



SHATTERING THE STANDARD

BY TRICIA M. LILLEY

Best-in-class legal marketing initiatives are dispelling the stereotype that law firms are not on par with other professional services firms. Law firms today face mounting pressure to generate new business — pressures that, according to joint research conducted by Bloomberg Law and the Legal Marketing Association (LMA), are coming from all directions. This includes internal firm pressures (68 percent); corporate counsel reducing the number of firms with which they will work (46 percent); the marketing success of competitors (43 percent); and rising client pressures (41 percent).

To combat these pressures, legal marketers are stepping up their game in all areas, from business development to client service to traditional communications. This was reflected in the submissions for this year's LMA Your Honor Awards, which recognize best-in-class legal marketing initiatives from around the globe. This year, as always, the winners embody trends — some nascent, some classic — that are at play in the industry.



Feedback from judges and the evaluation process points to a few key ways firms are responding to market pressures:

- Focusing on the next generation of decision-makers, both internal and external
- Leveraging data and technology for differentiation and implementation of informed, educated focused marketing strategies
- Employing economical, pragmatic approaches that forego unnecessary bells and whistles to focus instead on personal engagement

And one overarching theme consistently voiced by judges is that legal marketing as a profession has truly come into its own.

"I was very impressed by the level of sophistication evident in all of the submissions," said judge Mark Smalls, vice president and chief marketing officer at JAMS, the world's largest private provider of arbitration and mediation services.

"Some of the most highly rated entries were from small firms with either minimal staff or sole marketers," Smalls added. "Even in firms where there was not an in-house marketing function, the partners became engaged and they knew how to identify consultants able to execute cutting-edge work."

Holly Barocio, judge and principal consultant at GrowthPlay, pointed to how "laser-focused" objectives seemed to be, with detailed ROI and ROE metrics tied back to them.

Young at Heart

A focus on the next generation of both law firm leaders and in-house counsel was a consistent thread found in this year's YHA submissions. Millennials are earning a seat at the table and a place in the audience.

"Reaching younger attorneys, internally and within the context of younger in-house counsel, was really a trend that popped out to me from a number of the submissions," Smalls said.

For instance, Sutherland Asbill & Brennan has embraced a strategy of connecting young leaders among its associate ranks with emerging leaders at the firm's clients for substantive interaction and networking. This investment in the next layer of business development from the traditional focus on partners cultivates a new generation of business developers and firm leaders with a stake in the firm's growth.

Halls Maines Lugin, P.C., an energy-focused trial boutique, recently embarked on a rebranding initiative that aimed to re-

invent the firm from its historic profile as an energy insurance coverage firm. Part of this initiative was a new website that features new attorney photos and bios that showcase the relatively young partnership, highlighting personal qualities of the lawyers and presenting case studies emphasizing the evolution of the firm's practice.

Several firms are engaging associates and junior partners in marketing initiatives to serve the dual purpose of business development for the firms and educating the next generation of rainmakers in the art of marketing.

"Giving associates, including summer associates, marketing responsibilities and experience is a trend that I find smart and strategic," said Amy Spach, marketing content manager with Perkins Coie LLP.

Spach, also one of this year's YHA judges, adds, "Firms put them to work on competitive intelligence, pitching, client education projects and more. Associates are motivated and energetic, and they deliver great results."

Through an initiative that was perhaps not aimed at engaging millennials, but had that effect notwithstanding, K&L Gates LLP revamped its internal business development structure from a decentralized geographic and practice-based business development support model to a single

unit of coordinators offering virtual support to all 22 US offices, regardless of where the coordinators are based. A valuable outcome of the restructuring has been that it engages and stimulates millennials, resulting in higher performance and greater professional development.

Embracing Data & Technology

The use of mobile and social technologies, along with the growing role of Big Data, is nothing new to the legal profession. However, firms continue to embrace these technologies, implementing them in a variety of new ways.

"I observed an increased focus on data analytics that informed the purpose and objectives of an event/business development program, campaign launch or other initiatives," said Barocio.

For instance, Allen Matkins is using data visualization as a tool to improve business development processes and inform a more strategic approach to client outreach and communications. This demonstrates a more analytic approach to using data.

Law firms have long offered gratis CLE programs to clients and prospects as a vehicle to promote expertise and stay top of mind in the market. Winning submission K&L Gates Hub, however, leveraged technology to enhance the firm's digital marketing strategy to offer an on-demand CLE center for in-house lawyers with more than 100 free courses. The online center's success prompted the firm to create one of the first-to-market Brexit client support initiatives.

Overall, being able to successfully execute on this new set of responsibilities can be directly related to having the right tools and resources in place. In this regard, technology tools most poised to play a valuable role in developing new business include business intelligence and CRM, matter management software, proposal management software, and pricing management software.

Looking specifically at business intelligence, legal marketers believe it to be among the most useful in business de-

velopment. According to LMA/Bloomberg Law research, roughly 73 percent consider this technology to be critical with regard to developing business, marketing the firm or obtaining valuable competitive intelligence.

Overall, the value of business intelligence is accelerating, and marketing and business development professionals are looking at the technology tools with an increasingly scrupulous eye. As noted by some respondents, good business intelligence and analysis tools can be difficult to find, and therefore must be examined very closely to ensure they meet the long-term needs of the firm.

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The Human Element

Paradoxically, there is definitely a back-to-basics or "economizing" flavor emerging in the area of legal marketing. Today, firms continue to approach their objectives strategically and with an economical use of resources, financial and otherwise.

Firms continue to execute simple ideas well without a great deal of financial investment. For example, Fish & Richardson has developed a Guide to Patent Litigation in Federal Court. This is an overview of patent litigation aimed at the layperson. The content was developed in-house and then leveraged in several ways — from print to webinar to blog posts to social media serialization.

Another example comes from tech-focused firm Wolf Greenfield, which took the standard digital holiday card and "broke through the clutter" with an innovative, yet low-cost video card featuring a Rube Goldberg machine — a device designed to perform a simple task in the most complicated

way possible. The card highlighted its key practices and provided a comments section to encourage engagement with recipients.

Initiatives that tie in the aforementioned trend of involving junior lawyers are another way that firms are engaging in clever, low-cost marketing activities. Spach says that placing marketing on the radar of next-generation lawyers, from the start of their careers, is a low-cost investment in the future.

"Whether deploying gamification to capture competitive lawyers or focusing on in-person meetings with clients and marketing team members to warm up virtual connections, marketing departments are achieving success by capitalizing on our human instinct to connect and win," Spach added.

As an industry outsider, Smalls brings a fresh perspective and says he was impressed by the variety and sophistication of the entries to this year's YHA. Smalls dispelled the stereotype that law firms are not as current as other professional services firms in their marketing.

"I feel like whatever gap may have existed has definitely closed," Smalls said. "We saw many very eye-catching, sophisticated entries taking it to the next level."



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