

ASSOCIATION OF
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Legal Marketers' Growing Influence

In 1986, I was asked to write an article for the *National Law Journal* on an emerging position: the law firm marketer. The piece was titled, "Firm Development Mobilized by a 'New Breed' of Resource." What a difference the years have made. Where law firms then had but one marketer, regardless of the size of the firm, they now have 5, 15, or 150, depending on the practice or number of lawyers.

Although the law firm marketing professional is no longer a new breed, the responsibilities and functions continue to evolve. As the departments have grown, so have their scope of responsibilities and, dare I say, influence. Let's explore some of the biggest changes in the role of marketing professionals in law firms.

Functional Specialists

In the past (and still in many smaller law firms), the marketer was expected to handle everything related to marketing and business development. However, in larger firms or those willing to make the investment, functional specialists now exist in an array of areas including:

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- Business development coaches
- Communications professionals
- Event coordinators
- Graphic designers
- Marketing technology/CRM professionals
- Market research professionals
- PR directors
- Pricing specialists
- Proposal managers
- Social media experts
- Writers

Each of these different functions requires different skills, so it is unrealistic to expect one person to handle them all with equal capability. As a result, firms are hiring people (in-house or outsourced) with complementary strengths to provide top-notch, full-service marketing departments for lawyers.

Expanded Responsibilities

When marketing departments are small, it forces the marketers to focus on “fires” — alerts to be sent, webinars to be scheduled, proposals to be submitted, etc. With more support, however, the leaders of the department can focus on more strategic elements of marketing.

Many people fail to understand the full scope of the marketing function. Marketing has long been described as the “Four P’s”: product, price, place (distribution), and promotion. In the past (and, for some lawyers, still today), the focus was on the last “P.” Promotion relates to things that get the word out about the firm and its services, such as advertising, websites, social media, seminars, and alerts. While promotional activities are important, they represent only a slice of what the marketing function could or should contribute to a firm.

Some marketers are now playing a substantial role in determining the profitability of work and, subsequently, what the firm bids on new business. While a growing number of law firms have hired directors of pricing, smart firms involve their marketers in assessing whether business is worth pursuing and at what cost. On the product and place fronts, strategic marketers research and recommend firm offerings such as new substantive practices to pursue, service areas to grow, or new geographic markets to enter.

Today’s law firms are hiring sophisticated business people who also have other aspects of marketing in their repertoire. For example:

- **Training.** Marketing professionals often team with the firm’s professional development staff to organize training and coaching programs that marketing and business development skills of the lawyers, from giving elevator speeches to making effective pitches for business.

- **Strategy and Planning.** Law firms increasingly are recognizing the strategic planning expertise marketing experts bring to the table. Marketers are leading planning sessions and helping partners look critically at their long-term strategies. In addition to organizing partner planning retreats, strategic marketers contribute to the substance of the meeting and are involved in implementation of the final plan.

Strategic marketers also find themselves with significant external-facing activities, such as:

- **Client Interaction.** Marketers can serve as client ombudsmen of sorts by interviewing top clients and bringing their comments, concerns, and ideas back to the firm. The marketer could also have direct client contact in a range of other situations, from focus groups to client entertainment.
- **Hiring Input.** In some firms, marketers work with the recruiting department to define the criteria for hiring associates. If the firm expects its lawyers to develop business — or in cases of lateral hiring, bring or grow books of business — that quality should be explored in interviews. The market professional is in a great position to determine if candidates have what it takes to generate business and be good team members.
- **Business Development.** Today's marketing professionals are involved in pitching business for their firms. Their roles range from identifying and doing due diligence on opportunities to hands-on involvement in major proposals to being part of a pitch team that approaches a prospective client. In most larger firms, business development support is assigned to the firm's "product lines"; marketers embedded in industry or practice groups gain valuable insight into the clientele, referral sources, organizations, media, opportunities, and landscape for substantive areas. More and more, however, the leader of the marketing department must have a thorough understanding of business development.

Future Growth

What might the future hold for the legal marketer? I often joke that in corporate America, the CMO has the best parking place at the company. While marketers might never unseat powerful partners for that spot in law firms, their influence and impact will continue to grow.

Despite tremendous growth in the law firm marketing position over the years, one thing is as true today as it was in 1986 — no matter how talented the marketer, the culture of the firm and its support for the function will ultimately determine the marketer's ability to make a difference.