

Cause Marketing for Law Firms? Yes and Here is Why.

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In 2019, it is not enough to be a good business with a good product. The modern buyer has an unprecedented set of options for everything from handbags to heart surgeons. The cycle of gathering options, weighing them, and making a decision takes just seconds to complete, meaning that capturing the attention and loyalty of potential clients is more competitive now than at any point in history.

According to the most recent Cone Communications Global CSR Study:

- 87% of people said they would purchase a product because a company advocated for an issue the potential buyer cared about; and,
- 76% said they would refuse to buy if the company supported an issue contrary to their beliefs.

Law firms selling legal services are not immune to this process.

During a recent panel at the ABA Techshow entitled “Is Your Web Presence Customer Friendly?” a guest shared that most clients now are not buying based on facts, but on how a company makes them feel. What this means is that getting involved in a cause that fits with your law firm’s niche is vital to competing in the evolving legal marketplace.

What is Cause Marketing?

Cause marketing is exactly what it sounds like: investing in marketing that promotes a cause that connects with your potential client base. Chances are you have already interacted with brands that are doing this. Perhaps you have purchased a pair of socks because the company that makes them matches each sale with a gift of socks to a homeless organization. Or maybe you choose to avoid a chocolatier that has a spurious environmental record.

Cause marketing is taking the steps to align your business with your personal interests and passions that benefit something besides your bottom line. The upside? When potential clients see that you are willing to stand for something you believe in, they are more likely to trust you and do business with you.

How to Choose the Right Cause for Your Law Firm

As easy as it might seem to simply integrate business persona and personal advocacy, it can be a treacherous road. In fact, it is possible for cause marketing to backfire (especially in the case where a third party is collaborating with you to choose or promote the cause).

Here are some of the considerations that I suggest to my law firm clients interested in cause marketing:

Choose an area that correlates with your worldview and legal practice. Determine the set of issues that align with your practice area(s). For example, if you are an immigration law firm, you could align with an immigration non-profit or social activism group dedicated to supporting estranged family members across borders. Construction litigators might sponsor low-income home building organizations. Criminal defense law firms might partner with low-bono organizations that work to change unjust laws. Once you begin to think creatively about who and how you can help, you will find that there are many organizations who really need your law firm's support.

Interview and vet organizations. One of the common mistakes I see is that attorneys are often too busy to really do a deep search on the organization that they are thinking of sponsoring. This is a critical step to protect against backlash. It does not do your firm any good to support an organization that does not have the infrastructure to provide community benefit or the leadership to make change happen. Take the time to learn everything you can before you commit.

Keep it local. If you are a solo or small law firm, your best cause marketing will come from supporting local causes. Local social activism that benefits underrepresented groups in your personal community are always in need of additional support. What is often overlooked is that these partnerships may lead to new clients down the road.

More than Just Lip Service: The Perceived Power of Brands in Democracy

As with all marketing, cause marketing for law firms requires time, energy, and financial investment. In addition, the current prospective client wants to know that your engagement with a cause is more than just superficial. A recent study by Edelman, a global communications and brand research company, showed that the number of buyers that are driven by their beliefs are growing in every demographic across the United States.

Richard Edelman, the president and CEO of Edelman, explained the staggering results this way:

“Brands are now being pushed to go beyond their classic business interests to become advocates. It is a new relationship between company and consumer, where purchase is premised on the brand's willingness to live its values, act with purpose, and if necessary, make the leap into activism.”

Simply stating involvement is not enough. Simply donating money is not enough. Real cause marketing comes from fully integrating the organizations and concepts that you support directly into the bedrock of your law firm's business model.

It might seem an overwhelming task, but it can be done. It simply requires a few daily, weekly, and monthly tasks to get you started on the path to harnessing that belief-driven potential client.

5 Tips for Implementing Cause Marketing

Be deliberate about your marketing and commit a base number of hours per month on your chosen cause.

Promote your cause or collaboration on social media, on your firm website, in your newsletters and email blasts, and at local events.

Attend and support events and fundraisers for your chosen organization.

Offer to provide more than financial assistance (lawyers on their board, volunteer for a legal night, provide yearly review of their contracts, etc.).

Have a goal for what successfully supporting them looks like. This might be hours of time donated, number of people helped, houses built, etc.

Conclusion

Done correctly, cause marketing for law firms can increase your social collateral and increase your business development pipeline potential exponentially. Done poorly, it can leave a smear on your good name. Remember that the real goal of this type of marketing is to do good—both for your community and for the attorneys that represent your company. Cause marketing, when implemented sincerely, can lift both the individual and your business in addition to making the world just a little bit better.

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