

Specific Marketing Tactics to Delight In-House Counsel

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Smart law firms can get new business and keep clients loyal by taking simple steps such as providing “concierge” services, ghostwriting articles for in-house lawyers and sticking to their budgets, according to a trio of General Counsel.

The in-house lawyers spoke at the recent Legal Sales and Service Organization (LSSO) conference in Chicago. In a panel discussion moderated by Kristin Sudholz, Director of Business Development for the national law firm Drinker Biddle, the in-house lawyers included:

- Daniel Harper, VP, GC and Secretary for Océ North America, a printing company for professionals.
- Jenifer Robbins, GC, FPL Advisory Group, a family of companies that provide management advice real estate and financial service companies
- Mary Doohan, VP, GC and Secretary, Morton International Co.

In my experience, most panels of general counsel are an hour of griping and complaining about law firms charging too much, being slow to return phone calls and having idiot associates. This panel was refreshing because it described things that law firms are *doing right*, and which marketing-savvy firms can turn into business development tactics.

Intranet with alternate fee arrangements. Sudholz said that Drinker Biddle had collected every example it could find of an alternate fee arrangement the firm had entered into. This information was collected and placed on their internal intranet, so that every lawyer could look up actual engagement letters with alternate feeds, the many different approaches the firm had taken, worksheets and the contact information of the lawyer who put the deal together.

Secundments. This refers to a law firm sending an associate to work at a client’s offices, for free or for a low cost. Clients love it because they get an extra attorney for free. It’s excellent business development for the firm, because the associate will build relationships with the in-house lawyers, learn how the general counsel’s office operates and become familiar with the client’s business.

Concierge services. This refers to a law firm making an expert lawyer available for quick calls and emails from anyone in the client company, all for a low flat fee. Robbins said, “We have a terrific relationship with firm that does all our employment work. We pay a very low annual retainer that allows me to call them anytime. I have random

questions. I'm sure it's a losing proposition for the firm. But what that does allow for them to be involved from the get-go with every employment matter I have. They know first about any material matter that comes long. They end up doing my employment work that has any magnitude at all. The retainer proportion allows them to wind up with all my employment work."

Give your clients a break when they hit hard times. "We had a potential bankruptcy hit us, and I had to figure out how to get our legal work done without changing my budget," Harper said. "Our law firm agreed to reduce significantly the retainer we were paying them, like down to a dribble. As a result we gave them the legal work of monitoring our 600 active trademarks. My point is they not only reacted but they were proactive saying we know you're in a tough situation; let's figure out how to go forward in a longer term relationship."

Learn the client's business. Doohan of Morton Salt said, "I had to switch law firms and I wasn't pleased with the decision. But the new partner learned how salt was made, studied our business and learned our competitive landscape. He got to know our business people, and determined who would make good witnesses and who would not. He really embedded himself in our organization, and he's been a wonderful asset to our company."

Ghostwrite articles for clients. "Our compensation consulting division was doing a study, and our law firm wrote an article discussing the survey they were doing, covering legal issues involved in long term compensation issues in Europe," Robbins said. "It gave the firm some visibility, it had the firm partnering with one of our business units and made us look pretty good. My business people were thrilled."

Success Fees. Harper said, "In litigation, there's a phase for each step. We pay the law firm 80% of their fee, and the 20% goes into a success budget. At the end of the matter we've got this success budget, and we use a formula as to how the success bucket is divided up. Firms on average get 107% of what they actually would have billed. It forces the law firm to be efficient and to make well-thought-out case assessments at the very beginning, because it will determine the margin for the firm will be."

Send FAQs, checklists and forms. Robbins said, "If you send us forms, and make something that will make work easy for us, it will be something we'll really appreciate."

Create a dossier or profile of the client. "Law firms should have firm profiles of a client so that any lawyer can review the client's business, what it does, what other names we operate under and what subsidiaries they have. There should be a dossier on my company so that any lawyer can review it before they call me," Robbins said.

The panelists recommended that lawyers read [51 Practical Ways for Law Firms to Add Value](#) at <http://bit.ly/9NIIEW>, written by the Law Firm Value Committee, composed of

personnel from eight major law firms. The committee developed a checklist, with activities ranging from visiting a client's premises to instituting "kaizen" programs.

For more on this topic, call:

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