

## Law Firm Business Development: Taking Your Role as a Business Developer to Higher Levels

By [Steven M. Bell](#) on October 8, 2019

"I need the client development professionals to get us 90%, or at least 80%, of the way to the finish line!"

This is a refrain that I increasingly heard from partners during a long tenure as a client development leader, particularly in the last five years. While the words could have been about any client development endeavor – a brochure, a presentation, a blog post, a web site page – the partners primarily were asking for (demanding) that marketing and business development professionals take a leading and substantial role in pitches, proposals and pursuits. Pressed for time, lawyers want [client developers](#) to take more responsibility to understand the client (or prospective client) and its business, to know and be able to write intelligently about industry issues, to have more than a passing knowledge of the legal issues at play, to have a thorough knowledge of the firm's lawyers and their experience, and to connect the dots in a nearly finished work product that could be delivered – with pride and with minimal lawyer intervention – to the client.

While that's a challenging new step for law firm marketing and business development professionals, it's also a compliment, connoting that lawyers have developed a new level of respect and trust of staff, and a willingness to elevate them to equal (or nearly so) members of proposal, pitch and pursuit teams.

That's a far cry from 20 or even 10 years ago, when many lawyers ordained themselves as masters of everything (including marketing and sales) and viewed the Marketing Department to be more or less a fulfillment center for their ideas and wishes.

That many lawyers have made this leap of faith is encouraging, and now more than ever, it's important for client developers to step up and deliver as never before.

Today's law firm client developers are much more prepared than their predecessors from a decade or two ago, when it was common for law firms to populate marketing departments with "recycled" individuals from other departments or even administrative assistant roles. Today's client developers come with business degrees and other relevant credentials. Law firms are more willing than in the past to offer compensation packages that are competitive with the "traditional" commercial world, and as a result, very highly qualified professionals are plying the trade. And thanks to professional development resources available from organizations such as the [Legal Marketing Association](#), the [American Marketing Association](#), the [Legal Sales & Service Organization](#) and outside consulting organizations that offer business development training and certification programs, today's marketing and sales professionals are able to quickly pick up additional business competencies specifically relevant to law firms. In other words, lawyers are justified in their emerging expectation that marketing and sales professionals actually can deliver on that 90% or 80% expectation.

Meantime, here are some additional ways that marketing and business development professionals can even better prepare to "get to 90." These are activities that lawyers themselves should undertake but for which they are untrained and rarely have time to complete. It represents a huge opportunity for client developers to fill the gap and to burnish their reputations in the eyes of their inside clients – the lawyers. Yes, these steps take time, but what should be a more important priority than clients?

- “Adopt” the clients of the lawyers you are supporting
- Follow these clients on social media, their web sites, client alert systems and more
- Learn to read and interpret SEC documents including 10ks, proxy statements and risk profiles (short courses in such subjects are affordable and readily available from a variety of sources)
- Listen in on quarterly earnings calls
- Follow industry analysts
- Subscribe to industry reports related to the clients you have adopted
- Stay abreast of litigation, transactional and IP issues that are regularly updated by information services
- Become certified in a business development skill from an organization such as LawVision that provides such [certifications](#).
- Engineer opportunities for face-to-face interactions with clients, at a minimum at social and educational events, but at business meetings, as well. After all, if you have completed the steps above, your understanding of the client will surpass anyone else’s!
- Importantly, when this preparation on your part provides new insights that would be of value to the client or your firm’s service team, let the relationship partner and service team know about it!

Delivering this kind of Wow! to your internal clients will go far in advancing your career, your standing as a professional, and the development of the legal marketing profession in general. It’s a tall task and a huge expectation, but one that is parallel about what clients expect from the lawyers and law firms who serve them. Go for it!