



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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Using the Client Experience to Up Your Game

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON APRIL 18, 2017



The final session that I'd like to share from the [Legal Marketing Association's Annual Conference](#) this year focused on learning lessons from businesses outside of the legal industry – while there's something to be said for understanding what your peers are doing within the industry, there's a lot to be learned from other professionals as well. LMA brought Maggie Watkins, Chief Marketing Officer of Sedgwick LLP to moderate [Lynn Skoczelas](#), Chief Experience Officer of Sharp HealthCare, [Lilian Tomovich](#), Chief Experience Officer at MGM Resorts International, and [Susan Letterman White](#), Founder and Managing Partner of Letterman

White Consulting to offer their perspective on how businesses are using the client experience to up their game.

The panelists shared with us some key learning outcomes that we can adopt in our own pursuit of the excellent client experience.

Create a client-focused *culture*

Sharp HealthCare did this by launching “impact teams,” which led to increased market share, employee satisfaction, and consumer satisfaction. Now, they’re having to look to new league tables to provide them with a metric they can improve on. MGM realized after the recession that they needed a shift, and through client feedback they identified their brand purpose, that they’re actually in the entertainment business, not the gambling business. They defined who they were and what they stood for, set standards for their employees and clients, and then communicated, trained, and held people accountable to create this culture.

Client journey-based transformations aren’t easy, and may take years to perfect

This isn’t a “process change” which can take 2-4 months, but a *culture* change, which may take 2-4 years. You create this by tapping into your leadership and understanding their hot button issues and values. White commented that “A rational argument never convinces someone coming from an emotional place.” I’d venture to say that for those of us in law firms, creating culture change may even take longer. Patience is truly a virtue for legal marketers, as is the ability to let go of the credit. As the panelists said, culture shifts rely on leaders (that includes us) to communicate and effectuate change, and without that, the shift can’t happen. Look at what’s going right, and how you can do more on that, and don’t focus on the negative.

Law firm marketers shouldn’t be afraid to plant seeds of ideas with their firm leadership either. Many of us who have stuck around in our current roles for a while have found that a good idea takes about two years to percolate. You mention it, drop hints, research, data, etc. in subtle and sometimes overt ways and bring in other influencers and consultants to shore up your seed over time, and one day, the managing partner or practice group leader knocks on your office door to tell you about this “brilliant” idea he or she just thought of, which sounds remarkably familiar. Hide your grin behind your hand and roll out the appropriate level of enthusiasm for their (your) new (existing) plan, and be satisfied that you’re effecting change, even when you’re not getting credit for the generation of the idea.

An entire firm/organization must be involved to be successful

An essential piece of the puzzle is getting everyone on board. Sharp HealthCare holds an annual re-commitment ceremony to focus on the “experience journey,” which makes it part of the organization/culture. They also have quarterly education for leadership, and regular check-ins for setting and reviewing goals. Skoczelas noted that consistency of your message is key – some people are hoping that change will go away,

so you must rinse and repeat your messages. Involving and engaging everyone makes them want to be a part of the firm's success. In the end, the cynics will leave, and the skeptics will get on board. Tomovich added that she has a project management and change management office, and they make culture shifts happen. She encouraged everyone to look for defining moments and experiences (both among clients and employees) that you can share and promote.

Firms must develop an understanding of what matters to their clients, not what matters to them

It's easy to fall back on the idea of what matters to the firm and its constituents. But when you're developing an effective client experience, the focus should be, as the name suggests, on the client and what matters to them. It sounds incredibly simple, but it's a step that many firms and lawyers skip when making decisions that impact the client experience, from where their offices will be located to how they interact with their websites.

Start with a vision and create a structure to align with priorities and actions

Clarity of brand and purpose is also essential. You can't change how clients are experiencing your firm until you understand who you are, says Tomovich. Once you're clear on brand, you can identify how you continuously drive differentiation. The panelists had a few tips in this section, saying first that timing matters. We're at a culture shift point right now in our profession (meaning that the client experience is becoming more and more important), so now is really the time to address it. Also, pay attention to politics – make sure that those with the real power (not always those with the right titles, by the way) are on board. Know and engage your key influencers as well.

Some final suggestions

The panelists added a few final points for the audience in developing their own culture shifts:

- Develop a “journey road map” that delivers to the vision – who are you as a firm, where do you want to be, how can you get there?
- Use metrics and data (hard and soft) to monitor progress and manage performance.
- Create ways to work differently – strong leaders, empowered employees, and increased communications.
- A successful customer experience program can result in increased revenue, lower costs, and more efficiencies.
- It can also be a differentiator and competitive advantage.

Have you undergone a culture shift to focus on the client experience at your firm? What lessons have you learned? What about the panelists' comments particularly resonates with you?

