

What Do You Really Need From Your CMO, Now?

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What do law firms need from the CMO? The answer is contained in this one simple statement. The CMO is the voice of the client across the law firm. That is the CMO's job, plain and simple. Any firm that gets this; gets it.

The role of the CMO only gets complicated when management committees, hiring committees, marketing partners, recruiters, (even the candidates themselves), and the list goes on, do not understand or exploit this simple fact.

To further complicate matters, despite the written job description in front of them during the interview, these same parties often have different goals, criteria or even a personal agenda outlined for the candidate. More often than not, the CMO job description is only worth the price of the piece of paper. And so, the CMO is hired as a one-trick pony to satisfy the highest compensated voice.

In fact, for real CMO success, hiring committees should be looking for the individual who can tune into and represent the voice of the client. They must have the skill and patience to deliver the message to the entire firm at every level.

The challenges of client-centric demands and changes that are taking place today are not limited to the marketing department. Every CMO needs a cross departmental think tank. I'm not talking about a Monday morning staff meeting with the CEO. The voice of the client must be heard in coordination and collaboration with all departments.

If my statement is true, that ultimately the best CMO represents the voice of the client throughout the organization, then everyone should be listening; from the receptionist to the accountant to the managing partner, to the practice chair and their assistant. And marketers, as activists, must help law firms, cross departmentally, find and meet the unique needs of the diverse client base. The client voice must be heard not just in the marketing function, but also in management affairs and service development of the whole law firm.

The two most important questions a firm can ask the candidate during the interview are "Can you be the voice of our clients across the firm?" "How can we support you in your role as the voice of the client?"

Once that little piece of business is settled, you can move on to the details.

Today, CEOs and executive committees are pushing hard for growth and more effective marketing efforts (read ROI). Finding a CMO with the full range of necessary skills is not always easy.

There are a number of areas where change is creating new priorities for chief marketers. They are playing a more active role in shaping the firm's public profile, managing

delivery methods that involve technology, and building new capabilities within the marketing department and among individual attorneys. The key is to inject the voice of the client in each discipline and across the firm in a holistic manner.

There is a proliferation of touch points, today, like in no other time. Many factors are changing the way clients' research and engage law firms.

Broadly speaking, the low-cost, time-saving, "facts-only" sales approach isn't going to fly in a time where instant access to relatively trustworthy information is available via the Internet, user generated content, citizen journalism, and instant access to feed back via the Web. Communicating value propositions in word and deed are indeed the soup du jour.

Many chief marketers focus on building brands, making marketing communications more effective, finding new markets and repackaging slow practices. These responsibilities aren't going away, but new channels are available and they need to be addressed by the marketer and the firm. They need the voice of the client.

The ability to build the firm brand across an increasing number of media, including user-generated content, is critical. Many of these skills, such as expertise in the business use of social networking and new media require a degree of specialization. Many CMOs would agree that the skills needed to keep up are becoming so specialized that their law firms will have to operate quite differently in the future. While these roles will compliment the generalist capabilities of traditional marketing managers, some law firms may see a need to restructure their marketing and business development teams to address these new key marketing capabilities by adding social media technologists. This will in turn foster and support CMO success. Smaller firms will likely consider outsourcing new media marketing activities requiring specialized skills just as CIOs rely on external IT resources.

The demand for higher value and service-oriented approaches only make the CMO's job more complex –and without the support of the CEO, managing partner, and partnership responding to the client voice, the job will continue to become less attractive. A nice paycheck only lasts so long before the lack of support or frustration outweighs its reward. The churn of CMOs in law marketing is a cost most firms could avoid if their expectations, intentions and perspective were in the right place – giving voice to the client. Placing new leadership in marketing roles is expensive. Why not give your CMO the necessary support to be successful?

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