



Straight Talk from General Counsels on How to Win Their Business

Far too much of corporate law practice marketing is predicated on what the firm wants potential clients to know, rather than what general counsels are actually looking for and how they conduct their searches. I came across a gem of [a video on the Corporate Counsel section of Law.com](#) that provides a glimpse of what general counsels actually care about when identifying and vetting outside firms.

- **Strong word-of-mouth is a great equalizer; gets you on the short list.**

“Be good at what you do. We tend to interview the people we’ve heard about a lot, and we’ve heard about them a lot because they’ve had success in the past. And it doesn’t mean that we’re the kind of company that defers to the absolutely “blue chip” [or] “name brand” in a certain area because that’s an attorney the board will be comfortable with...If you are good at what you’re doing, whether you’re small, new emerging, well-known, we tend to be able to find you.”

Eric Whitaker, General Counsel, Tesla Motors

- **It doesn’t matter how good you are if you’re also an ass.**

“Can I get along with this person, will they get along with my [internal] clients? Getting along with me is important, but it’s much more important to get along with the clients, because the clients are going to see you in the long term, every day basis. If the people who have to work with you on a daily basis in that transaction can’t stand you, that’s not going to reflect well on me nor is it going to get you repeat business.”

Robert Shives, Senior Director & Associate General Counsel, Fujitsu

- **Forget quirky videos and personal narratives; make website attorney bios more search-friendly.**

“I absolutely check out bios, because we are frequently vetting new counsel. I look at representative clients, I look at representative matters. One of the things that makes me crazy is when the sites aren’t easy to maneuver. So how you’ve coded your website to be able to sort. Try and do it yourself, as if you’re an outside counsel trying to get to a person with this expertise in this location.”

Renee Lawson, Associate General Counsel, Zynga

- **Think rifle, not shotgun.**

“One of the things that’s sort of interesting is that a lot of firms describe [themselves] as the everything to everyone. I’m usually looking for something very specific, so if you are an IP/anti-trust/transactional/product liability/labor and employment/estates and trust lawyer – which I have seen – you’re probably not the attorney I’m going to hire. So think about how you’re portraying yourself to the outside world.”

Renee Lawson, Associate General Counsel, Zynga

“It’s a credibility issue as well. When one sees that long list of “you’re an expert in every field,” you just pass. You take a pass on that person.”

Megan Pierson, Senior University Counsel, Stanford University

- **You're competing against in-sourcing.**

"I hire a lawyer and expect that they're going to give me 2,000 hours a year for a \$200,000 salary — I'm paying them \$100 an hour. In reality, if you're working with me at a high growth company you're working 3,000 hours a year, so it's even less [per hour]. My blended rate from law firms for the most part — big law firms — is still \$400-\$500 an hour.

"It's simply a situation where, for the most part, law firms have priced themselves out of a whole bunch of work I used to have them do. It's that simple. When I started in '99 I would send contracts to law firms, I'd send license agreements to law firms, I'd send some employment issues to law firms. I just don't do it anymore."

"If work is going to repeat at all, I'll bring the expertise in-house. My in-house teams have simply gotten much bigger, and my outside counsel use has gone down, and it's a direct result of the economics of it."

Eric Whitaker, General Counsel, Tesla Motors

- **Billing reviews can be moments of truth.**

"I don't bring everything up with my outside counsel, but I do bring certain things up because we are early in a relationship and I want to set expectations. If I ask you to look at something on a bill, I expect you to look at it, and I expect you to get back to me promptly. And frankly if it even has the slightest appearance of being inflated, wrong, I expect you to say, "I've taken care of it," and I expect you to do it right away.

"If I have to battle for a write-off with you, after I've given you the courtesy to bring it to your attention and reviewed your bills that *you* should have reviewed, you're not on my list anymore."

Renee Lawson, Associate General Counsel, Zynga