

How to Hit the Right Note When Pitching to In-House Counsel

Law firm pitches to in-house counsel are often devoid of emotion, storytelling or creativity. For the sake of perfection and professionalism, attorneys might play it safe and just reiterate what's on the firm website. This is where they begin to get off-key.

I've been in legal marketing for more than two decades. What I have learned is that regardless of how loud we, as marketers, sing the importance of differentiation, personality and uniqueness, lawyers will choose to go the safe route – the redundant route – when they pitch in-house counsel. That's why they lose attention after the first verse: They become tone deaf.

Attorneys, you have to hear what your clients are saying when they sing in harmony with your marketing team. Your marketing folks know how to craft a #1 hit when it comes to creating pitches that include catchy tunes and maybe even a mic drop.

Last year, I wrote about the first experience I had [as a fly on the wall](#) of the pitch room. I've recently had another opportunity to hear even more law firm pitches and feedback about how to improve content and delivery, and I'm bringing the insights straight to you. Like the smash movie "Pitch Perfect," here are my notes about how to create harmony with your business development pitching.

Turn up the volume, and let's count down the top 10 tips.

10. Bring the energy.

Inside counsel wants to be engaged from the beginning. For each practice group pitch I've observed, the feedback about overall tone was consistent: Inside counsel wanted to see passion and enthusiasm. *Appropriate* professional enthusiasm, that is – you don't want to come across like you're pitching on "Shark Tank."

Counsel wanted to know the attorneys' "why." Why do you do what you do? They weren't thrilled when lawyers were just stiffly reading slides. They wanted to see authenticity, and they wanted the lawyers to talk to them. As one inside counsel said: "Levity works and is appreciated when it is authentic."

9. Tell stories.

A good pitch begins with setting the stage and explaining what you do. Then you can provide the how and why by [sharing case studies](#) or telling stories that counsel can relate to. Stories that support your firm's "why" will connect with inside counsel at the emotional level.



Terry M. Isner

Owner/CEO
Branding & Business
Development
302.519.8895
tisner@jaffepr.com

Why would an attorney want to pull on heart strings? Lawyering is as much about relationships as it is about knowledge and skill, and it's easy to forget that you're pitching to human beings. Inside counsel appreciated hearing from attorneys about joining the firm because of its culture, or about why a firm went with a virtual model because a spouse was in the military. But remember that each story should highlight and showcase the underlying message, and not be for arbitrary entertainment.

8. Go beyond the website.

Here's another direct quote from one general counsel: "Don't tell me what I can find on your website. Tell me what I don't know – especially about you." In-house counsel probably has already reviewed your website and bios. Remember that website copy is designed to sell, whereas your pitch should be used to surprise, intrigue and connect with the listener.

7. Lead with experience.

Counsel wants to know why you are different from the other firms they receive pitches from, so talk about your differentiators and unique positioning. This starts with the firm and practice group, but then talk about specific individuals on the team and offer related stories or case studies. Every chord is comprised of individual notes, and each team member should be part of the harmony.

6. Show the team.

Avoid the yearbook approach in your slideshow presentation when showcasing your team. If attorneys are not present at the pitch, don't just slap all their pictures together on one slide. One inside counsel noted that it's better to give each team member their own slide to "make it feel like they are here."

Most in-house counsel wanted more details about each attorney on the team, including where they worked before and specifics about their practices, representative matters or industry focus. They didn't just want to hear that the entire team was from Big Law or in-house. For example, note that an attorney has five years of experience in working on healthcare transactions, three years with the DA and then four years in Big Law doing M&A. In-house counsel wanted breadth, depth and uniqueness. They wanted to see the pitch team exhibiting support for and recognition of the team members who were not present.

5. Release the visuals.

Many musicians use visuals like art, photos and videos to accentuate their music, and attorneys can take this tip with them to the pitch room. A slideshow is a wonderful instrument to accentuate and underline a firm's message. In-house counsel loved visuals, pie charts, graphics and stats that accented and helped them engage more in firm stories. But don't fill slides with just or a ton of words – too much text was overwhelming and hard to read, according to feedback. Using bullet points to organize subject matter helped separate out the noise.

4. Highlight efficiencies.

Client focus is important, and in-house counsel wanted to know how attorneys would serve them. But phrases like "client services" are vague, so provide stats and details to support them. In some pitches I've observed, firms promised they'd save their potential clients money, but did not include details. One firm stood out by including a chart and doing a side-by-side comparison of costs and savings, and inside counsel was impressed. Inside counsel also mentioned they would appreciate a breakdown of how a case would be handled, such as details about how seniors versus juniors or associates would be involved.

3. What do you stand for?

In-house counsel wants to know about [your firm's culture and values](#), and how they're practiced across the board. That doesn't mean your business model or rates, or even compensation. They want to know that your people feel appreciated or included, and how the firm is involved in the community. If you have training programs on internal issues or initiatives that support families, mention them. If your firm is dedicated to pro bono or diversity and inclusion, tell them about it. Be sure to discuss the balance between these initiatives and the law practice.

2. Get specific.

In-house counsel appreciated hearing case studies, examples and statistics. They enjoyed hearing stories about attorneys' favorite projects. They wanted to hear about examples of client obstacles and how to navigate past those. Don't be afraid to dig deep with specifics.

1. Back it up.

For every claim your law firm makes, be prepared to back it up. Everyone in the room will feel uncomfortable if you make a claim but don't have tangibles to support it. For example, if you say your firm promotes diversity, especially with race, your attorney roster has to reflect that. If you don't, you will be called out, and inside counsel will have a hard time placing its trust in you.

If you claim to have competitive advantages or efficiencies, be ready to articulate very clearly why you are a better solution or value in concrete terms.

When you discuss case studies, try to tell stories from the experience and bring your audience into your thinking and process. In-house counsel said this kind of candor lets them know what they can expect in a partnership with you.

Coda

All of this feedback was music to my ears. For those of us responsible for creating a pitch, it was great validation, underscoring our advice to attorneys about what matters –

what sings – when clients are looking to partner with outside counsel.

To refrain: Don't tell them what they already know and don't repurpose your website. Let them in, let them experience your passion, let them get to know your team and what makes you all get up each day to help others. They are looking to work with people, not a brand, so be sure to sing along with them, not sell them.

For help in orchestrating your firm's perfect pitch, reach out to me, Terry M. Isner, at tmisner@jaffepr.com.