

Catch In-House Counsel With Honey

Occasionally, we get that special opportunity to be a fly on the wall in rooms where important things happen. A few months ago, I got a glimpse behind the curtain of how internal counsel hears pitches and came away with some very valuable insights – and validation.

I recently spoke at the 2022 NAMWOLF conference, about firm culture and empathy's seat at the table. My soapbox, as those who know me are aware, is all about creating **kind and compassionate business cultures** where people are **empowered to be their whole selves**. I'm all about how empathy and core values of kindness are directly linked to revenue and profits. I believe that we as legal marketers are not in the business of selling lawyers. We are in the business of raising profiles, building relationships, and keeping our industry relevant and in line with our clients' needs and expectations.

After my presentation, there was a private program where law firms could pitch a panel of inside counsel and receive critiques. This was a closed event, but since we had a few new friends from my presentation, I was able to sit in. Gold for this fly! Now I'm sharing what I learned with you.

Stop Selling Lawyers

I sat through several firms' pitches and critiques, and what I heard warmed my heart. The panel unanimously agreed that they want to experience the **human side of the firm**. They want to have an emotional connection. They want to connect with people, not be sold to.

Here are a few tips and some insider knowledge to help you revamp your pitch so it resonates in a more personal way.

1. **Bring a team.** Always pitch with a team, and it had better be a diverse team. Don't just bring a handful of folks and then have one person do the pitching. The panel wants to hear from everyone, and they want to connect with the entire team. They want to see a diversity of race, gender and generations.
2. **Tell a story – your "why."** The panel wanted to experience the firms through stories, rather than a list of services and accolades. They want to hear about where you effected change, where you solved a unique problem, or why you might have a greater understanding of or insight about a specific industry than the competition. Why are you a lawyer? Why are you at this specific firm? Why do you care?
3. **Accolades, awards and rankings do matter.** The panel said they do want to see your achievements. You should be proud of them, especially those that pertain to the prospective client's business and industry. Be careful not to present them in a cocky or arrogant way – simply build a slide that presents them, and in-house will recognize their value as it applies to the client. Don't fill a page with badges, though. It's not about quantity. Focus on the **rankings and awards** that are relevant to the pitch, but also don't



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overthink it.

4. **Be creative.** Yes, being creative, standing out and being memorable are very important to inside counsel. This shows personality, innovation and differentiation from the other pitches. Don't go in with a presentation that lawyers created from a pragmatic, legalese point of view. Your goal is to connect on a personal and emotional level – remember, you are not selling lawyers. Instead, sell an experience. The panel really gravitated to the creative and they were disappointed when it wasn't carried through a presentation. They liked concepts, the use of fun, nontraditional phrasing and playfulness. Several times, they said they wanted more of those qualities!
5. **Show by example.** Instead of listing your services and experience, develop some **case studies** that are relevant to the people you are pitching. Share the goal or issue, the process, and the results. Tell the story – and to really hit it out of the park, allow several folks on the team to tell it, to show the interactive relationship of the team, the diverse thinking and how you built consensus to arrive at the unique solution together. In-house will find something in these case studies that will strike a chord with them, and they will begin to form an emotional connection with you.
6. **Leave an impression as well as making one.** Be sure to leave something behind, and it should be just as creative as the presentation. The panels really appreciated having something they could refer to and use to review and recall after a presentation.

The Takeaway

Drop the formality and loosen up a little when pitching your prospective clients, especially inside counsel. They don't want to be sold to; they want to connect, trust and find a like-minded team to work with. They are looking to connect with people, not a brand. Get personal. The panel loved it when one attorney told a personal story and got choked up. The panelists did, too, and instantly connected with her. When we make that emotional connection on a personal level, things like price and rates aren't as important, and you can guarantee a successful professional relationship.

It was validating for me to hear that inside counsel values DEI, the human side of the lawyers, making personal connections with service providers, and creativity and personality. When the panel told my client that they loved their creative approach but wanted more of the same and the client said they took it out, the panel said, "You need to listen to your marketing guy."

If you need a marketing guy to help you develop a dynamic and creative marketing strategy guided by the core values of empathy and compassion, reach out to me, Terry M. Isner, at tmisner@jaffepr.com.