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Make the 'Right' Next Move or Hire

Insights and Expectations from Both Sides

By Eva Wisnik and Jennifer Johnson

Law firm marketing departments continue to grow at a rapid rate. In 2006, we placed 37 marketing business development and public relations professionals into law firms, compared with 24 just a year earlier. What are firms looking for today when they decide to hire a new director? What do directors seek when they decide to make a move? To gain further insight into these questions, we interviewed one CMO and two Executive Directors who recently hired, or are about to embark on hiring, a new director. In addition, we interviewed two seasoned directors to determine what convinced them to make a move and decide that this would be the "right" position for them.

WHAT THEY SAY

Gary Fiebert, Executive Director at Schulte Roth & Zabel and member of the faculty at SUNY Stony Brooks' Executive MBA in Law Firm Management, says, "When we recently hired a director of marketing, we searched for a professional who could provide our attorneys with resources and training so they can be in a position to be more active in client development and have the tools in place that are needed to maximize their time and effort on business development activities." Anne Malloy Tucker, CMO at Goodwin Procter, recently hired a Director of PR, which is a newly created position for the firm. Anne states that this Director's focus will be mainly strategic. She says, "Expectations from the PR function have risen tremendously in the last five years." When asked what triggered the hiring of this new Director, she refers both to a need for further name recognition on the West Coast, where they recently opened offices, and the battle between law firms for talented attorneys. These business challenges have elevated their need for a strategist. Anne explains, "We need to more proactively publicize and differentiate our firm." She stresses that this director's success will be measured by a combination of balancing internal and external resources, determining the right resource mix, and measuring the before and after name recognition and awareness of the firm's strategic practice expertise.

Rene Gatling came to law firm marketing from a "Big 4" accounting firm. She chose McKenna Long because she believes that they have been thoughtful about their

strategic direction and committed to business development. Prior to hiring her, McKenna identified their business development goals and had the structure in place to support these objectives. She was impressed by the fact that the firm was ready to begin implementing "10 Strategic Initiatives" that the partners identified as key and to align the practice plans with this strategic plan. Rene cites implementation as her key goal for 2007. She spent the first three months in her new position putting the infrastructure in place including policies and staff. Rene asserts, "Now we are ready to support the attorneys' actions and keep them moving at a higher level." When asked how she will measure success, she responds by saying, "We periodically check in with our internal clients, for example, the practice group leaders. We conduct formal and informal client satisfaction surveys to see how we are doing from their point of view and make sure they know what we can do for them." She is also in the process of planning the implementation of systems to track RFPs, pitches and proposals that will help to measure successes in the long-term. But how do you stay focused when you have so many internal clients? Her tool of choice is a "balanced score card." When a lawyer proposes a new idea or initiative, she cross-checks it against the "10 Strategic Initiatives" to confirm that it supports the firm's strategic plan. When asked about her biggest challenge, she doesn't hesitate for a minute and says it is "finding talent that is strong and able to make a successful transition into the law firm environment."

Even though she is still relatively new to law firms, she believes that "it is not enough to be an experienced BD professional, you have to be able to leave your ego at the door, but also know when to push things forward." Rene concludes that "very few professionals from outside of law are able to walk that line without overstepping it."

Elizabeth Kennedy just accepted a new position as the firm-wide Director of Strategic Business Development at Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw. A primary reason she took the job was because she felt that the firm's decision-makers support the CMO, Kathleen Reichert. For Elizabeth, this means that the partners understand that their investment in marketing professionals will benefit the firm, but that results will take time. She was very careful in deciding to make this move. According to Elizabeth, anyone who is considering a job change should do his or her research. She definitely did hers. Before accepting the position, which will be based in New York, but requires her to travel to all offices and spend a good deal of time in Chicago, she spoke to a number of partners, the Managing Partner and the Executive Director. Finally, she spoke to the firm's previous head of marketing, who provided good feedback, thereby enforcing her decision to accept. Even before she begins her first day of work at Mayer, Brown, Elizabeth is very clear about her goals for 2007 and is planning to walk in with ideas to potentially implement. She will be contributing to a strategic plan for each practice group and then developing marketing action plans to support these strategic plans. In order to help her lawyers develop new business and get results, she says, "We need to promote our firm's strongest selling points and that is the attorneys' experience and capabilities." To do this effectively, she will have to develop infrastructure, including knowledge management and experience databases systems, and expand the existing department that will require helping to define firm-wide business development roles and filling them.

SEARCHING FOR A DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

We also spoke with one Executive Director who is planning to embark on a search for a new director of marketing, a position his firm currently does not have. Because this position is still in the planning stages, he asked that the firm not be identified. When asked about his key goals, he noted, "this Director needs to be proactive rather than just reactive." For example, the firm would want this professional to focus on developing internal communication and cross-selling plans. The firm envisions that this Marketing Director

will equip the partners with skills to leverage firm-wide capabilities. The Executive Director adds, "We want this Marketing Director to have a large impact on our lawyers' ability to develop business, and to serve as a key adviser for

them. If we hire the right person, our partners will respect [his or her] expertise and value [his or her] guidance."

QUESTIONS TO ASK

If you are on the hunting side rather than the hiring side, here are some examples of questions you may want to ask firm management before accepting a senior-level marketing position:

- What will success look like if you hire the right person for your Director position?
- What initiatives will you want them to focus on for the first 6 months? First year?
- Do you anticipate that this new Director will need to add to the current marketing staff?
- When you think back to the Managers/ Directors who have been most successful in your firm, what attitudes and behaviors did they exhibit that enabled them to be respected and effective?
- What do you believe will be this Director's biggest challenges?
- What are the chances your firm will merge with or acquire a firm within the next two years?

Eva Wisnik, President of Wisnik Career Enterprises, and **Jennifer Johnson**, Director of Recruitment, specialize in collaborating with law firms nationwide to identify top-quality professionals to lead their marketing, business development and public relations departments. They are looking forward to sharing their market knowledge with you through this column. Please e-mail any topic ideas, thoughts, or questions to marketing@wisnik.com.