

Law Firm Sales & Marketing: Whose Department is on the Chopping Block?

By [Silvia L. Coulter](#) on March 19, 2019

Firms are leaner than ever. After having gone through several years of cost-cutting and layoffs, firms are operationally strong and beginning to hire again. One area that seemed to make it to the final rounds at most firms, without too much chopping, was the marketing and business development department.

While these departments have made it to what I'm calling the "final round," they are now receiving more scrutiny than ever before. Many of these departments, admittedly more so in the AmLaw100 firms, have grown to a significant size. Their direct impact on the revenue growth is still a mystery to many firms' partners. Marketing and business development departments have often grown simply to support the many requests for often-times random acts of marketing.

Should your firm take a closer look at the make up of its marketing and BD teams? Perhaps. Other factors contribute to the growth of these teams and to their (sometimes) disconnect and mis-alignment with the firm's revenue and growth strategies. Here are some areas to examine before chopping too much:

1. **Firm leadership:** Many leaders are still hesitant to put a stake in the ground about the key areas for the marketing/BD department to focus on for fear of alienating partners. The resources should follow where the best revenue growth opportunities exist. Communicate across the firm about the key projects the marketing and BD department is focused on, the impact it will have on the partners, and how it aligns with the firm's strategy. This communication from the top is key to bridging the gap that exists between this important operations team and the partnership. It will be important to say "no" to some of the more disconnected marketing requests.
2. **Marketing resources:** Web sites, communications, CRM, research, listings/rankings, marketing technology tools, and others are all necessary elements of successful marketing. And, these critical marketing resources are important to support the lawyers' sales efforts, and client service. Some of these activities are best if they are outsourced versus building a big team internally to support the function. Examine whether or not the firm is getting the most from their internal relationships in these areas and if the functions and activities are aligned with the overall firm strategy. If the activities are not directly tied to support sales opportunities, then question their necessity. Again, random acts of marketing can be very costly. Related to Leadership above, sometimes it is important to say no. A marketing and business development assessment from time to time may also be instructive with helping to refine the marketing and business development department's focus.
3. **Pipeline management:** Holding the lawyers accountable for their various business development activities is important. Each business development request should have a related prospective client/existing client associated with it and a potential dollar amount the activity may yield. This sales forecast as it is called in business, will be an incredibly helpful tool for office heads, practice and department leaders to determine how much revenue is being pursued and what resources may be necessary to close the potential new business. Accounting and consulting firms are about twenty years ahead of law firms in this area. Pipeline management tools like Salesforce ([OnePlace](#)) are available and becoming more prevalent in the more sales progressive law firms. Without a pipeline management tool, the business development professionals at the firm may take the heat for the significant dollars being spent which may not lead to new revenue.

In short, when it comes to examining the marketing and business development functions, be careful to close the gap between the team and the partnership by paying attention to the three key areas above. The firm will undoubtedly have a better relationship and respect for this important resource.

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