

THE NATIONAL LAW REVIEW

The Law 2023 Study and the future of Legal Services: A Question & Answer with Deborah Knupp, Keynote Speaker for LMA New England Regional Conference

Thursday, October 20, 2016

The Legal Marketing Association New England Regional conference will be held in Boston on November 14th and 15th this year. This conference offers Legal Marketers the chance to imagine the future of the legal industry and attend sessions focusing in on how legal marketers can foster innovation to better prepare for the challenges ahead. [Deborah Knupp](#), Managing Director of Akina, A GrowthPlay Company, will give the keynote presenting the highlights of the [Law 2023](#) study. The Law 2023 study was organized by Akina and focused on envisioning what legal services would look like in the future. Ahead of the conference, Ms. Knupp was kind enough to answer the National Law Review's questions about the Law 2023 study, client motivations and desires, and innovation in law firms.

What was the motivation for the Law 2023 study? How did you get involved?

In February 2013, a group of eight underwriters (organized by Akina, A GrowthPlay Company) funded a year-long innovation study and think tank through the Insight Labs/GreenHouse to reimagine the practice of law and the design of the future law firm by looking through a series of futurist lenses in the year 2023. These lenses focused on disruptive innovations in technology, economics, demographics, education and the general studies of innovation itself. Law 2023 findings were published in February 2014 and highlighted 7 Design Principles that serve as a blueprint for proactive and disruptive innovation:

Design Principle 1: Technologies Will Enable Lawyers to Bill for Real Value

Firms will deploy technologies in new ways to provide new platforms to deliver premium insight and wisdom. Leading firms will continue to develop collaborative and self-service technology offerings and will introduce solutions to business needs that afford premium billing potential.

Design Principle 2: Firms Will Develop Offerings That Transcend Jurisdiction

The nature of jurisdiction is quickly changing with the impact of globalization. Law firm networks and non-traditional legal service providers are redefining how firms do business as a result. Firms that are able to bundle solution providers (legal, technology, consulting, designers, communication, etc.) will capture and create new market share.

Design Principle 3: Demand for Responsive Institutions Will Create New Markets for Accountability

Law firms in the future will be required to measure success beyond traditional financial and profitability metrics.



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Business/Social enterprises and the rising influence of Gen Z are major drivers for transparency and accountability. Profitability frameworks like Triple Bottom Line metrics provide new ways to measure and demonstrate value from the client's perspective and encourage firms to be good stewards of their means.

Design Principle 4: Firms Will Tap New Talent and Enable New Pathways to Practice

Firms will continue to create new job titles and career tracks and expand recruiting reach beyond aggressive lateral hiring. Recruiting for new talent will undoubtedly include technology experts, designers, account management professionals and other business advisory capabilities. Workplace standards will continue to become more flexible to attract and retain top talent, and job sharing and virtual working environments will become more normative.

Design Principle 5: Information Access/Transparency Will Push Firms to Seek Hyper-Specific Markets

As buyers continue to have more access to information and self-service, firms will need to develop deep business expertise combined with legal technical expertise to be valuable. Firms who continue to develop industry focused teams, micro-offerings and niche solutions have a greater probability to win and retain business and shift market share from competitors.

Design Principle 6: Firms Will Launch R&D Departments to Create New Offerings

New productized offerings and R&D functions will develop and implant within firms to explore new lines of business and new ways of practicing law and delivering legal service. These functions will likely mirror how high tech and healthcare firms approach R&D.

Design Principle 7: User/Anthropological Research Will Shape Client Experience of Legal Products

Firms will fortify relationships with clients by using business, financial, relational, competitive and anecdotal intelligence to anticipate a client's future needs. Firms that excel will build firm-wide client experience playbooks and protocols to be proactively responsive to clients.

What do you see as the single biggest challenge facing the legal industry? In your opinion, what are some barriers to change?

There are several challenges facing the legal industry including flat demand for outside legal work, growing engagement of bringing more legal work in house, unpredictability in client loyalty and the general desire to have change happen faster than organizational culture can sustain. Law firms who are succeeding in this market are utilizing design thinking (voice of the client/client-centered) to focus on adapting the client experience and legal solutions to best match what clients need and are trying to achieve within their businesses.

What are some things clients are looking for in law firms? How are they communicating these desires?

Clients tell us that quality and technical expertise are table stakes and minimum expectations for doing work together. Clients are rewarding collaboration and creativity to find new ways to solve client problems that are willing to have an expanded view of services, pricing, staffing, etc. Clients tell us that the number one differentiator that lawyers can demonstrate is "knowing their business" and engaging in proactive, predictable communication that keeps clients from being surprised and increases the number of options they have to address a challenge, risk or need.

In the intro to the study findings, it says, "Firms on the right path will have to face the hard truth that their actions today won't be understood for years." Do you have any suggestions for marketers who are trying to bring about change in their firm, especially if they are advocating for a change that won't be easily understood?

Innovation when it's working centers first and foremost on Client Experience. There are three progressive levels of innovation - core, disruptive and reinvention. Core innovation focuses on improving client experience in tangible areas of client service like communication, business intelligence, relationship investment, client intake, client feedback and billing and fee care. Disruptive innovation focuses on the invention of new productized offerings and solutions that fill a gap in the service requirements. Reinvention innovation focuses on establishing new business models, technologies and offerings that are not currently offered in a law firm.

Can you define the “triple bottom line”?

Many organizations and institutions look at financial metrics and shareholder (stakeholder) value as the ultimate (only) measure of profitability. Innovative organizations and institutions recognize that financial metrics are only one piece of the profitability picture.

In the late 1990’s and early 2000’s a new construct for profitability was introduced called the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). The TBL measures financial profit and measures the value created for people and the planet. In a law firm context, a TBL can be measured by three standards:

1. Is your law firm the preferred place for the most profitable clients to do business?
2. Is your law firm the preferred place for the most talented people to work?
3. Is your law firm the preferred place where the most inspired leaders want to serve their communities and the larger world at hand?

TBL metrics in a law firm will undoubtedly include revenue, profits per partner, billable hour productivity, and realization. Additional metrics within a TBL approach include measuring net promoter score, turnover (client and employee), employee engagement, number of promotions, promotion readiness, bench strength, level of lateral candidate quality, employment offers versus number of acceptances, great place to work metrics, ratings/rankings, community awards and recognition, impact of pro bono and charitable giving, positive press, morale, etc. Firms that embrace a Triple Bottom Line approach to profitability have a significant business advantage in attracting and retaining profitable clients AND are able to build assurance of high quality, consistent work product that delights clients through effective talent management and organized leadership development.

One of the suggestions is for firms to develop “niche” markets where they can credibly claim dominance--does this conflict in anyway with jurisdictional concerns?

With the continued redefinition of collaboration, law firm networks and utility of technology, law firms have more and more options to behave globally across jurisdictions through alliance partnerships. Niche focus allows firms to elevate their business acumen and business intelligence in a way that attracts positive attention to solve business problems, not just legal problems.

The study mentions “R&D” Departments in law firms. What does that look like? What kind of issues would these departments examine?

R&D departments range from internal committees with representation of all practice groups and administrative functions to councils that include client advisory membership and multi-service provider membership to include professionals outside of the legal industry. R&D efforts that are most successful are deeply committed to understanding what their clients need before designing innovation and product offerings to address that need. Examples of initiatives include client feedback, project management, digital information and other process reengineering.

With all of these innovations, what do you see as the role of the legal marketer?

Legal marketers are ideal innovation architects to guide their firms through all three innovation stages and can provide “quick wins” with an inspired focus on client experience. Leveraging design thinking, the Triple Bottom line and continued commitment to knowing a client’s business will provide excellent pathways for legal marketers to be leaders of law firm transformation.

Thanks to Ms. Knupp for her time and expertise. The LMA NE conference [agenda](#) has many sessions focused on innovation in law firms, and the conference is in Boston, Massachusetts on November 14th and 15th.

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