

## How to Choose the Target, and Then Hit It!

By [Steven M. Bell](#) on May 29, 2024

It's a longstanding tradition in the legal business: Clients complain about law firms on subjects such as price, deficient client service, slow response times, and unacceptable outcomes. Meanwhile, lawyers grouse about clients' fee-squeezing, unreasonable service expectations, extreme deadlines, and undue pressure to achieve the right results.

Given how law firm business development has transpired over many decades, it's not surprising that law firms and clients end up in relationships that are not completely satisfactory to either side.

The time-honored way of acquiring new clients relies on *indiscriminate* networking, publishing, speaking, hoping for referrals, waiting for the proverbial phone to ring, and what one wag has labeled "random acts of dinner." When client development consists of casting a wide net, there will be a haul, no doubt, but will it be the right one?

Once clients are on board, it is very difficult and emotionally draining for them to be cast out. It's hard to walk away from revenue. Origination credits and client lists are badges of honor. And associates need billable work.

Professional sales operations in law firms have gradually been gaining traction, and this new business function is making progress in aligning the interests of clients and legal service providers by applying the discipline of targeting.

Targeting. The concept is simple, though its implementation may be complex. Here's how it unfolds: Examine the firm's strategy. Extrapolate where that strategy is driving the firm...three years? five years?...down the road. Which current clients should stay? Which new clients should be added? And not just in a general sense. Specify by company name and with the names of individual buyers of legal services at those companies. That's what targeting is, or at least should be, at law firms.

Here's another facet of law firm targeting. Beyond identifying prospective clients and naming existing clients for significant, strategic investment, disciplined targeting also can create cultural alignment, better results, happier clients, and more professionally fulfilled lawyers.

This can be accomplished through a disciplined analysis of the desired attributes of the best clients of the future. One firm defines great targets as individuals who have buying authority and who:

- are at companies with large, complex issues requiring sophisticated legal solutions;
- understand big-law-firm economics;
- know and like the law firm and its lawyers;
- are not locked into exclusive relationships with other lawyers and law firms;
- are in the right geography;
- resemble clients already served with distinction; and
- would be fun to serve.

These are the aspirations of one firm; each firm can define for itself the characteristics of ideal clients and work hard to create the perfect target list. And then summon the willpower to make the investment and stay the course. It's not easy, of course. But law firms whose clients are the result of disciplined targeting stand a greater chance of achieving sustainable client satisfaction and true professional fulfillment.

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