not always the best route.

“The effectiveness of outsourcing marketing functions is ideal for businesses that want to maintain focus on the bottom line without distractions. Outsourcing also allows for the predictability of solid timetables.”



When talking to law firm leaders, I often hear the refrain: “We know we need some help but we don't know for what exactly.” Well, you don't have to—at least not at first. One clear path is to engage an independent consultant to conduct a marketing needs assessment. A formal needs assessment will help with priority setting. Perhaps the firm needs to focus solely on marketing—i.e. branding, web site, media relations, speeches, blogs and social media and social events. Or maybe the firm needs more client and prospect development coaching—i.e. business development training, competitive intelligence, pitch preparation, and client teams.

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Some firms have already identified needs and established priorities, but know they lack adequate staff. Small and mid-sized firms often hire outside professionals who specialize in specific areas. Hiring a consultant for a discrete project can introduce partners to the concept and benefits of marketing professionals without the risk and cost that come with creating a full-time position. While some consultants have diverse backgrounds, most have specific skills and strengths. Law firms can test the waters by hiring a consultant for a specific mission. Outsourcing can also relieve firm leadership of tremendous burden. Consultants offer flexible services and fees. They also bring flexibility to their clients in the form of testing or piloting programs. For example, do you need:

A coaching program?

An expert on social media?

An expert on event planning?

To start a blog?

If the answer to any of the above is “yes,” and you don’t know where to start, seek an experienced consultant who will be dedicated to the project. Tapping in to expertise without ramp-up time makes good sense.

Consultants are:

- » Plugged in to law firm technology and resources
- » Plugged in to legal industry news
- » Plugged in to competitors
- » Plugged in to buyers

Consultants need:

- » No training
- » No daily supervision
- » No politics

When internal resources are scarce or in-house employees have specific expertise, but lack the full range of desired experience, law firms look to outsource. Law firms have long outsourced many functions, from the mail room to travel services. However, outsourcing is no longer restricted to “back office” tasks. Employing a fully-staffed, in-house marketing team can be costly in terms of compensation, overhead and supervisor’s time. Outsourcing marketing roles can reduce overhead costs while the firm embarks on new territory. 🏠



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