



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
*Relationship Building
within the International
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Driving Collaboration: Beyond the Traditional Referral for Mid-Sized Firms

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON OCTOBER 24, 2017



Most of us are familiar with a typical referral – a lawyer that you’ve built up a relationship with who has need of your practice expertise or a client with work in your jurisdiction will call you up and ask for your assistance. At times, they will pass your name directly to their client to contact you directly. In either scenario, it is a one-to-one relationship from one party to another.

This is the way that many firms outside of, and sometimes inside of, law firm networks view the referral concept and on which they were founded. Networks were developed to build cohesive, collaborative environments that foster the strong relationships that make these referrals possible. Globalization in the legal market in the late 1980s and beyond required either this model, or mergers with larger firms, or firms opening offices in overseas' markets.

In today's global world, however, we've moved well past this to an even further collaborative model, and networks are challenging their members to think even more proactively. This takes two forms:

1. Examining their current clients to see where they may have needs in your jurisdiction, along with one or more jurisdictions where you have existing relationships, and pursuing that work as a flexible team of firms or lawyers from those firms.
2. Identifying completely new opportunities for multiple members to work together to pitch on.

In a recent article, The Lawyer examined the [top 5 predictions for the future of law firm networks](#) and suggested that in the next five years, such

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deals involving three or more jurisdictions will make up at least 10 per cent of the activity of major law firm networks.”

Those networks weighing in on the panel felt that firms are either there now, or the prediction doesn't go far enough.

Whether you're part of a law firm network, or you're a mid-sized firm interested in collaborating with your existing partners around the world on these types of referrals, if you're not already doing this, there are some questions you may want to be asking, and some steps you should be taking to move towards this type of partnership.

What to Consider

It can be challenging to identify where to get started when you're trying to move past the traditional referral. But there are a few things you can do right away:

- Consider a small number of your own clients who are doing business internationally. Make a list of where they're located in addition to your own jurisdiction.
- If you're in a law firm network, identify the fellow member firms who are in those locations as well. You may have strong relationships already with those firms, but if you don't, now is the time

to introduce yourself, and begin building up a broader base.

- You may know one type of partner at the firm, but practice a different type of law. Use your relationships at the firm to introduce you to the contacts that you need. This can be done through telephone calls, skype, or most preferably, in-person meetings. In exchange, offer to introduce other partners at your firm as well. If you're uncomfortable making a cold introduction, ask your network administrators to assist.
- Look at really deepening the relationships at the top three jurisdictions you would expect to send more work to, and see more work from. Overlap as many partner (and associate!) introductions as you can, and when looking for reasons to follow up while developing the relationships, consider things like co-authoring articles (which you can also share with the network to promote), co-presenting both in and out of the network, and ultimately introducing the clients you've identified.
- If you're not in a law firm network, you may already have a loose affiliation of relationships with firms in the locations that you're interested in, or you can do some due diligence to find firms that you trust in those places. It will take some additional time and work, but you can identify and develop the relationships you need on a one-on-one basis, or you can seek out a network membership that is suitable for you.
- Once you've further developed these relationships, or if you feel you already know these other lawyers well, give some thought to your clients' pain points, and how you could work together to resolve these.

As you're deepening your relationships with your fellow members or firms, some questions and issues may come up on a case by case basis that you'll want to resolve. These questions are worth discussing in advance so that you can start to give some thought to what your flexibility and answers might be. Some of these might include:

- Although there are multiple firms working on this deal, can we agree on a single rate that we charge the client? Can we also agree on a single billing contact?
- Who will manage the project so that the client has one point of contact, instead of multiple contacts?
- Are there projects that will require us to think even more creatively and put together teams of lawyers from our firms, rather than acting as firms working together?

What are some other issues that you can identify that might come up?

Working more closely with your colleagues in other firms, you'll recognize and understand each other strengths, and then be able to work together to pitch for completely new work as well. Start to make this a regular part of your thought process when engaging with a fellow member or lawyer – "How can we work