



Calling all clients...

The telephone as a marketing tool – friend or foe? **Ruth Jones** reports.

Whether you are looking for new clients or concentrating on developing your existing client base the key to growth could be sitting right in front of you. The telephone gives us instant access to virtually anyone in the country, enabling you to build relationships with your key targets from your desk. Yet all too often lawyers find the telephone, and the possibility of undertaking a marketing call, a challenging task.

Integrating marketing activities

Telephone marketing can support and enhance the results of all your other marketing activities. Unlike printed matter, the phone can be used first-hand to encourage a response to a mailer and to help you understand someone's interests and needs and how your practice may be involved. Regular contact through appropriate and intelligent telephone marketing will build relationships and generate loyalty, even when someone doesn't yet need the services of your firm.

It is perfectly acceptable for marketing personnel to make an introductory call on behalf of law firms – and to many prospects it indicates an innovative and proactive interest in their business. The caller need not get involved in technical issues, as any queries can be answered by a partner when he visits or a call directly from the partner can be scheduled. With a quiet, friendly and professional manner the caller will enhance the reputation of your practice.

Campaigns to gain new clients

It is imperative to clearly identify the objectives of any marketing campaign from the outset. You may be introducing a new service or partner, have a current 'hot' topic you have expertise in, or you may want to build an industry-specific client base.

It is also vital that any campaign utilises accurate target data. Things you should know about your targets include employee numbers or turnover, net profit figures, their legal status, and who the appropriate decision-maker is. Also consider the company's geographical area, specific industry sectors and exclusions.

Making the call

Prepare a detailed brief, collate the information a prospect would need to know about your practice, include your standard contact information, details about relevant partners and specialist areas of your practice. You should also formulate the key questions that you want to ask. This will provide information for the partner attending the meeting or enhance further marketing efforts.

If the decision-maker is not available then quietly but firmly ask when the named contact will be available and offer to call them at that time. Professional and well-timed persistence is required. Ensure that if a prospect is busy you offer to call back when they are free to chat.

You'll be able to refine your brief in the early stages of a campaign according

to the quality of responses received, and make it work better for your practice.

When the hard work has been done, you must be sure to manage the process of diary dates and availability for appointments. Letting the prospect down at this stage could end your opportunity.

Surveys

A carefully constructed telephone survey can also be a quick and simple way to highlight key areas for marketing departments to concentrate on. They can be used to formulate new services, benchmark competitors or assess satisfaction with existing services and other quality issues. They provide a relatively easy way to construct and evaluate strategic decisions.

Existing clients

Finally, when was the last time you made personal contact with your existing clients? A carefully coordinated client care program by telephone would ensure that you maximize the potential from companies that already know and trust your firm. This may simply be a rolling monthly calling schedule of top 100 key clients assimilated by invoice value. Above all, regard the telephone as a marketing challenge worth considering and ensure you have a strategy in place for its effective use. ■

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