

Law Firm Sales: 2021 is the Year of the Sales Team

By [Silvia L. Coulter](#) on February 3, 2021

This article was first published January 26, 2021 in [PinHawk's Law Firm Marketing Brief](#).

Despite COVID-19's business interruption, competition continues, and the challenges facing a mature legal industry continue. Challenges historically present new opportunities. One of those opportunities is to examine the firm's marketing and sales processes. For most firms, the marketing support systems are all in place—web site; public relations, marketing technology, social media, etc. With a bit of ongoing updating, the marketing systems are set, and the firm's marketing resources do not require frequent and costly overhauls. The new focus must be on building an effective sales team and culture.

We can go on and on about whether or not most firms have an effective sales strategy and the supporting culture. This article is more about building a strong sales team to support the firm's overall sales strategy.

The very word "sales" may still conjure up images of unwanted stock broker cold calls or aggressive retail sales individuals. While these individuals are very successful in their type of selling, we are writing about a different kind of sales professional. Lawyers practice law. Some take on additional responsibilities for managing the business of the firm. Most are now responsible for business development. This leaves firms with very little competitive advantage when it comes to winning business. The need for a professional sales team is more important now than ever before. The sales team is not to replace the lawyers, but rather, to team up with the lawyers to create an effective, competitive sales strategy for each new opportunity to expand or to win new business. Just as lawyers practice law, sales professionals sell. They know how to develop a sales strategy, move potential opportunities to the next level toward closing business, and expand existing client opportunities.

The lawyers' roles change with a professional sales team. A partner's role in sales is to be available for some of the up-front sales strategies, and most importantly, to be present when the opportunity to close a new engagement presents itself. If the firm is to leap into the next level of success, it will need sales professionals to continue to carry the firm into the future. We've written about this in prior articles, but if you missed the article or blog, here is additional information to help your firm build as successful a sales team as possible.

1. Required: a successful sales background. Check out the sales professionals' backgrounds with former sales managers at companies where they worked. A successful salesperson will never be comfortable with just reaching quota—they will do whatever it takes to over-achieve.
2. Meet with partner and leader counterparts at the Big Four accounting firms. They've had sales teams now for at least 15+ years and might be instructive on implementing best and working with sales professionals.
3. The reporting structure is a very tricky topic. If the firm's Chief Marketing Officer/Chief Marketing and BD Officer is an exceptional people manager, it can work to have a sales team report up to this individual. Otherwise, it can lead to counter-productive behaviors and damage both teams' reputations at the firm. Although not always popular, our recommendation is to have clearly-defined roles and responsibilities and make sure the sales professionals are not tied down with mundane day-to-day tasks. They will leave and help a competitor instead. Give them the freedom they need for success to build new relationships and close new business.
4. Set a financial goal. In the commercial world, it's called a "sales quota." Sales professionals need goals, and often

like to know they will be rewarded for exceeding goals. Take a year to integrate this important role before setting too high a bar on the financial goal.

5. Be careful not to get too caught up in whether or not the sales professional has had law firm experience. The most important experience is the sales experience. Then industry knowledge and prior law firm experience. Without the first two, the last will not matter very much.
6. Sales professionals need kudos. Law firms are not generally the environments for recognition important to sales professionals. Being recognized for achieving success is another important element of reward for these individuals.