Law firms doing the “same old thing” isn’t going to work anymore. Despite all the legal industry changes discussed in Part 1 and Part 2 of this series, 66% of Managing Partners report that their law firm’s strategy has not changed. It is imperative for today’s law firms to have a strategic plan that evolves with the firm and changes in the market; however, only 24% of law firms report having strategic plans, even though 71% of Managing Partners report that having a strategic plan improved their firm’s performance.

What makes a strong strategic plan?

Successful strategic planning is an ongoing process; the first step is creating the plan, but just as crucial is the follow-up. Steps include:

- Implementation
- Review
- Making changes as needed (and things can change fast)

When drafting a strategic plan, it’s important to think about the process--and to incorporate measurable capabilities. The tenets of good goal setting should apply--keep things simple, realistic, and achievable, looking ahead three to five years with annual goals. As you create the plan, build it with the knowledge that it is a living document that must change, because the world is changing. It should function as a sort of guiding principal, and it reminds your firm of your priorities when crisis situations arise.

With rapidly changing technology, crises and unexpected opportunities, keeping in mind your strategic objectives is a good way to keep your firm focused on your priorities. When surveyed, Managing Partners indicated the most important strategic objectives were Marketing and Business Development, Succession Planning, Firm Growth and improved lawyer productivity.

Where should a law firm allocate Marketing and Business Development resources?

With Marketing and Business Development as one of the most important pieces of the strategic plan; it’s important to describe what a solid strategy looks like. For many
firms, marketing and business development is not a top priority—it should be. The research for Re-Envisioning focused questions on trends in allocating marketing resources in the following seven areas:

- Website and Internet Marketing
- Firm Events & Seminars
- Organizational Involvement
- Charitable Contributions
- Rankings and Directories
- Marketing Staff
- Lawyer Sales Training

When asked about 2015 investments v. 2016 investments, it was clear that most firms are continuing to do what they have done before. According to Re-Envisioning, “firms are doing the same old things because ‘we’ve always done it this way,’ budgets are set by equity partners unwilling to support marketing expenses, or there is a ‘let’s wait and see what the other firms are doing’ attitude.” Investing in Marketing & Business Development can pay off in a big way, but of the firms surveyed, only 25% of them invested more than 4% of their revenue in Marketing & Business Development. To successfully move forward, law firms need to change their perspective and to truly innovate in terms of their Marketing and Business Development practices.

A good place to start is with the clients your firm already has—and wants to keep. Break them into A list, B list and C list—so you can identify who may be happier working with a competitor, and who you want to make sure stays with your firm.

**What should a law firm consider when developing a business development model?**

Beyond an inventory of current clients, it’s important to develop a BD model—representing how your firm views business development and how it works for your firm’s situation. Your model should answer the following questions:

- Why do people buy?
- How do they buy?
- What are prospects and clients motivations and fears?
- What is the process for finding prospects and transitioning them into clients?
- Where does business come from?
- How does your business development efforts focus on building relationships?
- How does your firm become a trusted advisor to your clients and community?
- What differentiates your firm and your lawyers, and how do those differences align with your clients’ needs?

Asking questions like this can help your firm ensure that your marketing and business development resources are going in the right direction—and can help your firm create a deliberate way forward, with an integrated approach to ensure goals are met and resources are not squandered. Additionally, creating a plan with measurable tenets can help your firm track return on investment so it’s clear what’s working and where additional investment might be warranted.

**How does a law firm achieve buy-in for the marketing and business development plan?**

Another area to consider is asking individuals in the firm—partners and associates—to create a personal business development plan. By asking individuals to think about marketing and business development, your firm is demonstrating its commitment to these principals. Additionally, asking partners and associates to think about how they can best contribute to business development encourages accountability and personal reflection, so individuals can find a way to contribute that is best for them, increasing the likelihood that the commitment will be lasting.

These changes may be around the corner, many law firms are incorporating them already. Brent Turner, Client Development—Peer Monitor & Thought Leadership at Thomson Reuters, comments, “For the first time in many years, we’re seeing healthy acceleration in the marketing and business development budgets of US Law Firms, let primarily by AMLAW 200 firms. We’re also seeing evidence that these investments are starting to pay off in a big way.”
"MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING IS SO IMPORTANT THAT I THINK IT SHOULD BE A PREREQUISITE TO PARTNERSHIP. IF YOU ARE AN ATTORNEY AND YOUR LAW FIRM ISN'T TRAINING YOU IN SALES AND MARKETING, THEN YOUR LAW FIRM LEADERSHIP IS SETTING YOU UP FOR FAILURE AND LETTING YOU DOWN."

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