

LMA 2009 CONFERENCE PREVIEW...NOW WHAT?

MANAGING CHANGE IN LAW FIRMS

A Presidential Perspective

By Amy Spach, AS Written Communications

When attending her first LMA national conference, the lesson that caught the attention of attendee Jennifer Manton was the importance of listening to clients. Inspired and energized by the conference, Manton returned to her firm to lay the groundwork for its first client care program.

Much has changed in the ten years since that LMA gathering. Today, client surveys are common, marketing departments have grown, economies are global and Manton has evolved from conference newbie to the 2009 LMA president. But even with all these changes, one concept remains true – it's still all about the clients.

"Clients should be our impetus for change, we really need to understand their industries and how they are managing economic challenges," says Manton, Chief Marketing Officer of Loeb & Loeb LLP. She views the current legal landscape as a watershed opportunity for marketing professionals to lead the conversation both with internal clients – firm attorneys, and with external ones – firm clients.

Strategic Core

Talking to clients and gaining insight into their businesses are components of the grander strategic approach that Manton would like to see drive the next era of law firm marketing.

Viewing this transitional and tumultuous time as a unique chance, Manton adamantly believes that marketers don't have the luxury of maintaining a low profile; "Instead of following the path of least resistance, we need to situate ourselves and our firms for the long road by thinking strategically and steering the change."

Formulating and following a strategic plan can take many forms. From educating marketing committees on ways to align marketing and business development to initiating marketing intelligence that supports your firm's clients, the potential to function as a valuable resource is tremendous.

"A strategic plan separates followers from leaders and creates a framework to follow, or to change, if necessary," says Manton. Without one, a firm risks a haphazard future and she points to a lack of strategic planning, or commitment to it, as one of the contributing factors to high-profile firm dissolutions last year.

Generate Revenue, Change Perception

One way to demonstrate the worth of strategic thinking is to illustrate the marketing department's power to generate revenue. Tackling the eternal struggle involving return on investment (ROI) is a compelling way to change the perpetual perception of marketing as a drain on resources.

"Break down an activity to a quantifiable function, to the lowest common denominator, and from there you can connect it to the revenue generation side," suggests Manton. The information is there – from tracking Martindale-Hubbell referrals to monitoring click-throughs of your client alerts, dig for the data and apply it to make your business case and change impressions.

Creating these new impressions does require time and patience. The client program Manton launched after her first LMA conference required 18 months of thoughtful, firmwide dialogue before it came to fruition. But it was worth the effort.

Join the Conversation

"Now more than ever, marketers can not be afraid to put new ideas out there – change requires many conversations," observes Manton. She's excited about the conversations slated for this year's conference and invites the entire legal marketing community to share ideas, opportunities and a bit of fun too.

Whether you are a first-timer, as Manton once was, or a marketing veteran, join us at LMA's 2009 National Conference, "Change...Now What?" at the Gaylord Resort and Conference Center, National Harbor, MD. More information on the conference is at www.legalmarketing.org.

Next Strategies: What to expect onsite.

...

Amy Spach, Principal of AS Written Communications, works with law firms to create Web content, articles and marketing materials. Contact her at 323.876.6374 or www.aswrittencom.com.