SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018

Strategies

THE JOURNAL OF LEGAL MARKETING

BUILDING THE BUSINESS

How Legal Marketers Can Better Impact BD and Sales

+

Insights From a Chief Client Officer

Legal Marketers' Growing Presence in the Buying Process

LEGAL MARKETING ASSOCIATION
LMA®
THE AUTHORITY FOR LEGAL MARKETING

MOBILIZING AROUND THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE

A conversation with Cole Silver, Chief Client Officer at Blank Rome

BY BETH CUZZONE

COLE SILVER, CHIEF CLIENT OFFICER, BLANK ROME

What responsibilities fall under a sales executive in a law firm?

To answer this question and more, we sat down with Cole Silver, a former practicing lawyer turned general counsel turned Blank Rome's chief client officer. Cole focuses on client acquisition and retention, client service excellence, revenue generation and market expansion. His official job description is, "Through client experience-based legal marketing and business development advice, coaching and collaboration, Cole helps lawyers acquire new clients, deepen existing client relationships, differentiate their services and navigate the intersection between law and business by mobilizing around the client experience for improved focus, innovation and financial results." Another one of the many advantages to Cole's insight is his former role as a general counsel, a true, "voice of the client." In this interview, Cole offers insights on making a transition to a more sales-focused role within your law firm and what planning and activities are necessary to succeed in that area.

Cole, how did you transition into a legal sales role?

Cole Silver (CS): As a practicing lawyer for over 30 years and having been in private practice where I owned my own firm, I've always been in sales. In private practice, you have to sell if you want to eat. In large firms, there may be enough work for service partners to exist, but in smaller firms, that is not always the case. I left private practice in the early '90s to go in-house, and as a general counsel, I quickly realized that in business, sales and revenue are all that matters.

As a general counsel, I had to protect the company from legal, financial and reputational risks, but my greatest value was helping the sales executives locate, negotiate and close deals. It was this partnership that helped my legal department be viewed as a "revenue center" rather than just a "cost center." Even at board meetings, I presented on legal issues for just a short time with the majority of the discussion going to the sales pipeline and projected revenues. This legal experience — both as a private practice lawyer and former general counsel — made my transition to a chief client officer at Blank Rome an easy one.

Describe a few obstacles you had to overcome during your transition into a legal sales role.

CS: The legal market is undergoing massive changes, and it's a very exciting time to be involved. But change is slow, and execution is always an issue. Because they weren't trained in sales, lawyers need help from those with experience in learning how to target, approach, listen, discuss solutions and close new business.

Lawyers are asked to do everything in the business cycle from getting the business in the door, pricing it correctly, creating a project plan and budget, administering the matter and collecting the fee. This process is not efficient. Embedding true business, sales and operations people into the system helps lawyers do what they do best and delivers a good legal result for the client. This is a very results-based business, so even with good sales or marketing people, if the lawyers don't get good results, the client will go elsewhere.

Other obstacles may include: lawyers' reluctance to have other people inserted into the business-generating process, ethical issues as to the unauthorized practice law, originating credits and lawyer compensation, and a hesitancy by older lawyers to accept a new way to go to market.

In your sales role, what responsibilities do you have day to day?

CS: No two days are alike, but I try to balance a handful of priorities:

- Revenue and cash flow are the overriding objective
- Training and coaching on business development, listening skills, closing techniques and client service and experience
- Business strategy, planning and execution
- Pitch and meeting prep that addresses client needs and aspirations
- Strategies to get more wallet share of existing clients
- Key client conversations and feedback to bring energy to their voice and concerns

How do you define the difference between marketing and sales?

CS: First and foremost, the two disciplines must be aligned for maximum effectiveness. I define "marketing" as activities that promote the firm and its brand, service offering and thought leadership in the market. "Sales" is a series of interpersonal activities to build trust, which is very important, and to ultimately create an attorney-client relationship that is mutually beneficial to both sides.

In law firms, salespeople (other than the lawyers themselves) are rarely used. In fact, sales is a dirty word. Instead, we use business development (BD) as a term of art for helping generate business. Of course, as legal marketers take on more of a BD role within firms, the lines between the two areas are blurring much more, but in a good way.

The sales model is someone who's out on the street meeting people, creating opportunities and closing deals. Sophisticated accounting and consulting firms use an "account management" model which is very focused and strategic by using a team and industry approach. Other professional service providers use a consultative sales approach, which is not about proving that yourlegal service is the best; it's about finding the solution that's right for the client.

Whatever term of art or sales model is used, marketing, BD and sales must be aligned. Sales is going to be more accepted moving forward as we are in a highly competitive market, and the old way of doing things — such as relying on glossy brochures, a networking event or the power lunch — is not going to cut it any longer. You have to stand out from the crowd by getting out there to be closer to your contacts, focus on their business, industry and competitive threats, be proactive in your advice and counsel and provide a level of service that is highly memorable — even before you're hired!

This is the opportunity that awaits the legal marketer who desires more — more than answering an RFP or creating a fancy bio page on a website — for those who want to deliver revenue to enhance and impact the bottom-line.

Can you give us a breakdown of sales-related activities?

CS: First, establishing a plan that includes:

- Research and competitive intel
- Needs analysis to determine strategic objectives, wants and aspirations
- Value delivery that addresses issues (give before you get)
- Consistent follow-up with real and tangible value
- Asking for the business
- Don't quit (most people stop after two attempts)

And then there are the regular activities that help you actually execute on that plan:

- Contacting clients often with valuable market and industry data
- Visiting client offices to meet with management on training or new developments; executive briefings
- Intense client discussions during every phase of the relationship
- CLEs, proactive advice on business or legal topics, personal review of new market data
- Helping connect clients with new business and helping them grow revenue
- Client feedback, updates and assessments
- Client service or account management teams
- Secondments

What advice do you have for legal marketers who are interested in transitioning to a legal sales profession?

CS: If you enjoy meeting people and building relationships, are a good listener, see opportunities where others see problems, take massive action every day, can treat every person with whom you come in contact as the most important person on earth and have a positive attitude and a pleasing personality, you have a winning combination to be a great salesperson.

Selling and growing the bottom-line is vital to your firm's survival, so you'll be an important player and handsomely rewarded. Every person successful in business or life has an ability to influence (sell) others on their ideas. Wouldn't it be great if you were that person? ■

The content in this feature correlates directly with the Business Development and Client Services domains in the LMA Body of Knowledge (BoK). To dive deeper into these subject areas, head to the Business Development domain here: **http://bit.ly/LMABoKBD**, and the Client Services BoK domain here: **http://bit.ly/LMABoKCS**.