

# 3 Ways Law Firms Can Remain Competitive

The extent to which evolution in technology is affecting law firms, branding and legal marketing was a key theme weaving its way through this year's [Gro Pro 20/20](#) conference in New York on June 22. A full day of presentations brought together chief marketing, business development, sales and strategy officers, as well as executive leadership, into one room for an exchange of ideas and industry best practices. It did not disappoint.



**Jaffe Staff**

While the program was not targeted to the legal services industry in particular, I found some key takeaways to share that legal marketers may find helpful.

## Legal Skills Are a Given, Not a Differentiator

Having smart and experienced lawyers is not a defining characteristic of a prestigious law firm and need not be touted in your marketing materials. This type of information is absolutely assumed by clients who are considering your firm. What clients *do* want to know is exactly what your firm is really, really good at, and few firms are willing to settle on just one thing. As a result, it's hard to distinguish full-service firms from one another.

Firms shouldn't try to be everything to everyone, and they can't be great at everything they do.

Instead, make a choice, and define your brand for what you want to be known.

The panel gave a very good example of brand definition by comparing Starbucks to Dunkin' Donuts. Everything about the Starbucks brand, from the color choices (greens, browns, muted tones) to the store design (comfy chairs and free WiFi) to writing your name on a cup of coffee, speaks to the brand. Starbucks says come, sit, stay awhile, Kathy, and enjoy your coffee. While Dunkin' Doughnuts – with its bright-orange and pink logo, plastic chairs, drive-through windows and even the tagline, "America runs on Dunkin'" – says Americans are busy and coffee is delicious fuel. It is meant to be superfast and convenient.

Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts have made choices. They have defined their brands, and by doing so, let customers know what they will experience when they walk into a Dunkin' Donuts or a Starbucks store.

What will clients experience with your law firm's brand? Have you defined it? If not, you leave it up to your competitors to do so. And while you are defining your brand, keep technology in mind.

Customers, particularly millennials who have grown up with technology, expect a "Pokemon Go" experience. Technology is advancing rapidly and is becoming more and

more integrated into our daily lives. Virtual reality and augmented reality are real things, and they deliver a relevant modern experience. The firms that can ride this wave of rapid change will find smooth sailing into the future.

## When You Want Something Done, Give It to a Busy Person

Many of the speakers noted that busy partners with active books of business are still the best developers of new business. They methodically spend time each week on some form of business development or marketing. In fact, the fastest-growing law firms are always prospecting and looking for new business. It was noted that one head of litigation spends 25 percent of their time on business development. Often, these examples of more-senior partners, who are extremely busy but do business development regularly anyhow, are the prod younger attorneys need to move their business development efforts to the next level.

But to have “best in class” client development, there has to be a playbook everyone agrees on and follows methodically. Successful firms have a consistent business development system where everyone is striving toward the same goal and in the same manner. Your brand is so important, and drilling down to the client’s experience when interacting with the law firm brand is critical. Once identified, it has to be duplicated across all practice areas and in all markets.

## How to Do More with Less

Marketing is often viewed as onerous overhead, so the sooner you can show the value of marketing by designing a marketing matrix, reporting and offering analytics on your efforts, the sooner you will find yourself with a seat at the proverbial table. Designing a nice website with useful navigation, developing pretty brochures and running good events are expected. Marketers are now tasked with going beyond such basics to show the firm’s true value proposition. This is a great muscle to build.

Thought leadership pieces must have a purpose and be aligned with a specific goal. Ask yourself what are you trying to achieve. Who are you trying to reach? There must be a sense of discipline about your marketing activities. These activities must drive the profitability objectives you are pursuing as a firm, so don’t be afraid to say “no” to an opportunity if it doesn’t seem to be the right fit.

Because marketing departments are expected to do more with much smaller budgets, and even smaller teams, it will be imperative that you “sweat the asset.” That is, repurpose thought leadership pieces in as many different ways as possible. For example, the one article also becomes a client alert, a blog post, a Twitter update, a LinkedIn post, a webinar and a video on the firm’s website. Demonstrating this type of value puts you in the position of a strategic partner with your internal audience and solidifies your seat at the table.

Do you need help in defining your firm? Contact Vivian Hood at [vhood@jaffepr.com](mailto:vhood@jaffepr.com).