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## MARKETING the LAW FIRM

SEPTEMBER 2015

### ***Business of Branding: Creating a Client-Centric Brand®***

By **Cindy Sharp** (/authors/816.html)

Professional legal marketers are by and large responsible for the creative and labor-intensive effort involved in developing a strong law firm brand. After all, a brand does not develop by chance, but rather is strategically planned, crafted and communicated.

#### **Shaping an Attorney's Unique Brand**

However, the firm's brand represents only one component of the business development matrix and individual lawyers bear a measure of responsibility with respect to establishing and promoting their own personal professional brands. In John Helleman's excellent article, "To Build the Brand, Build Up the Lawyers," featured in July's issue of *Marketing the Law Firm* (<http://bit.ly/1MIsUin> (<http://bit.ly/1MIsUin>)), he pointed out that the brands of individual lawyers must be developed because clients hire attorneys and not law firms.

Personal professional branding cannot be reduced to a blueprint. The marketplace will define an attorney's individual brand, in large part, on the basis of the breadth and quality of the lawyer's actions. For example, a lawyer who routinely publishes and speaks in his or her field of practice will be branded as an expert.

While many facets of a professional brand could be explored, space limitations require me to confine the scope of this article to offering a few narrow perspectives with respect to the branding process in one particular arena — client relationship mastery. Significant economic efficiencies can be achieved if focus is geared toward building a Client Centric Brand®. Most are aware that it is less expensive to obtain repeat business or a referral from an existing client than to go through the arduous cycle of developing a new relationship.

#### **A Brand Is a Promise**

Many believe that a brand is simply a promise — a promise to prospective and current clients as well as colleagues as to how the lawyer can be expected to behave. Those expectations are based on past actions observed by or conveyed to those we seek to favorably impress.

While individual attorneys bask in the sunshine of a robust law firm brand, an attorney with a poor personal brand not only undermines the law firm's brand, but also affects the law firm's bottom line. An attorney with a substandard brand will have difficulty getting referrals from outside sources as well as from his or her own partners. Therein lies one of the dangers in failing to train and coach lawyers to develop behavior consistent with a Client Centric Brand®.

#### **The Client Relationship**

The foundation of brand differentiation begins with articulation of the firm's philosophy on client relationships and establishing standards of service. The project continues with attorneys reframing certain attitudes and forming new habits so that the lawyer and the firm will benefit with the reward of deeper client relationships.

#### **Six Stages of a Client Centric Brand®**

##### ***Stage One: Prospective Client (Not-Yet Connected)***

**Objective:** To become known as a thought leader in a particular field of law in order to have the opportunity to serve more clients as well as to re-enforce relationships with current clients and referral sources.

**Action:** The lawyer frequently writes articles, blogs or books and speaks before a variety of audiences in the area of law in which he or she wishes to be considered an expert.

**Implicit Promise:** "I promise that I am a thought leader. I keep on top of the latest developments and cutting edge strategies in the legal arena. Even my colleagues rely on me in order to stay current."

##### ***Stage Two: Forging a Connection***

**Objective:** To influence a prospective client to retain the lawyer when the need arises.

**Action:** The lawyer becomes familiar with the prospect (both at an institutional and individual level) without "pushing" for business.

**Implicit Promise:** I take the time to get to know prospective clients and their industry thoroughly so that I can offer exemplary representation. I'm willing to be patient and show value first.

##### ***Stage Three: Serving the Client***

**Objective:** To offer the best possible client service because it is the right thing to do. Of course, great service also inspires client loyalty.

**Action:** The lawyer consistently under promises and over delivers. The lawyer is always on time and gives the client full attention during meetings and proceedings.

**Implicit Promise:** I respect you and the value of your time and always deliver top-notch professional service. You have my complete and undivided focus when I work on your matter.

##### ***Stage Four: Billing***

**Objective:** To establish that fees are simply part of the business relationship and to ensure that they are paid in full and on time.

**Action:** The lawyer sends out accurate, regular and detailed invoices that reflect the terms of the retainer agreement.

**Implicit Promise:** I am fair in all of my business dealings with you. The amount of an invoice will never be a surprise.

##### ***Stage Five: Conclusion of Matter***

**Objective:** To ensure that the client understands that the matter is complete and to solicit feedback regarding the representation.

*Action:* A closing letter is sent and the client is surveyed. The survey can be conducted in writing, by phone or by personal interview.

*Implicit Promise:* I care about client satisfaction, will respond to all feedback and continuously strive to improve.

### **Stage Six: Post Matter**

*Objective:* To continue the relationship with the hope of attracting additional business.

*Action:* The lawyer has a structured process that keeps his or her name at the top of the client's mind. *Implicit Promise :* I am your trusted adviser and am always thinking of your interests — even when I am not actively representing you.

### **Conclusion**

Professional brands can be enhanced with small shifts in attitude and action. If each of "your" attorneys committed to work toward improvement in each of the areas outlined above, how would that affect your law firm's *overall* brand as well as the bottom line?

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