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On Management

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Richard Gary

The “Big Picture”

Ten Questions CMOs must be ready to answer

Let's say you're the firm's chief marketing officer. You're about to sit down with the managing partner to discuss the firm's marketing efforts and how they fit into the firm's overall business strategy. Here are ten questions you should be prepared to answer clearly and concisely.

1. What are the firm's principal strategic objectives, and how can marketing contribute to achieving them?

I've always believed that it's critical for everyone in the firm — lawyers and administrative staff alike — to see the connection between their work and its larger purpose. This gives people a sense of value and encourages them to put forth their very best efforts.

And so, the first question you should be able to answer involves the firm's strategic plan. You should understand the firm's principal strategic goals and be able to articulate them effectively, without hesitation. And then you should develop marketing programs to support the firm's objectives.

As Bruce MacEwen of Adam Smith Esq. (www.bmacewen.com/blog, an affiliate of law.com, a sister online news site of *LFI*) puts it, a strategic plan is a continually evolving awareness of the fit between (a) the specific demands of the marketplace, (b) the firm's ability to meet those demands, and (c) ways the firm can change to more closely align its resources with the market. You

should understand each of these three components as well as anyone in the firm.

2. How do each of the firm's practices relate to each other and to the firm as a whole?

This is another “big picture” question. You should be completely familiar with the firm's practice and intellectual resources. It's impossible to develop sound marketing programs unless you understand what the firm has to sell.

But this goes beyond basic knowledge. You need to understand the complex way in which the firm's practices relate to and support each other. For example, the tax practice may support an industry-sector specialty, such as energy or healthcare. Or insurance coverage experts may support the representation of insurance industry clients, but positional conflicts may arise if their expertise is applied on behalf of clients in the commercial sector. These are the sort of issues you must understand in order to use your knowledge to develop marketing ideas and opportunities that make sense for the firm.

3. What strategic and economic contributions does each practice make to the firm?

You should have access to the firm's business intelligence tools and the analytical information they produce. At the end of the day, you probably aren't a key strategic decision-maker, but you must understand how the firm's practices fit into the whole. Economic contribution is an important, though not the only, factor in this analysis.

4. What keeps clients coming back to the firm year after year?

Every firm presents a value proposition to clients, i.e., a unique combination of quality, service, and value, within the context of the firm's practice mix. This is what leads to enduring relationships with the firm's best clients. To maximize your effectiveness, you should understand this value proposition and be able to communicate it to lawyers and clients alike.

What's more, be prepared to tell the managing partner whether you believe the firm offers compelling value to clients. If the answer is no, consider what changes might be made to strengthen the firm's service profile. As a seasoned marketing professional, you have a perspective that the managing partner, as a practicing lawyer, doesn't have. Don't be afraid to speak up. You're a member of the firm's

senior management team, and your opinion should be sought and valued on key issues.



Be prepared to say whether you believe the firm offers compelling value to clients.



5. What is the firm's target market in terms of clients and practice areas?

Answering this question involves the firm's configuration. You must understand the firm's core strengths and the industry sectors to which those core strengths can most effectively be marketed. Can the firm's practice resources be strengthened — or perhaps even reshaped — to address target markets more effectively?

6. How should the firm approach client relationships — from the viewpoint of a client's business and legal needs, or the firm's practice resources and its legal expertise?

This is a philosophical question to which there is no right or wrong answer. Most CMOs advocate a client orientation, while many law firm partners advocate a firm orientation, even if they pay lip-service to a client-oriented approach. Whatever the answer, it's important that you and your managing partner agree on the approach.

7. How can the firm learn more about its clients, their needs, and their opinion of the legal services the firm provides?

There is only one correct answer to this

question: Conduct client interviews on a regular basis! If you want to improve client service, institutionalize and strengthen the firm's client relationships, and develop a better sense of the firm's identity, you should adopt and implement an ongoing client interview program. And you should be responsible for this effort.

8. Is the firm fully utilizing the client relationship management tools that are available to it?

Every firm should organize and retain client information — everything about each client's relationship with the firm (e.g., contact information and history for all clients and client representatives) — in one central location. Working closely with the chief technology officer, you should lead this effort and know what CRM application makes the most sense for your firm.

And in this area, I have another strong recommendation: Create client teams for your key clients. Client teams should meet regularly, at no charge to the client, and focus on both the client's business and legal needs and the firm's ability to meet those needs. Because you understand the firm's most important client relationships, no one is better qualified to coordinate this effort than you. You should never miss a client team meeting.

9. Do you understand the firm's partner compensation system well enough to know what behavior it rewards?

It may seem odd for the managing partner to ask you about the firm's partner compensation system, and I'm not suggesting that you should be handed a list of partner point allocations. But, you should understand the firm's compensation system well enough to know how partners are evaluated. Is the compensation system subjective or formulaic? How important are business originations in setting partner compensation levels? Are originations shared? Is teamwork rewarded?

If the firm rewards teamwork and collaboration, you can have confidence that

a collaborative marketing approach will be received warmly by partners. Conversely, if the firm has an eat-what-you-kill compensation system, you should focus more on individual marketing efforts by partners. This knowledge will help you do a better job.

10. Can you deal with partners who resist participating in the firm's marketing efforts?

This question reflects a critically important measure of your effectiveness — how well you deal with people. With the possible exception of the COO or executive director, no member of the firm's administrative staff interacts as closely, or as often, with partners as you. You must earn the confidence and respect of the partnership and be able to work with the partners in every office and practice area, whether they actively support the firm's marketing efforts or not. It's impossible to overstate the importance of this responsibility.

At the end of the meeting, I hope the managing partner asks you two more questions: Do you have everything you need to do your job effectively? And, how can I help you succeed? Be prepared to answer these questions as well. Remember, one of the managing partner's most important tasks is to identify and then nurture people who can help the firm thrive. A talented and effective CMO is one of those people who can make a tremendous difference. **LFI**

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