



Précis Paper

Marketing in Law Firms (Part 1)

Rob Knowsley presents in discussion with Louise Blase on marketing for law firms based on 40 years experience - gold.

Discussion Includes

- Marketing by dissemination of helpful information, rather than selling
- How to determine where to target marketing
- Tracking sources of revenue
- The effective use of databases
- Email and on-line marketing
- Search engine optimisation and web analytics
- How to use LinkedIn effectively
- Who in the law practice should be involved in marketing?
- Coaching and education

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Marketing in Law Firms (Part 1)

1. In this edition of BenchTV, Rob Knowsley, principal legal practice management consultant at Knowsley Management Services (KMS), is interviewed by Louise Blase on the topic of marketing in law firms.

Overview of Marketing for Small to Medium-Sized firms

2. Marketing can mean a lot of different things to different people. Mr Knowsley recognises marketing as getting information out to those people who might benefit from that information, such as clients, referrers, or editors of publications. It is important that the information firms provide is useful, relevant and clearly expressed about situations these people can recognise and benefit from in dealing with challenges as well as opportunities in their lives and businesses.
3. Marketing should be imbued into a law firm's culture such that people see it as the helpful dissemination of information, rather than 'selling'. This benefits both lawyers and clients since lawyers generally hate 'selling' their services and clients will be more favourable to the information than if it was being 'sold' to them. Firms can use information from existing client files to educate others about issues that the law firm is capable in, which will tend to lift the level of inquiry from existing clients but also from referrers and the wider public, depending on who the law firm targets and what their services are.

How to Determine Where to Target Marketing

4. When determining where to target marketing, Mr Knowsley believes that, for an existing firm with existing services, it is important to look at whether a particular team has a 'healthy backlog' of work, that is, does each member have enough work to hit their work plan targets and easily produce what is expected of them for a reasonable period into the future. If a team has a 'healthy backlog', marketing can be used just for maintenance. If, however, there is a short-fall in work in a particular team caused by a drop-off in the levels of inquiry at the firm or a deliberate increase in the size of a team, more marketing may be required. Mr Knowsley recommends setting a period of time, for example three months, for effective marketing activities to start obtaining the number of inquiries required.

Importance of Reporting

5. Monthly activity reports assist law firms to be accountable for their marketing efforts. If there is a real problem in the firm, sometimes a shorter time frame may be required for reporting in order to identify and fix issues.
6. Firms should be able to learn from reporting, assessing and analysing their current client base and the types of matters they work on. While from time to time there may be truly unique matters, it is more likely that the current matters a firm is working on are representative of the kind of problems people have in the firm's client base and in the wider community. If a firm wants more of that sort of work they need to be using information about those situations to govern how they inform people through marketing.

Tracking Sources of Revenue to Clients and Use of Databases

7. Since there is a lot of time and money at stake when it comes to marketing, and human memories are sometimes fallible, Mr Knowsley prefers to rely on statistics and hard data to inform firms of what is working, what has worked in the past and what is continuing to work in regards to marketing.
8. Most law firm databases in small to medium firms do not appropriately record the sources of new and returning clients. For example, they might list a returning client as an existing client and not record where they came from in the first place. If a database is more detailed on where a new or returning client comes from, it allows a firm to look for similar people using the same tools.
9. Knowsley points out that the trick is knowing how much inquiry comes from each marketing platform so that the firm can determine whether or not the platform is delivering a good return and if the money spent on it would be better spent elsewhere. For example, the Yellow Pages books might seem useless as a marketing platform in some modern law firms but for other firms their advertisements in these books might bring in significant revenue. Another example might be a firm newsletter. There is now technology available to determine who opened a newsletter, what they read, who they sent copies to, what links they followed to a website and what they downloaded etc. If a firm is able to track and collect this information, they will be able to determine where information is gaining traction and can tie that back to inquiries.
10. A database of clients and contacts is useful – but it must be a "genuine" database in that it is able to record a wide range of useful information about clients, contacts and referrers such

as their interests, location and industry. A law firm can then use tools within the database to easily determine who should receive certain information for a specific purpose.

11. When recording information, it is important for databases to allow for *multiple* categorisation and *overlapping* categorisation. This is needed in order to collect specific information about what a client does or what business they run so that they can be identified very quickly in the future and targeted information can be appropriately dispersed to them.
12. Databases should also be able to track all communications between the firm and clients or contacts. Teams can then learn from that information and, where appropriate, use it for similar scenarios in the future to save time.
13. It is also important to have a database software product that is going to be able to grow with the firm and allow the firm to capture information for multiple purposes in the practice. The danger with law firms is that they might spend too long trying to find software products that are perfect and in some cases they miss months or even years of opportunities to use products that would have been perfectly adequate and allowed them to do significant marketing more effectively. Mr Knowsley notes that software tends to evolve over time as people use it.

Online and Email Marketing

14. It is very important to ensure that a firm's communications for marketing purposes are not 'junk' and they are relevant for the end user. Making appropriate subject headings for emails so that they can be easily identified, keeping concise and ensuring a very strong opening paragraph will likely increase readership of current and future marketing material.
15. Content should be produced at all times from experiences within the practice and from other external sources like cases and commentary. The goal of a lawyer should be to write highly relevant, easily digestible and practical material that will then be disseminated out of the practice by others.

Allocation of Resources

16. Huge changes are now occurring in law firms in IT, communication and productivity. It is important for legal practices to prioritise properly such that those who are best at doing certain work like writing marketing content, are allocated sufficient time within their work plan to do it. There are some very good providers internationally of writers who prepare material for lawyers to use on a subscription basis, but Mr Knowsley believes lawyers should instead be utilising the time that they normally do not spend on client files to write and complete other marketing activities. Lawyers who are clearly and currently capable need to

plan to do this marketing work and there needs to be a process of identifying topics, possibly with the use of a template, so that they do not spend highly valuable time writing irrelevant or indigestible material. The people who are really good at marketing should be appropriately allocated enough of this work and also train others in how to do it. It is important to avoid a misapplication of resources in marketing.

17. At the entry level, lawyers should be encouraged to develop an interest in marketing and trained in what works. However, as graduate lawyers do not always have a considerable amount of life experience to relate with clients, they should not be allocated an enormous amount of time to do it. As their individual experience grows they may be able to perform more and more of this type of work.
18. Across the various people in a small to medium practice, about 30 minutes a day per person spent on marketing is probably sufficient. It is important to monitor this so that it is not put aside for several days or weeks. Mr Knowsley suggests using 'running documents' which are added to at least once a day and can gradually be built upon as ideas occur until it becomes optimum length and only requires some basic editing or reordering before publishing.

Search Engine Optimisation and Web Analytics

19. Search engine optimisation (SEO) in basic terms just means the website is set up and the content is published in such a way that uptake by a search engine such as Google is optimised. When somebody searches using popular terms, either words or phrases, Google will know how relevant that is to a firm's website and give it a rating which impacts how and where it appears in the search results for an individual searcher. SEO is very technical and the methods search engines use frequently change over time and are generally not publically announced.
20. Mr Knowsley recommends that law firms hire a consultant, who could be remotely-based, to advise them on SEO such that their material is tagged and structured appropriately and can be easily found in various search engines. This will allow the firm to optimise the exposure of material to the kind of people who are looking for it. SEO is also applicable to other online applications such as LinkedIn.
21. Web analytics tell firms how many people have found the material, how they have used it and how long they have stayed on the web page. A firm should want to increase the amount of time people are looking at their web pages and the number of pages they look at. There are freely available tools supplied by search engines, such as Google analytics, which are able to provide firms with useful information. For example, a firm might be able to compare the search terms that people are using to get to their website with the SEO tags that they are

actually using to help people find them. Law firms should however be cautious not to over-use popular search terms in their material which can upset readers.

LinkedIn

22. People should spend an adequate amount of time and put a lot of thought into creating their LinkedIn profiles. Mr Knowsley recommends individuals read and make use of a lot of excellent expert advice on how to create LinkedIn profiles, which is freely available on the internet. LinkedIn quite regularly sends members suggestions for what to add to their profiles and takes them through the process of filling in missing sections, step by step. Mr Knowsley states that there is generally always room for improvement when it comes to LinkedIn profiles. For example, people often forget to add recent publications or appropriate memberships.
23. LinkedIn also provides a form of analytics about who has looked at posts, over what period of time they looked, and from what industries they come from. This can guide individuals on who they are having an impact on and what other topics might be good to write about.
24. At the moment, most people's use of LinkedIn is fairly casual and people are more interested in increasing their number of contacts rather than targeting material to specific groups or professions within their contact group. There should be a focus on the quality of connections made on LinkedIn rather than the quantity. Mr Knowsley recommends that once a person has recognised the types of people on LinkedIn that are useful to be connected with, they should follow their activity and posts and make positive contributions to the debates that they start. Being an active participant in conversations on LinkedIn is a great way of establishing new relationships with people in other markets and creating new opportunities e.g. being invited to write guest editorials in newsletters.
25. There are programs that can be acquired such as Autopilot for LinkedIn which allows individuals to automatically visit 900 new profiles a day of the type they are interested in. This encourages these people to visit their profile and ask to "link in" with them. Many of these programs come with free trial periods in which the program can be used without a cost while the person determines whether or not committing to a month by month or annual expense is worthwhile. These programs can save a great deal of time and effort for an individual who wishes to connect with more people in their target market.
26. Another consideration is that there might be a conflict between a LinkedIn profile a current employee of a firm uses for now and a profile an individual wishes to take with them to a future role at another firm. In dealing with this conflict, Knowsley believes a firm should start with a decision or policy about how LinkedIn will be used at the firm and thereafter review

profiles and establish protocols for how profiles should be set up, who has access to them and what happens when an employee leaves the firm. If firms insist on employees using LinkedIn, the profiles of individual employees should target and focus on their expertise as a team member within particular areas of the practice.

Who in the Law Practice should be Involved in Marketing?

27. According to Knowsley, all staff should be involved in the marketing of the legal practice according to the contribution they can make which depends on their skillset and attitudes towards marketing as well as their current workload. For example, some employees might be very good at networking at events but terrible at creating written marketing material.
28. In a small to medium-sized firm, the director of marketing services should preferably have some managerial clout, have respect, know what they are doing and be capable of drawing in external resources. The director does not have to be located on site but it is preferable that the employees at the firm have met who they are being trained by or who organises events etc.

Coaching and Education

29. Leadership is very important in a law firm when coaching or educating other employees. Getting those who are very good at certain aspects of marketing to share with others what they do and how they do it with practical examples is quite an effective way of improving the marketing process and allowing others to play a greater role. It is necessary to encourage employees to understand and learn from what others are doing but also to encourage them to identify where their strengths are in the marketing process so they can play a greater role there.

BIOGRAPHY

Rob Knowsley LLB MIMC

Legal Practice Management Consultant – Australia

Rob Knowsley has provided legal practice management advice and solutions to over 1,300 legal firms in Australasia over 42 years. He provides practical advice to address fundamental problems, and to develop successful legal firms.

Louise Blase

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