

Not just a job for partners

Why new and early career lawyers should be part of your marketing mix.



by John Gray

The legal profession in Queensland has come a long way in the last 20 years in understanding law firm marketing. Marketing budgets and teams have expanded, and we've embraced new technology to help in the process.

But there remains a major 'missing piece' to the marketing strategy puzzle – the active and effective engagement of new and early career lawyers (NAECLs) in the marketing program.

Most firms, both large and small, rely heavily on partners to carry the burden of their marketing responsibilities but do not properly engage NAECLs in the process. This has implications not just for the partners themselves, but also for the success of the firm's future marketing activities.

However, the lack of NAECL involvement in marketing is not just due to firm policies and management. A Bachelor of Laws and admission to the Supreme Court involve very little in the way of marketing skills development. Combine this with a quite sensible early career focus on developing legal skills and meeting time-recording budgets and it is understandable that the thought of getting involved in marketing is wearisome to NAECLs.

Despite the perceived reticence on both sides of the generational divide to launch into NAECL-led initiatives, there are a number of valid arguments in favour of such an approach:

1. **Leverage.** We all understand the value of delegating legal work to achieve the best leverage, but we continue to concentrate significant marketing effort among the people with the highest hourly rate. Drafting articles, monitoring client activities, preparing tender responses and ghost-writing blogs are just a few of the marketing initiatives that can be delegated to NAECLs.
2. **Action beats inaction.** More hands on deck means more marketing activity getting done, more profile for the firm, more relationships being built and invariably more work coming in the door.
3. **Accept the risk, take the benefits.** Reluctance to involve NAECLs in marketing activity has traditionally been due to the perceived risk that they'll leave and take the client with them. The reality is that NAECLs leave firms more often because of a lack of client involvement, not because they've gathered a swag of loyal clients.
4. **Successful marketing is a learned skill.** It's not something you suddenly understand when someone puts Partner or Senior Associate on your business card. Undeniably some people have a talent for rainmaking, but if you want your firm's future partners to at least understand the fundamentals, the earlier you start the better.
5. **It's a numbers game.** It's no secret networks are vital to law firm marketing. So why exclude the potential networks of your NAECLs? Networks and relationships built over time from early in a career can be an invaluable source of work for both the individual and the firm in later years. Sacrificing a few billable hours now to give your NAECLs the time to maintain their networks is a worthwhile investment in future opportunities.
6. **Different generation, different perspective.** While you may have a personal view on the value of applying stereotypes to different generations, the fact remains that people of different ages can have very different perspectives. Don't discount the value that a fresh opinion can bring to the table.
7. **Think long-term.** It's time for law firms to start thinking way beyond five-year plans. We can take some inspiration here from government strategy, insurance companies and even some family-owned businesses. When the great rainmakers and client relationships you rely on now are gone, where will you turn? NAECLs who understand marketing and are actively involved from early in their careers, will help ensure a profitable firm remains so despite the passage of time.

So what can you do to increase NAECL involvement in your firm's marketing activities? You might start considering:

- **Education.** Providing regular, quality learning opportunities and resources for NAECLs to develop their marketing skills and understanding.
- **Cooperation.** Ensuring management, partners and NAECLs all understand what the firm is planning regarding marketing and how they can contribute.
- **Engagement.** Don't let NAECLs think marketing is something that 'just happens'. Engage them in projects, planning and decisions, particularly those where they have a personal interest or aptitude. Involvement with social media or other technologies that younger lawyers may understand better than your firm's partners may help with target audience engagement.
- **Positioning.** Every lawyer in your firm should have a clear picture, or individual plan, for how they can contribute to the firm's overall marketing strategy.

With a new financial year upon us, now is the time to take a look at your marketing mix and analyse if it makes best use of your resources. You might find wisdom in unexpected places...

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