

Is your marketing strategy supporting your recruiting efforts?

By Gary Mitchell and Almira Bardai

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If it's not, you could be missing out on a huge opportunity.

The most crucial element of recruiting is finding the right fit. And it's a two-way street - it has to work for the candidate and the firm. Not all law firms have the same culture, and not all recruits have the same needs; it is imperative to ensure complete alignment from the start.

Are you attracting the 'right' candidates for interviews—or are you spending a lot of effort interviewing, only to find out there's a miss-fit? What do your candidates know about your firm prior to their first interview? Experience tells us that when marketing is driving the recruiting strategy—the law firm gets the candidates they want. Still considered “avant-garde” in the legal industry, those firms that have embraced the relationship between marketing and recruitment, and who are seizing the vast opportunities it presents, are those who are attracting the employees they want.

Are traditional recruiting efforts meeting the mark? Tactics that have worked in the past may not necessarily work now, such as advertising in career sections of legal publications, on-campus efforts, firm-sponsored events and so on. As recruitment efforts become more sophisticated and innovative, law firms must adopt “out-of-the-box” thinking in order to attract candidates of the highest-caliber and with the right fit.

What a recruiting program/strategy looks like when it's driven by marketing:

Some outstanding media campaigns have been recently undertaken by both local and national firms. Following the HELM Awards (Honouring Excellence in Legal Marketing) in Vancouver, which were presented by the Legal Marketing Association, one national firm took out a 1/3 page ad in the legal supplement of a local business publication, congratulating their lawyer on winning a marketing award. This is phenomenal. Think about it for a minute. This firm publicly recognized one of their lawyers for outstanding accomplishment in marketing. That is precisely one of the mandates of the Legal Marketing Association—to further the recognition of marketing in law firms. What does

this tell recruits - that the firm not only acknowledges employees' talent, but also values their efforts. This strategy also landed them a front-page story in another national publication.

As part of its overall marketing and advertising strategy, another Vancouver-based firm told the story of an associate who was unhappy in his career, and how the company supported him in making changes to his practice area and supported him with training. This is a brilliant and innovative example of demonstrating the value that firm places on its lawyers, to potential recruits.

Tell your story – Your law firm's story is an integral part of the marketing and recruitment process. Paint a picture of your culture, your learning and development strategy, your history, your areas of specialty, your team, the opportunities available, and who you're looking for. A well articulated media relations campaign that drives coverage in law and business publications can help you do this. And it does wonders to help your existing lawyers tell your story. After all, the best storytellers are your employees.

Differentiate yourself – It sounds like a simple concept but a surprising amount of firms are not effective in differentiating themselves. Law firms and their cultures are not the same, so what makes your firm so unique and makes it stand out in the marketplace? More importantly, consider this: firms make every effort to differentiate themselves to potential and existing customers, why wouldn't they do this to potential recruits?

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The uniqueness of your firm's culture, such as compensation plans or comprehensive training and mentoring programs that use real life results to point to, are of interest to recruits, as is celebrating your lawyers' success stories. Taking the time to drive your profile and your message will drive candidates to you.

Marketing can also lead an internal communications campaign that recognizes and rewards within. When a firm has the reputation of supporting and rewarding talent— word gets out. If your associates experience this recognition, they become ambassadors of your message and your culture when engaging with potential recruits.

Marketing can also support your recruitment efforts by providing comprehensive training and coaching to new recruits, to help them on the right track. The new generation of lawyers emerging from today's law schools has very different needs from those of past generations. They require more attention to work/life balance and for the sake of money and career are less likely to sacrifice home life to achieve success. International consulting firms conducting extensive research into why lawyers leave firms have discovered that the number one reason lawyers leave early in their careers is the lack of training and support. Hence it goes to show that when you have the reputation for providing this level of training and support, the word gets out.

So why should marketing and recruitment go hand in hand?

One of the largest challenges facing law firms today is recruitment and retention. Part of the challenge is selecting the best candidates as students, young associates and laterals. The key here is the fit. If the fit isn't right from the beginning, then you are wasting time, energy and resources. This may seem obvious yet many firms still attract the wrong candidates who simply do not fit into the company and its culture. They might have the best grades, yet they themselves do not have the characteristics required to become successful within your firm.

There are many differing needs out there among students, associates and laterals. Not all lawyers are motivated by the same factors. Some may be more motivated purely by money; others may seek a culture that supports a work-life balance. By being honest in your recruitment approach, telling your story and communicating about your culture, your firm will be much more effective and targeted in its recruitment efforts, and less likely to encounter issues in retaining new recruits.

When referring to honesty, I am speaking about

“the dance”. It's important to clearly and accurately articulate the needs and culture of your firm. If you are more progressive or entrepreneurial or traditional, recruitment candidates must comprehend it from the beginning and ensure that it is the right fit for them. As I mentioned earlier, there are variety of motivating factors, as not all students or lawyers are looking for the same opportunities. Some are more attracted to a progressive firm that allows for flexibility and work-life balance, while others are excited about the entrepreneurial opportunities of a smaller firm or the structure of an old school firm. Still others are more comfortable with the infrastructure that comes from working in a large national firm.

Some other ways marketing can support your message, articulate your unique culture and attract the right candidates may be:

- Highlighting your managing partners extraordinary leadership skills
- Articulating a unique business model
- Highlighting a team approach to client service and business development
- Creating alignment with your target audience with sponsorships and community involvement then using the media to get that 'corporate responsibility' message out to potential recruits
- Talking up some of your high level clients (not only adding value for your clients), but also demonstrating to potential recruits the high level work that they could be involved in

Getting the message out that you have the culture, the team and the opportunity- 'you are the firm to be at'

Can you begin to see the possibilities?

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