

What You Really Need From Your CMO, Now.

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What do law firms need from the CMO? The answer is contained in this one simple statement. The CMO is the voice of the client across the law firm. That is the CMO's job, plain and simple. Any firm that gets this; gets it. The role of the CMO only gets complicated when management committees, hiring committees, marketing partners, recruiters, and even the candidates themselves do not understand or exploit this simple fact.

To further complicate matters, despite the written job description in front of them during the interview, these same parties often have different goals, criteria or even personal agendas outlined for the candidate that are not presented. More often than not, the CMO job description is only worth the price of the piece of paper. And so, the CMO is hired as a one-trick pony to satisfy the highest compensated voice.

In fact, for real CMO success, hiring committees should be looking for the individual who can tune into and represent the voice of the client. They must have the skill and patience to deliver the message to the entire firm at every level.

The cross-departmental CMO.

The challenges of client-centric demands and changes that are taking place today are not limited to the marketing department. Every CMO needs a cross departmental think tank. I'm not talking about a Monday morning staff meeting with the CEO. The voice of the client must be heard in coordination and collaboration with all departments.

Marketers, as activists, must help law firms, cross departmentally, find and meet the unique needs of the diverse client base. The client voice must be prominent in management affairs and service development across the whole law firm. Ultimately, the best CMO represents the voice of the client throughout the organization, and everyone should be listening --from the receptionist to the accountant and the managing partner, from the practice chair, the associate, and their legal assistants.

The two most important questions a firm can ask the candidate during the interview are "Can you be the voice of our clients across the firm?" "How can we support you in your role as the voice of the client?" Once that little piece of business is settled, you can move on to the details.

New skills required for success.

Today, CEOs and executive committees are pushing hard for growth and more effective marketing efforts (read ROI). Finding a CMO with the full range of necessary skills is not always easy.

Many chief marketers focus on building brands, making marketing communications more effective, finding new markets, and repackaging slow practices. These responsibilities aren't going away, but new channels are available and they need to be addressed by the marketer and the firm.

There are a number of areas where change is creating new priorities for chief marketers. They are playing a more active role in shaping the firm's public profile, managing delivery methods that involve technology, and building new capabilities within the marketing department and among individual attorneys. How will the CMO inject the voice of the client in each of these disciplines and across the firm in a holistic manner?

There is a proliferation of touch points, today, like in no other time. Many factors are changing the way clients' research and engage law firms. Broadly speaking, the low-cost, time-saving, "facts-only" sales approach isn't going to fly in a time where instant access to relatively trustworthy information is available via the Internet, user generated content, citizen journalism, and instant access to feed back via the Web.

The ability to build the firm brand across an increasing number of media, including user-generated content, is critical. Many of these skills, such as expertise in the business use of social networking and online media require a degree of specialization. The skills needed to keep up are becoming so specialized that chief marketers may have to operate quite differently in the future. While these new roles will compliment the generalist capabilities of traditional marketing leaders, some law firms may see a need to restructure their marketing and business development teams to address these new key marketing capabilities by adding social media technologists. Smaller firms will likely consider outsourcing online media marketing programs just as CIOs rely on external information technology resources.

Conclusion.

The demand for higher value and service-oriented approaches only make the CMO's job more complex –and without the support of the CEO, managing partner, and partnership in responding to the client voice, the CMO's job will continue to become less attractive. A nice paycheck only lasts so long before the lack of support or the willingness to move the ball forward outweighs its reward.

The churn of CMOs in law marketing is a cost most firms could avoid if their expectations, intentions and perspective were in the right place – giving voice to the client. Placing new leadership in marketing roles is expensive. Why not give your CMO the necessary support to be successful? Your clients will thank you.

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