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Turn Your Non-billable Rankings Time into Biz Dev Opportunities

The fee earners' primary responsibility is to serve the firm's clients. While it's true that many also have administrative or managerial responsibilities, and every biller should be thinking about how to increase their book of business, none of them should be bogged down with rankings nominations. You will need input and information from your fee earners for your firm's submissions, but pulling it together and doing the heavy lifting — marketers, that's on you.

What can you do to maximize the non-billable time that your fee earners put into gathering information for and reviewing rankings submissions? You can use this time as an exercise in business development. Here are some strategies for leveraging non-billable time spent on rankings toward growing your firm's business.

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Identify the Trends

Once you have reviewed the firm's nominations, you will have a good sense of the issues that have mattered most to clients over the past year. Are these issues still a priority for clients? If so, what information can you provide clients to keep your firm top of mind? Is that information articulated well in your communications to clients and prospects, on social media, and on your website? Are you leveraging your experience to the max?

Current practice area clients aren't the only ones to keep in mind. Just because a client hasn't used your firm for a particular area in the past doesn't mean that you can't offer them your perspective on pressing issues in that area. One of the goals of business development is to keep your firm top of mind with clients in the event of a future need. Reminding or educating clients about your other service areas can help you expand your work with existing clients should such a need arise — and that rankings process can help.

Review Gaps in Your Service Offerings

While gathering information to prepare a rankings submission, evaluate how you can improve your client service. Often, working to answer questions in the submission will uncover things like silos or gaps in communication between practice groups or offices. As a marketer or leader in the firm, it can be useful to share feedback with fee earners about how to make service offerings more comprehensive or work on cross-selling initiatives.

If you are looking at your submission and noticing a lot of work in one area, and then a lot of referral work in a complementary area, ask yourself, "Has the firm thought about expanding to serve this need?"

Think about Client Feedback

Many rankings submissions require client feedback. Figuring out who will be the “best” client to put forth will require some internal evaluations. Once you’ve identified those clients, take some time to evaluate what the client might say about you and how you could potentially serve them more effectively or what else they might need. This is also a good time to remember to check in with those you haven’t spoken to in a while or who could become potential referral sources.

Rankings organizations are essentially completing client satisfaction surveys. Are you doing these with your clients directly? If not, think about how you can incorporate client feedback into your client service continuum. Many fee earners are reluctant to ask their clients for feedback, but then are surprised when clients take their work elsewhere. Feedback is a good thing; it gives you the opportunity to improve your service to clients and build deeper, more-lasting relationships with them.

Recognize Your Fee Earners

When you complete nominations for individuals in the firm, you often learn interesting things about them that should be celebrated. Use this information to recognize them in internal communications. Have they volunteered a tremendous amount of time with a nonprofit? Are they mentoring students? Are they prominent in bar service or other professional leadership roles? Acknowledging things like this will go a long way when you need their feedback for something else, and can also be used for other firm highlights in social media or public relations.

Repurpose the Submissions

Remind your fee earners that ranking submission work can be repurposed for things like client alerts, articles, media relations or other thought leadership pieces. This will make focusing on non-billable work easier to swallow for fee earners and help them view this time as a good investment in business development.

We acknowledge that fee earners are not likely to be overly enthused about taking time away from billing and client work to focus on rankings and awards, but we also realize they either expect to be ranked or understand the importance of awards to enhance their credibility to clients and perspectives. Helping to guide them through the process as part of a business development exercise will gain you more buy-in and help make the experience as painless and productive as possible.

If this process still seems completely overwhelming and impossible, but you know your firm would benefit from gaining rankings and awards, Jaffe’s experience can help guide and advise you about how to tackle these obstacles and create a successful rankings program.

Want to talk more about your rankings program, initiatives or submissions? Need help getting started or with submission guidance or review? Reach out to Evyan O’Keefe at eokeefe@jaffepr.com or 347.213.7656, or Michelle McCormick at mmccormick@jaffepr.com or 281.975.9447.