

Key Takeaways from #LMA19: Lessons I Learned My First Time as a Service Provider

When Jaffe's "powers that be" told me I would write an article about my experience at the Legal Marketing Association (LMA) [Annual Conference](#), which took place last week at the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta, I immediately began to think about how I might aggregate everything this conference means to me and my colleagues in a short-form article. Yeah, right!



Jaffe Staff

Now, as I sit at my parents' house recovering from the whirlwind week, the inspiration hit me. Rather than wax poetically, I thought I'd try to commemorate some of the core takeaways from this year's conference with a little reflection on some of the outstanding programming.

Kicking It Off: We Can All Be Movement Starters

If there's one thing we can count on, it's the reality that most lawyers hate change. They are so remarkably resistant to change that often, they simply refuse to make a needed change. Facebook Groups Leader and former COO of Change.org, Jennifer Dulski, kicked off the conference with a great keynote address, reminding us that all change starts with small actions by individual people.

Dulski's address at times sounded like a pitch for her bestselling book, *Purposeful: Are You A Manager or a Movement Starter*, but her message was simple and on point: Change isn't easy, but starting the change (a movement) is, and any of us can be a movement starter.

Sometimes these corporate-speak presentations lack a little in the translation for LMA audiences, but not this one. At a time when our firms and lawyers face unprecedented disruption – from the Big Four (more on this later) to artificial intelligence, to the growing role that Alternative Legal Service Providers (ALSPs) play in today's market, and the consolidation that, for better or worse, is changing the competitive landscape of the Am Law 200 – Dulski's feathery-light message that we can all start movements was a compelling one.

Dulski gave us a fresh take on leadership, combining the best techniques from business and social change to help us understand how to transform our passion into a movement. One of the better keynoters in recent years, Dulski showed how all of us can create positive change in the world and make our lives purposeful.

Service Metamorphosis: Driving Performance Improvement

This year, the LMA Next Big Thing program was linked to how well law firms are measuring up to their decades of lip service about “delivering top-line client service.” The fact is client service has been a truism in law firm value statements for more than 30 years, but seldom has any firm stepped up to say they will track and measure how well they deliver on those clichéd promises.

Content Pilot’s Deborah McMurray teamed up with Finnegan CMO Terra Liddell, Faegre Baker Daniels’ Chief Client Development Officer Melanie Green, and Lewis Roca Partner Douglas Tumminello for an engaging and interactive presentation that highlighted case studies from the real-life efforts of Tumminello, Liddell and Green, whose firms have already started the transformation of “client service.”

McMurray walked us through the “service metamorphosis,” linking the process to an analogy of the birth of a butterfly, which includes four steps:

1. The egg (the groundwork for what the improved service delivery looks like),
2. The caterpillar (growth in confidence and capability),
3. The chrysalis (close to the finish line) and
4. The butterfly (the position of flourish).

Clients are demanding greater accountability for everything, including standards for service delivery. Each case study highlighted how being **proactive, strategic and focused**, along with critical analysis of internal processes, has helped the law firms make significant strides in how they define, and now measure, client service delivery. This program is scheduled to make the circuit this year, so I won’t spoil it any further.

Use the Right Data, Right

Tuesday afternoon, I sat in a session co-presented by my good pal, Robyn Addis, Director of Marketing at Ballard Spahr in Philadelphia (in full disclosure, I was the firm’s Director of Business Development for a short time), with Brian Conway of McDermott Will & Emery and Andrew Hutchinson of One Place. The presentation highlighted examples of how marketing and business development teams from two firms have leveraged their data to validate certain initiatives and activities.

The point of the presentation was not to extoll the virtues of collecting and analyzing data. Most firms already know they need to do this. What this group addressed was partially a case study in what sets of data should be used to effectively measure what you’re trying to measure. Addis, for instance, was trying to find ways to automate expense requisitions and her annual firmwide marketing budget, while drawing conclusions about the quality of investment in certain marketing and business development activities.

Props to my pal Robyn, who had the wisdom and foresight to *keep* an example of a set of data she tracked about a seemingly innocuous webinar program for one of the firm’s practice groups. Hoping the data would tell her the webinar was a waste of time, instead, she discovered that much of the data helped support the argument that this activity was helping engage their ideal target audience.

What started out as a quest to essentially confirm her own bias led to a conclusion so far on the opposite end of her theory that it served as a very compelling reminder that using the right data in the right way is a surefire way to help justify an otherwise-questionable effort. I was beyond proud of my former colleague, because this (for me) was one of the really effective teaching moments of the entire conference.

The Voice of the Client is *Back* with a Vengeance

Often the highlight of the conference, the General Counsel Panel this year featured inhouse lawyers from DHL, Home Depot and Volvo Financial Services. Before I go much further, I must warn you that I've now been to eight International and four Regional LMA conferences, all of which have sported some fashion of a GC panel. It's always good fodder for the legal marketer whose belief systems on everything from rankings to sports tickets are validated by this annual choir of angels.

This year, you could hear a pin drop during much of the conversation. Among other topics, the three client lawyers each agreed that the law firm industry needs a massive shift away from practice groups and toward an industry-based approach to service delivery. This is very much in line with delivering legal services your clients need and reflects the voice of the client. Those firms that align their legal services in an industry focus will be best-positioned to respond to ever-increasing demand for legal services because they will already have established how to deliver what clients want, while the practice group silos argue over whether the client is a litigation or a business and corporate client.

The real "mic drop" moment happened when Mark Smolick, Chief Legal and Compliance Officer for DHL Supply Chain Demand, announced that bet-the-company matters were no longer his purview alone. According to Smolick, the CEO and the CFO are weighing in because the investment and risks are so high – and if the CFO is weighing in, guess who else is probably at the table (in spirit)? The CFO's closest advisors: Deloitte, KPMG, E&Y, and/or PWC (the "Big Four"). At this suggestion, you could hear the audible gasp from the audience – more of an "A-ha" moment than shock and surprise.

Smolick pointed out that the Big Four are offering advice and counsel that solve business problems, while we're still trying to peddle legal services. His point: We've got to do better at focusing our advice on the real issues facing our clients, and in this particular case (as Smolick suggested) we need to think outside the box, and for instance, get our own law firm CFO's engaged in the client relationship.

It was an exhausting week, but in a good way and one I won't forget. It was my first year attending not as a law firm marketer, but as a service provider and consultant on the Jaffe team. We had a terrific presence at this year's event and I'm already looking forward to 2020 in Denver. Until next year!