

Navigating the Marketing, Business Development and Sales Continuum [Video]

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For years, law firm client development has evolved along a continuum, from marketing to business development to sales. While the individual paths may be distinct and may diverge in some areas, it's vital to be able to recognize where these paths overlap and require shared responsibilities.

Marketing, business development, and sales are essential to a firm's success. Some firms may have their footing primarily in one or two of these areas, but the most successful law firms have teams dedicated to each area working independently and in concert to be exponentially more effective.

Today, law firms should adjust how they approach client development to [better utilize their technological infrastructure](#). To understand where and how these paths overlap, it can be helpful to define and understand each team's role in the continuum in order to position your firm to create stronger relationships with contacts and clients while increasing the efficiency of your internal collaboration efforts.

Marketing

Simply put, marketing is advertising one message to many people. You have a message that is establishing your firm's branding and promoting your services and practice areas. These activities and messages include [content generation, webinars, sponsoring events, targeting and segmenting lists](#) and even how you manage your presence on social media.

While you do not have control over what a prospective lead will do after receiving your message, communicating your firm's brand to the public is a vital step in moving a contact or lead along the continuum.

As [law firms transition to a digital-first strategy](#), legal marketers are struggling to define their role in this continuum. To justify their roles and show how much value they are bringing to the client development process, marketers are trying to come up with new ways to increase the ROI on campaigns and utilize data tracking and analytics. To do this, marketers can track the performance of the communications they send out, events they sponsor and webinars they've hosted, by performing an ROI analysis on how many leads are received from these activities.

Tracking can provide valuable data and actionable insights into what is attracting leads and what is not. [But without clean, correct and up-to-date data on their contacts and prospects](#), legal marketers can't effectively communicate, send email campaigns and event invitations or effectively target or segment their contact lists. This can make it extremely difficult for marketers to perform analysis on campaigns and estimate the return the firm receives from their efforts. It also inhibits their ability to identify prospects worth pursuing and share them with the business developers.

Business Development

In law firms, business development has come a long way. At most of today's law firms, many business developers come equipped with sales backgrounds, yet they differ from a salesperson – a role that many firms do not have.

Rather than focusing solely on closing business, [BD teams work closely with attorneys from different practice areas](#) and assist these lawyers in developing and nurturing positive relationships with prospects. They can provide internal support and assistance by identifying opportunities or leads from marketing analytics, tracking referrals and sometimes even assisting with coaching attorneys on sales.

Through the utilization of marketing technology like CRM, eMarketing or experience management systems, [business developers have access to a plethora of data they can use](#) to personalize follow-up messages for a client who attended a webinar or have an attorney follow-up to share content or resources that may be relevant to them.

An interesting way some law firms have utilized business development professionals involves having them attend client meetings with attorneys with the goal of enhancing the level of service provided to the client. During these meetings, an attorney who is focused on litigation might miss subtle clues from the client regarding needs in other practice areas. But the business developer, having researched the client and being well-versed in all the firm's practices and having deep knowledge of the experience of the firm's other attorneys, can often identify new opportunities and make introductions.

But again, without clean and up-to-date data on clients and prospects, business developers may not recognize client needs, and without access to comprehensive and up-to-date information on the firm's services or attorneys' experience, valuable engagement opportunities will be missed.

Sales

As we move forward along the continuum, sales is the ultimate destination. After a lead is recognized and or nurtured by the marketing and BD teams, in most firms it's incumbent upon the attorneys to close the sale and finalize the business, with support from the other teams as needed. However, the question becomes whether this is the optimal scenario given that attorneys are not trained sales professionals and, in fact, many find the sales process frustrating or distasteful. Additionally, there is a question as to whether serving as a part-time salesperson is the best use of an attorney's highly compensated billable time.

As a result, in other professional services firms, we often see trained salespeople being brought on to initiate and advance the sales process. Members of these experienced sales teams not only facilitate and close sales but also assist with pitches and RFPs as well as forecasting future revenue and tracking the prospect through a business development pipeline. Over the years, a few law firms have

also adopted some of these practices, but it remains to be seen whether the process will gain more traction in legal matters.

Navigating the Continuum

Individually, each area of the marketing-business development-sales continuum is vital to the success of the firm. But, when the efforts of the departments are combined and coordinated, firms can increase their business development success exponentially.

But without clean, correct, and up-to-date data on prospects, clients, attorneys, and practices, firms will not be able to make actionable decisions and close business. This is [why having a healthy foundation of data on your clients](#) is imperative to successful client development and internal communication and collaboration.

For a deeper dive into the marketing, business development, and sales continuum and how marketing technology supports client development, watch a replay of Chris and Silvia's presentation below:

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