

The Value of the C-Suite in the Law Firm Setting

The organizational culture that permeates today's law firms promotes legal practitioner behavior rather than business of law behavior, but the transition from a practice of law to a business of law remains critical for the life of some law firms today. Relying on random acts of marketing and the traditional marketing mix ensures unwelcome challenges.

"Today, more than ever, law firms are valuing their business executives as critical to the success of the firm's operations, having evolved from a 'profession' to a 'business,'" said [Heather Morse](#), a first chair legal marketer at a Los Angeles firm. "These firms are seeing the benefits of greater marketplace share, as well as revenues and profits. But, more importantly, these firms are prepared for the 'what's next?' Whether it's the next recession or disruptions to their service delivery models – from AI technologies to the numerous alternative legal service providers that have entered the legal ecosystem." C-suite business executives like Heather have moved from playing a narrow role in the firm to driving all aspects of client-centered integrated marketing communications and service. They no longer assist with law firm strategy; they create it and manage the tacticians who implement the critical steps to success – as defined by the client.



Susan C. Freeman
Senior Vice President
Marketing & Business
Development
225.620.2085
sffreeman@jaffepr.com

The real voice of the client

The business executives in the law firm are often the voice of the client. The client must be heard, understood and respected. Lawyers then must speak the client's language and understand the client's company, industry, competitive landscape and regulatory landscape. Firms that rely only on outbound marketing and view the business executives as merely "non-lawyers," rather than implementing a client-centric business culture, will lose clients, natural rainmakers and, ultimately, profits. The U.S. legal landscape is not just a large-firm picture . . .

The impact filters down to smaller firms, too. Evolutionary change will and should continue, and business development professionals will have a far greater role as they become the law firm's "strategic partners" that they have been in businesses outside the legal profession for years. Firms will be able to make the transition from a practice of law to a business of law because of the help these professionals provide. Business management practices in a business of law model will result in more business development: attracting new business, retaining current clients and/or expanding client relationships.

[Jennifer Scalzi](#), CEO of Calibrate Legal, says, "Marketing is the place where the internal and external needs of your firm collide, and it will be a driving force in law firm sustainability in the years to come. The right CMO in your firm will be a cornerstone for a successful strategy in this increasingly client-driven marketplace, where firms are hungry

for competitive advantages that truly differentiate them in ways that will help engage potential clients in lasting partnerships.” Calibrate Legal just released a [compensation report for law firm Revenue Enablers](#) that shows that “firms are increasing their marketing and business development headcount,” Jennifer said. “The majority of CMOs report directly to the managing partner, which tells us that these professionals are becoming more valued every day.”

The organizational culture that exists within law firms is undergoing a client-driven transformation. Clients are pushing for a new power-sharing relationship with their lawyers and the firm’s business executives. This starts by knowing what your clients think of your firm, followed by what your lawyers think of the firm – all of which helps to define and create your firm’s story for external audiences. As clients evolve into more sophisticated consumers of legal services, the traditions associated with the practice of law are beginning to fade. This shift is especially apparent in how law firms market their services, and the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of those efforts.

Successfully transitioning from a practice of law to a business of law

Many law firms rely on professional legal marketers to [build their reputations](#) and business development professionals to bring in business. Still, many do not. It’s about equity. It’s all about listening with empathy, not judgment. Lawyers need to spend time and energy on developing mutually respectful relationships with the members of their firm’s C-suite and with their clients. Creating mutually beneficial relationships built on respect for one another’s education and real-life experiences is meaningful, cost-effective, ethical and fruitful.

Transitioning from a practice of law to a business of law also means that lawyers will need more [face-to-face communications](#) (no more practice silos), with business executives in the firm, and with clients through client conversations and other relationship-building efforts. These behavioral changes, when made at an individual level, will result in positive changes at an institutional level.

It’s not enough to acknowledge the competitive environment and the need to market legal services. A client-centric mindset must become part of everyday life – for everyone in the firm, not just for marketing professionals and those who develop business naturally.

The obstacles to client-centric business development are very real. Eliminating them starts with effective communication. With effort and commitment, these obstacles can be overcome. Understanding the [law firm culture](#) and making plans that get implemented and policies that get followed has to be the focus of strategic discussions at the highest levels. Business development and effective communication play a large role in helping a practice of law transition to a business of law.

The importance of lawyers partnering internally with business executives as much as externally with clients cannot be overstated. If you’d like to learn more about best practices for transitioning from a practice of law to a business of law in a client-centric manner, contact me at sfreeman@jaffepr.com and let’s chat. I ask a lot of great questions

– and you'll love every minute of it, I assure you!