



Consultant's Corner

Written by Julie Savarino, Esq.

TAKING MARKETING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

All firms that utilize marketing tools and techniques follow a progressive development curve. By analyzing the curve and determining position, a firm can encourage steady development and improve results from progressive marketing investments.

A firm's position on the marketing development curve is often related to the number of years that the firm has engaged in organized marketing. On average, most law firms have engaged in organized marketing for at least five to seven years and are either in the introductory or intermediate stages of development. An increasing number of firms are now approaching the sophisticated stage of development, with ten years or more of marketing experience.

A firm's history of organized activity is not the only indicator of its progress on the marketing development curve. While some progressive firms enter the sophisticated stage early on, other firms stagnate in the introductory or intermediate stage due to any number of factors and impediments. Some firms even fall backwards before they progress further.

Introductory Stage

When first organizing the firm's marketing efforts, the "stop/start" phenomenon is common, resulting from a lack of attorney buy-in, commitment, skill and follow-up. Often, a firm allocates limited resources on an idea-of-the-moment approach or on a "let's try it" basis. However, expectations are often unrealistic and objectives are often poorly defined. As a result, many efforts are interrupted by other, more pressing matters; are abandoned midstream or are simply evaluated based on an immediate-result basis. Some characteristics of the introductory stage include:

- Project-based orientation

- Marketing committee/partner appointed
- Part-time and/or coordinator-level assistance assigned
- Increased attorney interest and activity in marketing
- Emphasis on implementing marketing tools i.e., seminars, publicity, brochures, etc.
- Project or tool-based budget, some tracking and reporting

One firm recently began the process of advancing its marketing from the introductory to the intermediate stage by focusing more on the targeting, coordination and follow-through of individual efforts. The firm's efforts are now more unified and individual and practice group plans help to pinpoint efforts and increase the return on marketing investments.

Intermediate Stage

You may have heard the term "second generation marketing," which refers to the intermediate stage of development. Many law firms are now at this stage and find themselves struggling to demonstrate improved results from marketing efforts and investment. This stage is the one currently being experienced by the majority of law firms. Some characteristics of the intermediate stage include:

- Practice group orientation
- One or more dedicated marketing professional(s)
- Increased attorney receptivity and buy-in
- Sporadic marketing education and skill development
- Cost/benefit analysis conducted more regularly
- Tracking and reporting of activities and effort
- Annual budget allocation, review and adjustments

A large national firm located in the northwest recently began the process of

advancing its marketing to the sophisticated stage by taking a close look at each office's marketing support structure.

As part of this effort, the firm is selecting and analyzing practice groups and attorneys as marketing "models" for others. The partner-in-charge of marketing explains, "We have had a marketing director for over five years now. For the first three years, we were not sure what to do with him. But now, we have pretty strong buy-in and our partners want to be sure that we are all allocating our resources in the most effective manner."

Sophisticated Stage

At every stage in the curve, firms seek tangible results from their marketing investment. However, sustaining a pattern of measurable results from an organized program requires some level of sophistication. Just as a quality, solidly constructed building is not erected overnight, it takes time to develop a sophisticated marketing program.

Firms all over the world have followed various routes to reach the sophisticated stage. Some think they can buy the expertise and simply hire a top dollar marketing professional. However, this is not enough. The reality is that without an on-going investment of time, resources and commitment to marketing, the processes, systems, programs and procedures that support and sustain a sophisticated effort cannot be developed. Characteristics that mark the sophisticated stage include:

- Industry/niche orientation
- Integration of marketing with compensation and culture
- Defined marketing and "sales" positions
- Marketing what makes the firm "different"
- Integrated database, tracking and financial reporting systems
- Continuous training in business

Consultant's Corner

Continued from page 10

development

- Improved ability to measure results and justify incremental increases in resource allocation

One national firm approaching the sophisticated stage of marketing development recently reorganized its practice group structure to reflect external target markets and client groupings. This is a departure from the traditional, internally focused organization by legal practice area. To help institutionalize this change, the firm hired professional business developers for some of its most important, newly organized areas to assist attorneys with direct client development and improve business development skills.

If you don't know where your firm is on the marketing development curve, your marketing programs may be too elementary or too advanced to achieve optimal results. To identify your firm's position on the curve and to identify potential steps for advancement, consider conducting a "Marketing Assessment." A "Marketing Assessment" can be tailored for various purposes. It can determine how your internal structure and support services perform, how your firm compares with others and where enhancements would improve results.

About the Author:

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ELITE FAQ'S

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

by Fran Gonzalez, Elite Applications Guru

? Is there a year-end checklist?*

Not exactly. Your year-end checklist is dependent on whether you're at calendar year-end or fiscal year-end. Any year-end considerations, though, are in addition to your regular month-end activities. I've noted in the following table¹ whether the item is a calendar (C) year-end or fiscal (F) year-end action (or both). The diamond-shaped symbol ♦ denotes an action that applies only to a limited number of clients².

In preparation for calendar year-end, don't forget to review your vendor list for missing TINs (Taxpayer Identification Numbers) for 1099s. Also, consider doing a trial run-through to test your data formatting and your ability to actually print the 1099s.

Questions? Contact Fran Gonzalez in Elite's Los Angeles office, ext. 269.

Module	Action	C	F
ELBS	Update the Miscellaneous Control Record for the Current Invoice Number if your invoice number includes the year (e.g., 9700100 or 19970001). ♦	✓	
	Update the Miscellaneous Control Record for the Fiscal Year Starting Period.		✓
	Update the Miscellaneous Default Record for Command 600 "Start date for ledger summary." ♦	✓	✓
	Update the Miscellaneous Default Record for Command 1500 "Earliest allowable entry date." ♦	✓	
	Create any year-dependent ledger or cost codes (e.g., FEES98, HCOST98, TEL98). Be sure to include start and end dates. ♦	✓	✓
	Update the Location Holiday table.	✓	
	Update Timekeeper Rates 1-50 and Negotiated Rates 51-500, if necessary.	✓	✓
FMS	Review the Period setups to be sure all the periods for the new year have been defined and that the status codes are correct.	✓	✓
	Review the Accounting Period Maintenance in General Ledger Utilities to be sure all the periods for the new year have been defined.	✓	✓
	Close the current year.		✓

* This series of FAQs applies to Windows Version 2.4 or higher; Character Version 2.6.2 or higher.

¹Non-U.S. based Elite clients will need to adjust this list for country-specific year-end needs.

²The standard disclaimer regarding errors and omissions applies to this checklist.

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