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As The World Turns: What Generational Differences and the Changing Marketplace Mean for Lawyer Marketing

By Marci M. Krufka and Virginia Grant

Promoting products and services in today's global marketplace is much different today than it was 30 years ago. The same is certainly true for marketing legal services. Moreover, the lawyers doing the marketing are very different from their predecessors, as are their clients and potential clients. This article presents a look at how the changing marketplace and generational differences are intersecting to make legal marketing — meaning effective legal marketing — a brand-new world.

Today's legal marketplace is more competitive than ever. Consolidation has led to the development of numerous mega firms and literally hundreds of large firms. Also, continuing convergence efforts by in-house law departments have resulted in the consolidation of legal work to fewer firms, leaving those firms that do not make the cut to seek innovative ways to gain additional work from existing clients and target potential clients for new work. As we know, for a long time it has not been acceptable for lawyers to just "do a good job" and wait for clients to come. Rather, lawyers and law firms have to do significant work to develop and implement marketing strategies.

At the same time, under the pressure of this ever increasing competition, today's law firms are made up of lawyers who were admitted to the bar anywhere from 1960 to 2005 — with all their generational differences



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living together under one roof. Marketing strategies must account for the diversity of these generations, including marketing and business development styles.

In combination, these factors present a variety of implications for the marketing of legal services today. To stay on top of the game, law firms need to understand the issues and then implement new strategies to effectively address them.

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The Implications for Lawyers

What are the special factors at work, and what issues do they raise for marketing your firm's services? Following is an overview.

- **Firms have higher expectations.** Law firms today have different expectations for their lawyers in terms of business generation. Thirty years ago, after five to seven years, a lawyer who did good legal work would likely be invited into the partnership. Today, a lawyer is typically not invited to become a partner without eight to ten years of legal experience plus a book of business to keep himself or herself busy and provide work for others. Lawyers, therefore, must start their marketing efforts much earlier in their careers (and be good at the task).
- **Being a good lawyer is not good enough.** Clients no longer want just "a good lawyer." The growth in the number of lawyers, and the increase in competition, has led to a greater need for specialization than existed previously. Clients want the best intellectual property lawyer or the best securities litigator. They also want a lawyer with knowledge of their particular business or industry — a banking lawyer, a healthcare lawyer and so forth. Hence, lawyers must specialize in a particular practice area or industry and develop a reputation for expertise in that area.
- **Gen Xers and Gen Yers have been bombarded with advertising.** Unlike traditionalists or baby boomers, younger lawyers grew up with sophisticated marketing and advertising everywhere. From television and radio, to banner ads and pop-ups on the Web, to "floor graphics" (those strange stickers on supermarket floors directing you to your

favorite cereal), all of us are now confronted with hundreds of advertisements each day. For lawyers, the challenge is that their clients are, too. So, in this world of information, how does one get information about his or her services into the hands of clients and potential clients, and not in the deleted messages folder or the circular file?

"Gen X and Gen Y clients are much more comfortable with developing relationships via technology, rather than via the face time that was so important to preceding generations."

- **The Internet generation is much more tech-savvy.** Lawyers under the age of 40 grew up with computers in their classrooms and their homes. Many don't remember not having cell phones or what "chatting" was like before instant messaging. This has several implications for lawyer marketing. First, in terms of client service (marketing to existing clients), it means that clients have much higher expectations in terms of responsiveness (by telephone, e-mails, PDAs and the like). It also means that Gen X and Gen Y clients are much more comfortable with developing relationships via technology, rather than via the face time that was so important to preceding generations. (The authors, however, believe that face time is still very important.)
- **Younger generations are much more adamant about work-life balance.** Whereas earlier genera-

tions of lawyers were in single-income families, most lawyers today are in dual-income (and often dual-professional) families. Men and women lawyers have daily family responsibilities and want to be more involved in their children's lives than their parents were, or were able to be. Single lawyers also have personal activities that are very important to them. Young lawyers don't want to spend their evenings at chamber of commerce meetings, eating rubbery chicken dinners or having cocktails with a bunch of strangers. They also don't want to spend weeks at a time away from home in meetings and CLE courses in fabulous locations while their spouses have to struggle to be superman or superwoman, taking care of all the household duties and family obligations.

- **It's not only lawyer demographics that have changed.** Just as the demographic profile of law firms has changed in the past 30 years, client demographics have changed as well. First, Gen X and Gen Y clients have the same work-life balance issues that lawyers do (and they're not interested in rubbery chicken dinners either). In addition, corporations are also much farther along than law firms in terms of gender, racial and ethnic diversity. They are much different than the white-male-dominated corporations of the 1970s. Golf, sporting events and cigar bars are no longer universally appealing.
- **The rules have changed, too.** Companies are also much stricter about what their employees can and cannot accept from clients. Many corporations do not allow executives and other employees from accepting gifts, event tickets, dinners and other giveaways, from their outside service providers.

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Strategies for All Generations

Now that you know all this, how can you use this knowledge to enhance the way your firm markets its services? Implementing the following pointers should help.

- Traditionalists and boomers should communicate clearly with associates and non-equity partners about the firm's criteria for invitation to partnership, especially with regard to business generation. Firm management should also provide the tools, resources and training for younger lawyers so that they can begin to market the firm and their individual and group practices. Young lawyers should recognize the importance of business generation to their advancement in the firm and overall success and begin marketing early in their careers.
- Older lawyers should mentor younger lawyers concerning what areas of expertise they should focus on developing — consistent with the firm's plans for growth — and how they should go about developing their expertise and reputation in those specialized areas of law. Young lawyers should begin as early as feasible to specialize in a practice area that they would like to develop throughout their careers.
- All lawyers should take information overload into consideration when developing marketing materials for clients. When communicating their expertise to clients through newsletters, articles, mailings and the like, they should make sure that the information they convey is concise and directly relevant to the client's needs — and that they communicate their knowledge of the client's business and industry.

- To provide the best client service, all lawyers need to understand their clients' expectations with regard to responsiveness. Hint: ask them! Lawyers should also understand client preferences with regard to communications. Do they prefer face-to-face meetings, or are they more comfortable using technology as the primary mode of communication?
- When mentoring younger lawyers, traditionalists and boomers need to recognize that what worked for them in the past may not necessarily work (for themselves or their protégés) today. Younger lawyers, for their part, should develop strategies that will allow them to grow strong professional relationships with clients while still maintaining the balance they so desire. For example, regular breakfast or lunch meetings with clients can provide much needed face time with minimal intrusion into the lawyer's or the client's schedule. Lawyers should hold regular meetings with clients, at no charge to them, simply to discuss what is going on in the client's business, how satisfied the client is with the lawyer's services, and what the client's needs will be going forward.
- All lawyers should recognize the changing face of today's clients and build their marketing strategies accordingly. When developing marketing strategies, they should consider the gender, racial and ethnic diversity among their clients. One size does not fit all in today's legal marketplace.
- Last but not least, lawyers should be sure to ask clients about any rules or guidelines their companies may have in place regarding gifts from outside vendors — and stick to those guidelines in their marketing efforts.

A Little Understanding Will Go a Long Way

The bottom line is that one needs to recognize the different needs and desires of the four generations of lawyers within one's firm and in one's firm's client base. Understanding the changing marketplace and generational differences among lawyers and clients can help one develop more effective marketing strategies, generate more work, and improve relationships both within one's firm and with one's clients. ♦

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