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GCs Offer Law Firm Marketing Tips

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By **Larry Bodine**, a Business Development Advisor based in Glen Ellyn, IL. He has helped 250+ law firms generate new revenue by devising strategies, conducting business development retreats and individually coaching attorneys. He can be reached at www.LarryBodine.com and 630.942.0977.

Marketers and law firms can cross the following items off their list of marketing initiatives, because in-house lawyers don't pay attention to them:

1. Holiday cards (mailed)
2. E-cards (e-mailed)
3. Martindale-Hubbell and other lawyer directories
4. PowerPoint presentations at beauty contests
5. The history of your law firm
6. A newsletter sent out so late that it is the 5th one on the same legal topic.

That is the consensus of a trio of in-house corporate lawyers speaking at the program "The Art of the 'Pitch'" presented yesterday at New England LMA annual conference in Boston. However if you want to *get* corporate legal work, here's what in-house counsel *like*:

1. White papers that are well-researched and written directly sent to a GC facing that exact issue.
2. Lawyers who attend trade association meetings with clients.
3. Likeable lawyers who are easy to work with and who don't aggravated the opposing lawyers.
4. Client feedback surveys by telephone.
5. Quick answers to quick questions.
6. The first law firm newsletter on a timely legal topic.
7. A lawyer who has specific expertise on a legal issue facing a client.

John Remsen, Jr., founder of The Remsen Group in Atlanta moderated the lively discussion among:

- **John Affuso, Jr.**, Senior Transaction Counsel of the Massachusetts Port Authority. This quasi-governmental agency has 17 lawyers in-house, who do 60% of the authority's legal work. It spends \$1 to \$3 million per year on 25 different law firms.
- **Steven J. Roberts, Esq.**, VP of Real Estate Law at Stop & Shop supermarkets, which has 750 stores. The company has 17 in-house lawyers and spends \$7 to \$8 million per year on 15 law firms.
- **Margaret W. Chambers**, Executive VP and General Counsel, Boston Private Financial Holdings, Inc. The legal department consists of 3 people and the company uses Goodwin & Procter for almost everything. The company spends \$1.5 million per year on outside counsel. She is a member of the Association of Corporate Counsel.

"It's all about relationships"

"I'm very involved on trade groups. At a meeting of the International Council of Shopping Centers, there will be just as many in-house people and in-house lawyers. If I've been on a panel discussion with a lawyer, I may contact him later. When I need a lawyer, I'll also go to the trade group and ask them for lawyers active in the association. I also ask our current lawyers to recommend a law firm. For me it's all about relationships." Roberts said.

"It is all about relationships and technical capability. I have deep relationships with my law firms and expect them to be there for me. I go through my trusted relationships to find my referred law firm," Chambers said.

She added, "To get onto my radar, my private banks do a lot of work with law firms as banking clients. We retained one firm that does our employment law came in because a bank recommended them. The way people come in and find work with us is when Goodwin & Procter is conflicted out, or we need someone specialized. I'll use my GC network; I'll call other GCs to ask "what firms do you use?" I also use my primary law firm and ask them who they recommend."

"We also award a lot of work in ways besides RFPs. It might be a lawyer who pitched their firm, or we will call firms that we have long-standing relationships with, and if they don't handle the issue, we'll ask them to recommend a law firm," Affuso said.

He added, "We don't require a law firm with all the expertise in one place. We have a group of firms we've had longstanding relationships WITH. We're open to pitches when we need to go outside on a new matter. There was a former high-ranking attorney general and he called us and said he was with a firm and said he wanted to work with us. We called him when we had an issue with the AG's office."

Directories and the web

Chambers said, "I never look at Martindale Hubbell unless I need to find someone's address. I may occasionally look at the Chambers directory. I rarely look at directories." She added, "The only time I look at law firm websites is to look up opposing counsel, who they are, how old they are, what their experience is. But I don't use websites to find lawyers for myself."

"I do a lot of reading, so I'm a law firm white paper junkie. It's great to get these well-researched, well written white papers," she continued. "I get white papers because lawyers send them to me; I'm on a lot of mailing lists. I get very targeted pieces from law firms. Sometimes they were on the opposite side of me and they know what I want."

The three lawyers were hip on online social networking, and used LinkedIn. Affuso said, "I find LinkedIn useful to keep track of where people are and what they're going. We have a Facebook page and we do tweet."



Larry Bodine

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Pet Peeves

The triumvirate spelled out how to annoy them:

- **Overlawyering.** Don't assign a dozen summer associates to a case and bill for their time.
- **A lack of responsiveness.** The GCs expected a reply within an hour on a pressing matter, and a reply within 24 hours on a routine matter. "If it's something you can't get right back to us right away, we at least expect to hear back by the end of the day when you'll get back to me. The people we work with say we'll take a look at this and we'll get back to you in a couple of days, it depends on what the matter is," Affuso said.
- **Failing to keep down costs.** "We're always keeping an eye on the fees. Some firms pay more per hour. We've had very mixed results with fixed fees. We've had to go back and renegotiate the fee because the project turned out to be much bigger than either of us anticipated."
- **Sending a 300-page regulation when the GC wants a summary** and an explanation of what the company should do with it.
- **Failing to make the client feel important.** "Whether or not we're your law firm's most important client, we want to feel that way. If we don't feel you have our back, we'll look for somebody else," Affuso said.
- **Arguing with the client and with the adversary.** "We have enough things to bang heads about, I don't need a lawyer who's antagonistic and I'm not going to hire them," Roberts said.

Chambers summed up the discussion by saying, "The way you get in my door, is to have the specific experience I need. I want to hear what you've done before that exactly fits my needs. It's like hiring a personal physician. I want someone who's really good at a particular thing, and I negotiate the price. It's important that you have relationships with the regulatory agency I'm working with. What wows me is specific spot on experience and technical expertise. Likeability is important, but it's technical expertise that's first and foremost for me."

COMMENTS:

Excellent summary. Spot on, Larry, and totally in tune with feedback I get from interviewing clients as well.