

Fear and Loathing on the Marketing Trail 2012

By Amy Knapp



It's the New Year, and from your new-found perch on the StairMaster, you are reading a gazillion articles and blog posts about the 10 ways to succeed in business in the New Year. Some read like self-help books while others reiterate the life-affirming value of writing a marketing plan.

But eventually it all sounds like the adults on a Charlie Brown cartoon special. Those Charlie Brown characters can't hear the adults because the adults aren't clued in to their real concerns.

Whether 2012 brings another recession or simply a year of no growth, law firms and their leaders will consider anything but more profit a failure come December. The question is: how should we approach this year to feel like we won when it's over?

In the recent slow-to-no-growth market years, law firms have managed to eek out small amounts of growth by screwing down the expenses tighter than a drum, de-equitizing less productive partners, curtailing 1st year associate hiring, paring the marketing department to a fair-thee-well, and merging like mad in the hopes that bigger will be better/safer/more profitable. Not a lot of options left there.

So here are ~~10~~ 4 steps that I believe will make you feel like a winner on come next New Year's:

1. Stop thinking in 12-month increments and plan for the longer-term success of your firm.

The numbers on December 31 are primarily important because of the nature of your compensation system – they don't say much about the future of your firm, its unique

culture, the good work you do for clients, the life satisfaction you and your partners experience by working together or the meaning of life. Law firm compensation models have driven law firm business practices for too long. This is the year to get over it – and to share those modified expectations with your partners in a clear communication right up front.

2. Be honest – and proactive – about firm needs that have been festering for years.

If there is a slower animal on this planet than a law firm in decision-making mode, I have not seen it. Businesses that succeed in down economy acknowledge the elephant in the room, cut through the politics and take decisive action to address their needs.

- Need a stronger firm culture of business development? Invest in training and coaching.
- Would you be more stable with a broader platform from which to provide more services to existing clients? Invest in finding the right merger partner.
- Would your corporate client base grow if you could accurately provide fixed fee pricing? Invest in the knowledge management and PM training.
- Is your own office in another metropolitan area no brainer? Start planning now to sock away some money at the end of the year so the firm can ultimately afford it.

3. Take personal responsibility for doing everything you can in the area of business development.

I am in exactly the same boat as every attorney I work with and coach. If I don't succeed in business development, I don't support my family. I can confidently say that none of us do everything we know we should to develop business. Some years you may feel you do 70% of what you should, and some years, you probably feel you've only done 30%.

This should be the year to pull up your socks and do all that you know you should. And if you need support or direction, now would be the time to speak up, not in June, when five months of opportunity have passed you by.

4. Look like you've gone off the deep end.

Share with your partners and co-workers how lucky and blessed you have been and continue to be. Enjoy your culture. Realize how interesting and rewarding it is to work with intelligent people. Savor each time you use your skills to help some person or company. Express appreciation.

And then in 2012, sleep well at night.

About the Author

Amy is a legal marketing consultant and business development coach with an avid interest in social media and it's uses for professional services firms. Amy is a frequent speaker, trainer and retreat leader on business development and social media topics for law firms and related professional organizations. Contact her at amy@knappmarketing.net, visit her website at www.knappmarketing.com or her blog www.notknapping.com. Read the first chapter of her new book for FREE, LinkedIn and Blogs for Lawyers: Building High Value Relationships in the Digital Age [here](#).

