

Strategic Brand Review – Don't Forget the Interviews

My colleague [Alan Singles](#) recently discussed [how to complete a brand audit](#). Let's do a deeper dive into the interview portion of the brand review, because this is often the element that gives lawyers the most pause. Honestly, it is the hardest part of the process – but it's also the most important.



Jaffe Staff

Most lawyers are afraid of asking for feedback, even though they want to improve, but there is no other way to get an honest appraisal of how your firm and attorneys are seen in the legal marketplace.

Choosing Whom to Interview

Just like any representative sample, to make the results of your interviews helpful, you need a good cross-section of individuals. Your results will be skewed if you only cherry-pick those you know are happy, work with only your best partners or already send you lots of business.

For internal interview subjects, think about:

- Diversity of practice
- Office or geographic representation
- Level – partner, of counsel, counsel, associate
- Home-grown and lateral acquisitions

For client interviews, focus on:

- Different practice areas
- Single- clients and multi-practice clients
- Length of client relationship
- Geographic diversity
- Client demographics – employees, revenue, publicly vs. privately held

For referral interview candidates, consider:

- Diversity in the practice areas they refer business to
- Diversity of partners whom they work with
- Geographic diversity

Internal Interviews

Each and every person who works at your firm is an ambassador for your brand. You need

to make sure their perception of who you are and where you are going is in line with the [law firm's marketing strategy](#).

Members of the firm can also help identify issues that management may not see. There may be groups, including practices and offices, that feel resources are not distributed equitably.

Make sure you are talking to both home-grown and lateral talent. These groups may have very different perspectives on the firm. Home-grown talent will understand the firm's history and evolution. They will be able to compare the past and present, and ideally offer a perspective on what has improved and what might need some more work. A lateral attorney, on the other hand, can identify what attracted them to the firm and how their clients reacted when they announced their move.

It doesn't matter what management thinks the firm's brand is. It matters what your internal and external stakeholders think it is. Without buy-in from everyone in the firm (partners, associates, paralegals, administrative staff), communicating your [law firm's brand proposition](#) is impossible.

Client Interviews

Of course, all of your marketing and branding activities boil down to one thing: gaining and keeping clients. A branding review that lacks input from your clients misses important information. The key is to make sure you have a representative sample.

You don't want clients who all work with the same partner or practice. You want input from clients throughout the firm. You also don't want only longtime clients. Try to reach out to newer clients. What attracted clients to the firm in the past is not necessarily what attracts clients today.

Is there a difference in perception between clients who only use your law firm in one practice area versus those who use the firm in more than one? Do they know about the firm's other practice areas or are they consciously choosing to use another firm for those practices?

You might be surprised to know that clients who only use a firm for one practice area usually do so because they are not aware that the firm also offers other services. While some clients purposely diversify their outside counsel spend, many would be pleased to consolidate and streamline.

You also might want to consider talking to clients who have reduced their work with the firm, or who have become former clients. They could give you valuable insight into honest perceptions of the firm.

Referral Source Interviews

Most people think of asking clients for feedback, but what about the people who referred those clients? Referral sources are often overlooked, but they can provide tremendous insight into your firm's strengths and how it is perceived in the marketplace.

Referral sources know who people like to work with and they know who is a dud. Their reputation is on the line when they make a referral, so they are careful to recommend only the best. Find out why they refer people to one partner or another. Do they refer people to specific practices and not others? If so, is that because they are more-aligned with a particular practice or because they don't view the other practice areas as highly? How do they perceive the firm? What do they view as your strengths and weaknesses?

The Value of Feedback

Firms and attorneys are often reluctant to ask for feedback because they are afraid of inconveniencing clients, overburdening their teams or hearing something they don't like. But you can't attract the business you want if you don't know what people are saying about you. You have to ask.

People do want to be asked for their honest feedback. It shows that they are important to you, and that you care what they think.

If you're concerned about how various audiences might respond to a request for feedback about your firm, you can increase honesty and openness by working with a third party to gather data. When these interviews are done by a third party, people feel free to be candid. Jaffe can help.

Have you run into challenges trying to get buy-in for interviews during your law firm's brand audit? What did you do to overcome this hesitancy? Need help? Contact Terry M. Isner at tmisner@jaffepr.com.