

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

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What is the difference between a marketing consultant and a public relations (PR) consultant and which one should your law firm consider hiring? Most law firms are not large enough to be able to afford the luxury of an in-house marketing specialist or better yet, department. That being the case, because keeping the flow of new clients coming in or returning to your firm is so critical to survival, you might want to consider outsourcing your marketing or public relations needs. Tom Kane says: “a law firm should hire a dedicated marketing person on the day they open their law office even if it is not a full time in-house person. The important thing is that the firm is serious about getting professional marketing and public relations help”.

Marketing is generally used as a catch-all description and is everything a company or entity does to create and keep a customer or client, including development of a product or service, pricing, promotion and distribution strategies. The role of a marketing manager or consultant is to develop a strategy, plan and tactics for communicating the benefits of your firm’s services to a target market. The target market is comprised of those individuals or companies for which there is a fit between your firm’s services and the needs of your target market. Development of a strategy is critical before you begin your marketing efforts. A savvy marketing consultant will guide you in identifying potentially lucrative markets and help you develop a plan to service them. Once this groundwork is done, it is essential for the lawyers in your firm to distinguish themselves from the very crowded legal services playing field that exists today. At the very least, they need to do the following:

- Writing and/or publishing
- Speaking engagements
- Networking and taking on leadership roles in key organizations and professional organizations

All of the above should be done with a targeted audience in mind. Some of the common mistakes that are often made are:

- failure to plan,
- failure to implement the plan in a timely and cost-effective manner

- failure to get a professional to help the firm do both (since lawyers are not trained in the areas of marketing and business development) .

A marketing consultant can help you do your own initial assessment of market potential based on your firm's capabilities and market reach. In addition, they can identify potential markets and help you develop creative pricing strategies to help your firm maximize profits and market share while ensuring that your clients are satisfied. They can also work to develop advertising to promote the firm's services and attract more potential clients.

Public relations on the other hand, involves developing relationships and supplying information that is factual, interesting, and newsworthy to media, which is not controlled by you, such as radio, television, magazines, newspapers and trade journals. In PR, you have to earn coverage in the press with interesting, timely material that is helpful and useful to the target audiences served by the various media. A PR consultant, in their writing and communications, can help to develop an image for the firm and the attorneys by highlighting and communicating their strategies.

Michael Turney, Ph.D: University of Kentucky, says:

- The traditional view is that marketing exists to sense, serve, and satisfy customer needs at a profit.
- Public relations exists to produce goodwill in the company's various publics so that the publics do not interfere in the firm's profit –making ability.

Here are some interesting distinctions:

MARKETING	PUBLIC RELATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing promotes the transfer of goods and services from the producer and provider to the consumer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing's immediate goal is sales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public relations' immediate goal is mutual understanding or positioning of the organization with its publics.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing's implicit goal is profit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public relations' implicit goal is positive perceptions and predispositions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing's measure of success is the number of sales and/or the revenue it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public relations' measure of success is expressed public opinion or other

generates.

evidence of public support.

Your firm's marketing initiatives need to be linked with its public relations endeavors. For example, a newsletter published by the attorneys in your closely held business group, can be a great marketing tool, building credibility by establishing your attorneys' knowledge and authority. At a business networking PR event, your attorneys should mention the newsletter in conversations with small business owners and take their business cards to send them a copy of the newsletter with a personal note attached. In the same way, a PR tool like a press release about personnel changes or a new practice area concentration should be uploaded to your website, which is primarily a marketing tool. Also, consider "cause marketing", that is, marketing initiatives based on the cooperative efforts of business and charitable causes, a great way to integrate marketing and PR. For example, lawyers can get involved in community building endeavors offering pro bono services when legal issues arise in a crisis like a flood or fire, or providing education on an issue like spousal abuse or child neglect or drunk driving. When it comes to marketing for professionals, any activity that enhances their reputation and credibility will help generate new business, and when these efforts are integrated, the effect is multiplied.

Your law firm's investment in its billable hours provides for its revenue, but its investment in its non-billable hours provides for its future. While you can hire the services of a marketing consultant or a PR consultant, there has to be a commitment by the firm's management to support and encourage the lawyers' non-billable marketing efforts. A good marketing and public relations consultant can guide, suggest and recommend a strategy and a road map, but the lawyers themselves are responsible for closing the deal. Your marketing and PR efforts will create a positive environment of credibility in which your lawyers can earn the trust of prospects who will become their present and future clients. Obviously, this will impact their billable hours, but ultimately will pay off with a stream of new or returning clients.