

Legal Marketers Voice Their Goals for 2018

The turning of the calendar page to January always offers a chance for new resolutions or goals for the coming year. In this Q&A, Roy Sexton, Director of Marketing at [Kerr, Russell and Weber, PLC](#); Kathryn Holmes Johnson, Director of Marketing and Communications at [Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox P.L.L.C.](#); and Jacqueline Madarang, Senior Marketing Technology Manager of [Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP](#), weigh in with their thoughts about the important legal marketing challenges and issues on which they will be focusing.



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What re-solution(s) do you have regarding your law firm's marketing needs?

JACQUELINE: We want to be more thoughtful this year when it comes to our digital marketing initiatives. We will update our marketing technology plan and map out a multi-year plan to get leadership buy-in ahead of time. We have tackled *big* initiatives these past few years, such as a major rebrand, new website, new thought leadership and content marketing program via blogs, and now a new CRM tool we are implementing firm-wide. Now it is time to re-evaluate and see how else we can enhance the tools we have already launched and put in place.

ROY: Being new to this firm in a role that didn't exist before is exciting and frightening. The resolutions for me may be different for those who have held their roles for longer periods or are in roles that existed before their arrival. That said, I think in professional services marketing, even as we are buffeted by a sea of tech changes and market disruptions, it remains a top-of-mind need to educate our attorneys on the importance of marketing and their roles in the process.

It's a bit like that diet and exercise regime I declare personally every January 1 – it is timeless. The basics are essential: identifying client needs, developing thought leadership topics to address, writing "evergreen" content that will form the digital breadcrumbs whereby new clients will find you, repurposing both old and new content across a multitude of platforms, and arming your attorneys with the know-how and the technical proficiency to develop their networks and remain a go-to resource. I firmly believe that staying that course will keep your firm positioned to anticipate and address the various changes coming down the pike (e.g. artificial intelligence, subscription services, consulting firms entering legal, *et al*).

What is the most pressing legal marketing or PR challenge

you currently face?

ROY: There is so much “noise” right now, and I think it is getting harder and harder to break through. Unfortunately, our collective response seems to be to make more noise, as opposed to finding those quiet spots where an entrance will make a bigger difference. Or finding unique audiences that remain untapped ... which is more difficult by the second. I think we, as a profession, need to step back and reassess.

I also think that we remain crucially flat-footed where data and measurement are concerned. I don't know that we yet have a great handle on measuring or reporting our own effectiveness. We are light years from where we once were, but crafting a compelling story that celebrates the good we do in terms meaningful to our internal clients (attorneys) could still use some work.

KATHRYN: I wouldn't say it is the most pressing, but one significant PR challenge we face is the plethora of attorney rankings and accolades. Firms participate in large numbers, and if your competitors are in the game, you pretty much have to be in there, too. This means you have to invest time and resources, along with your political capital, to navigate through the various processes. Managing expectations and avoiding client fatigue are additional factors that contribute to the challenge of running a coherent legal rankings program that satisfies attorneys and yields results. We've all been doing it for years, but it just doesn't seem to get easier.

JACQUELINE: Automation of reports and other slice-and-dice data that we want to put in the hands of our partners. For example, since I have been with Bradley, we have launched nine blogs, which are managed by our marketing technology team. We get inundated with requests to analyze the data that come in from various sources. One of our challenges is that we don't have enough bodies and resources to slice and dice the data and automate (the reports). Our year-end reports still take us hours and days to do. While we may have created templates, we are still presented with challenges and not able to automate what we are doing.

What are you planning to do differently or new this year that you haven't done before at your firm?

ROY: Say “no” more. LOL. Or at least reclaim some of my time. (My personal resolution to my husband.) And that is not at the expense of attorneys' needs, but to better filter all the extraneous buzz that becomes incredibly distracting (e.g., new tech, marketing pitches, etc.). I want to return to basics a bit: what is the business we are in, why should anyone care, what does the perfect client look like for us and what lens are they using for purchasing decisions? There are lot of people trying to sell things to marketers – many of them wonderful people with wonderful resources to provide – but if you don't catch your breath, take stock of what you have (and don't have), and use a lean mindset to approach the work, you can fall down a rabbit hole very quickly.

KATHRYN: We are on the verge of launching a new website and refreshing our brand. It has been an enormous project to manage, while maintaining our “usual” day-to-day operations. We're working on an entirely new platform that gives us more flexibility to

change and adapt our content and user interface as our needs evolve. We're really looking forward to introducing the new site, since it has been over a decade since the firm's current website was launched. Our hope is that visitors will find the site easy to navigate, the content useful, and that the look and feel syncs with the experiences they have with us in person.

The update to our brand is exciting as well. We're building from an esthetic that has held up well over the years. It will be interesting to see how our new look and website are received. We're having fun pulling it all together and preparing for the big reveal.

What predictions do you have for the legal industry in 2018 that will affect legal marketers? How do you see legal marketers being affected by these changes?

ROY: I think we will continue to be distracted by big headlines and miss the core issues. I feel sometimes that we legal marketers are like that grade school soccer team that all clumps around the ball with no one left in the field for passing. The "product" we are selling is an advisory *relationship* that should be built on trust, accuracy and credibility. Yes, there are a ton of things on the horizon that are incredibly threatening – and they have to be taken seriously – but we can't compete with a robot that processes contracts in the blink of an eye. We just can't. But what *do* we do that a robot cannot? The humanity of our profession is the key distinction; how do we push that to the forefront and make that something that can never be commodified? The music industry lost its way 15 or so years ago because it thought it was selling CDs and forgot it was selling *music*. Let's not repeat that mistake.

JACQUELINE: I have mentioned this in a [previous article](#) published on JD Supra: Digital marketers have become savvier and it is no longer about understanding analytics, but also personalizing experiences with various tools. In 2018, there will be more focus on user journeys. Keywords will still play an important role, but the keywords that are typed into search engines will have to be more tailored to the target audience at the right time in their journey to address their specific needs. Digital marketers along with their digital agencies will have to get very specific about targeting their audience to continue to enhance their brand online when they develop their PPC campaign strategies in 2018. And what better time to start than now?

How can legal marketers make the best use of their budgets?

ROY: I'm a firm believer in budget neutrality – and cutting proactively when you can. Years of working in nonprofits will do that to you. What we spend on marketing comes directly out of the partners' pockets, right? We shouldn't take that lightly. What do you *really* need to get your message into the right hands? That is where tech aids and abets. There are frontloaded costs, obviously, but being strategic in your adoption of tech that will allow you to target clients, remain current with existing relationships and eliminate waste is essential. Don't let yourself ever be saddled with the moniker "overhead." Marketing should be the "Miracle Gro" that keeps the enterprise moving forward, but it should be used thoughtfully and judiciously with a clear articulation of outcomes and benefits.

Final thoughts?

ROY: We work in a very fun profession. Yes, it can feel sometimes like that scene in *Star Wars* where the trash compactor is squeezing Han, Luke, Leia and Chewie while a sea slug entwines their feet. The responsibilities are daunting – especially for a solo marketer like myself – but, man, when you help coach an attorney to find his brand voice and highlight the excellence of his practice and you see him light up over a new topic around which to write or speak or present? I'm not sure there are too many better feelings in the world. I'm a theater guy by training, so performance is in my blood, and this job can be intensely gratifying if you are with the right firm (I am) and you get to fire on all cylinders (I do).

What are *your* firm's most pressing legal marketing needs, and what goals do you have for your law firm in 2018? Add your comments here, or contact me to discuss, Vivian Hood, at 904.220.1915 or vhood@jaffepr.com.