

Law Firms and Their Future in the Changing Legal Industry

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When considering and, specifically, the nature of marketing legal services in the future, the best guide is empirical kinds: (1) law-specific data combined with (2) information from the mature unregulated service professions.

Both data indicate the same trends: There will be an ever-increasing trend to multinational megafirms. But there is also an ever-increasing trend to boutiques and even highly successful solo practitioners. Simultaneously, a decrease in attorney loyalty to law firms' institutionally will continue. Those firms clearly doomed to extinction are the "generalist" "full-service" midsized firms. Whether your firm, like the dinosaurs, is headed for the tar pits or not is a function of your target market segments, defined in terms of geography, demography, or industrial classification.

There lies the clue to future success: The survivors will know their target client group inside out and upside down. The depth of information will greatly exceed that of an occasional social encounter or friendly neighbor relationship. If there is a trend, it will be toward a greater segmentation and establishment of relationships along psychographic lines, tastes, and values.

Considerable attention will continue to be given to the legal profession by both the business and popular press. Topics such as lawyer incomes, firm structures, mergers, and legal trends, all command significant space in the press and attention in electronic media.

One trend that will not come to fruition is a Big Eight or Big Five as has happened in the accounting profession. There are two contributing factors:

Law is more complex with more separately identified practice areas.

By its nature, the practice of law requires stronger egos which probably translates into more individuals wanting to be the frog.

A frequent recurring issue will be alternatives to conventional legal service. While alternate dispute resolution (ADR) is as a promising trend to lower litigation incidence and costs, ADR is by no means the only issue. Legal technician clinics, storefront law offices, do-it-yourself legal software, and fill-in-the-blank legal documents are all getting widespread. To a certain degree, they will be successful in capturing legal fees. Why? It is not just a matter of the cost of legal services but the perceived value as well. It's no secret that the level of distrust by the lay public of both civil and criminal courts has been reflecting a lack of faith in the legal system altogether. Therefore, as a profession, law needs to reassess what it can do to reverse this alarming trend and implement proactive strategies.

Importance of client service

Ideally, all attorneys--public and private alike--must assure that their clients are being well served, specifically that they are getting the results they want, to the extent allowable. For lawyers in private practice, this is just another form of niche marketing, which calls for specialized expertise to be focused for a unique clientele. It is neither practical nor possible to "be all things to all people." The best approach is to pick a niche and then to serve the clientele or constituency to the extent possible.

A final trend is that in order to better serve the business and corporate clients, megafirms will own other professional services such as engineering, public relations, land use consultants, and on and on. In sum, the obvious conclusion is that the legal profession will become more crowded. There will continue an even more rapid attrition of practicing attorneys. Opportunities will exist in abundance for those who are smart marketers--those who deliver what the market needs, focus on niches, and those who do a good job of building recognition and credibility without losing sight of their single client. To attract new business and referrals, their existing client base. Whether in multinational megafirms, boutiques, or solo, law firms must be sensitive to the nature of a maturing profession. In the simplest of all terms, client-focus is the answer to the future of the profession.

Knowing and implementing the Client-Focus Theory

Most attorneys attend law school for two reasons: to reach personal and financial objectives. Attorneys who are in private practice of law today are attaining both goals, at least to some satisfactory degree. If these goals are not being met, the profession is in trouble.

whatever reason, the attorney logically takes corrective action. It is clear that attorneys cannot practice the law without the clients who need the expertise the attorney can provide. It is also clear that attorneys cannot earn the money they want without clients who can and are willing to pay. So the clients must be found and maintained. This search for clients is called business development, or marketing. The client-focus theory holds that fulfillment of the attorney's personal and financial goals comes through a focus on client needs. When the right clients are found and served well, it is a win-win situation, allowing attorneys to practice what they want and with whom they want. For the attorney, finding the right clients means the clients will receive superior legal service. The clients will obtain desired results. In the process, the attorney will be satisfied with his or her practice and, presumably, be compensated for this service. Some essays on legal marketing divide attorneys into two groups. One group of attorneys is production or practice centered. These attorneys are oriented toward the practice of specific areas of the law. They know which area of the law they like to practice, and they are usually very successful. The other group is client centered, focusing on client needs. The client-focus theory says that being client centered is ultimately the only valid orientation for successful attorneys. Being client-focused means having an active plan to provide superior legal products and services to clients at the time they want to buy.

Importance of understanding your clients

Understanding clients goes beyond knowing a little about their business or a few things about their personal lives. Understanding means knowing what causes a client to make a particular decision. It means developing a personal relationship with each client, upon which a foundation of trust can be established. Individual attorneys must foster these relationships. The client, therefore, becomes the center on which the attorney's world turns. The client-focus theory is the key to ultimate success. It removes the clutter from the marketing matrix by narrowing the attorney's efforts to serve the client. Attorneys always need to remain legal practitioners of the highest quality. But through the adoption of a client-focused attitude and embracing of practical methods to enhance client service, the attorney will also see the practice grow and prosper, fulfilling his or her personal and financial goals.

Interested in Learning More About Legal Hiring? Read the Definitive Guide:

[*How to Hire a Legal Recruiter for Your Law Firm: How Law Firms Recruit Attorneys Using Legal Recruiters*](#)