

This Month:

- **Moving the Firm Forward**
 - **Business Development : No hiding place**
 - **Converting the prospects**
 - **Accentuating the positives**
- **Essential Infrastructure**

Business Development – Why do we do it?

Or, more to the point, why we don't.....

When Charles Dickens famously wrote *“The one great principle of the English law is to make business for itself”* he clearly wasn't anticipating the birth of the gig economy, the 2008 crash or the liberation of legal services.

But, taken out of the pejorative context of Bleak House, his words are a timely reminder of the continuing struggle within some law firms to reconcile the need to incorporate business development into their traditional operations.

Some firms have adapted successfully to the arrival of a formal business climate. But, considering it is now 12 years since the watershed of the 2008 recession, too many have yet to fully commit to the extent of change necessary to survive an environment which is only likely to become more difficult.

To be cost effective and give a good return on investment, marketing activity needs to be thought through, planned and prioritised. Buy-in and involvement is essential from all staff. Too many disclaim responsibility or are 'too busy'. Other employees feel firms are not considering fully the right route to potential clients, describing social media as being OK for millennials but not necessarily effective for baby boomers. Pretty pictures, they say, but they do not demonstrate the benefits to a potential audience.

So how and why should we be doing it?

More Revenue and from targeted sectors – geography and work-type

- To meet the business strategy
- Growth
- Consistency – resourcing, working capital, activity post a peak
- Revenue and GP to exceed Overheads
- Cash incoming to exceed outgoings
- Staff retention and development
- And more

Lead Conversion – The next essential

This essential activity has seen some progress in recent years. Some firms were achieving a mere 20% conversion rate while others, by taking it seriously, up to 60%. You can fully understand the impact on potential revenue - I have quoted previously that a 100 person firm getting about 500 enquiries a month at 20% converts 100 and 60% converts 300. This equates, at just £500 a file, to increased revenue of £100,000 per month or £1,200,000 per annum. With 60% Gross Profit £720,000 to the bottom line.

Enquiries can be by telephone, e-mail or more reliably now through the web site – so it is critical that the web site is attractive and making an enquiry straightforward and response quick and effective. It is essential a mandatory conversion process is in place

There has been quite a lot of progress in recent years in particular with conveyancing, but most other work-types have remained pedantic.

Business Development – How should we do it?

To be cost effective and give a good return on investment marketing activity needs to be thought through, planned and prioritized. Plus the buy in mentioned earlier. Marketeers and Department Heads have to consider fully the right route to potential clients.

Our marketing plan should be segmented a bit like this

- Existing clients (easiest option)
 - Repeat work such as conveyancing, Wills updates
 - Additional work-types – cross selling all activities – additional property, additional private client plus new services to them
 - Private to commercial clients
 - Commercial to Private clients
- New clients (more difficult as replacing incumbent) – need to be prioritized in line with strategy

Routes to Market

All again have to be considered and prioritized recognizing the profile of the targets. We need to up to date profile of the business that demonstrates clear understanding of client needs and fulfills our business image and reputation.

What are those routes?

Our web site, PR, Social media, Direct marketing (e-mail, physical letters, advertising – often expensive if not specifically targeted, referrers - Own staff, Other professional services businesses – Accountants, law firms, IFAs, Other clients – corporate, private – and Advocates

Essential Activities

- Full understanding of existing client database
 - Segmentation between type, Services bought – gap analysis, Services potential, Route to market options
- Generation of potential new business database
 - Segmentation, Services potential (lower hanging fruit), Route to market options
- Clarity of the benefits that services and the firm bring to the potential
- Ensure the best communication route to the targeted audience
- Development of a phased plan – low hanging fruit first, manageable
 - Such as Wills upgrades, LPAs to Wills clients, Multiple conveyancing options for clients who have done one type
- Web site up date
 - Demonstrate understanding the business has of the needs (news, blogs, highlights), Easy access for quotes

- PR and Newsletters
 - Not just for the media but also for referrers and advocates – keeping them aware
- Referrers
 - Regular contact and updates, Sight seller for existing and new reflecting – Challenges, Solutions, Benefits, Return, Our qualification
- Enquiry Handling
 - Clarity as to who does what, Measurement, Training, Script – benefits, enough info, give a quote, get the rest of info, Integrated with IT system
- Plan
 - Firm for image etc, Work-type for image but also the right and expected level of return, Resources – the right people? Time allocation, Activity to be challenging but manageable, Constant measurement of success rates % enquiry, % conversions, considered reasons for success, considered poor messaging etc, Three months at a time BUT reviewed at the end of each month to consider success exploitation, recovery of shortfall, re-prioritising of low hanging fruit.

Possible Aids to Essential Marketing Activity

Last month I referred to <https://app.legalrss.co.uk/> which can assist demonstrate to the outside world a firms understanding of the needs of its potential clients – web site, social media, phone. Many firms may cope on their own but increasingly for essential support services we are looking to get support through outsourcing – IT, telephone, telephone answering, document production and an increasing number of others.

Lead Conversion

As stated above the potential return from sensible business development and enquiry conversion management can very quickly enhance the revenue and the bottom line. Also enhance cash flow.

A new software application is available now that can handle every work-type, tailored to the firms data-capture needs <https://www.perfectportal.co.uk/> contact Rob Lawson rob.lawson@perfectportal.co.uk . The product is integrated onto the firm's web site, data collection is varied by work-type and format, cost estimates are branded. Acceptance of a quote is integrated with many PMS/CMS suppliers already such as DPS, Proclaim, Tikit, SOS and Leap, with more on the way. Dependent on the relationship with the software, file/matter opening can be automated and even ID checks. Plus, as part of the quotes, for example for search needs and costs with a sister company InfoTrack but also others to suit the firm's needs and preferences.

What is also good is that key management information and KPIs are available to track to progress of the quote and response against objectives by each department.

Perfect Portal also offer a branded app for the firms which will enable clients to complete their on-boarding, ID, AML and Source of Funds with electronic TA forms and receive updates on their matters when signed up and being worked on

Enhancing image of the firm and individuals - Prospects Finding a Solicitor

The image of the business and the performance of solicitors and the whole team is a critical element. The managed image of the firm and solicitors is key and has to be a priority within the firm. Positive references and testimonials are critical

There is now a major enhancement to the Law Society's find a solicitor. With already 1,500 law firms actively participating and something like 3 million visitors <https://www.reviewsolicitors.co.uk/>

contact Saleem Arif saleem.h.arif@gmail.com is leading the way. A client or a prospect can enter a location, the name of a firm or indeed any particular work-type and be shown the profile of the firm, the solicitors and positive and defamatory reviews. It is key anyway that firms should be on top of this but it is simple and easy to do with potentially a very positive response

Unlike Trust Pilot the questions to clients are law firm related. Also unlike Facebook, if there are defamatory reviews by unknown participants then a hold can be placed on the statement whilst investigation as to ID are undertaken by the company – if defamation is confirmed though then the posting will go ahead.

Another positive making a consideration of this as worthwhile is the link that has been generated with <https://www.perfectportal.co.uk/> so prospects can not only find and be impressed by your image the quotation process can also be automated.

Monthly reports are also available to confirm the visitors and results.

Essential Infrastructure

Back in August <http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/August2020.pdf> with information from five suppliers to the legal sector I wrote about the importance of directors and managers making the right decisions. I have become aware since that there is a massive hike in firms reviewing the potential of hosted infrastructure which is being added to where recently acquired PMS/CMS are demonstrating the benefits from within their own groups.

Within https://www.manchesterlawsociety.org.uk/mls_advantage/ we include <https://www.nasstar.com/> who have provided fully managed IT services and fully managed hosting services to legal clients for more than 20 years. A strategic vertical market for the group. Contact Andy Lewis andy.lewis@nasstar.com.

They employ legal sector IT specialists in our project, support and helpdesk teams who understand not only the specific technical and application environments of firms but also the imperatives and needs of fee earners and partners. All of their services are built to SRA standards and with industry leading security measures at the heart of design. They have over 100 legal clients ranging in size from 50 to 900 fee earners. Yes bigger firms are now looking because of the need.

We know that 2020 has exposed specific challenges to the legal sector and Nasstar clients have highlighted the following 3 major considerations when selecting a IT managed services partner;-

- ***“Flexibility and Security – Home working and the shift to near total electronic communication has placed a massive emphasis on server and end user security. Gone are the days when fee earners were predominantly in the office and “protected” behind corporate firewalls and procedures. Our Next Generation Platform (NGP) is designed for organisations that want to adopt a high-performance, flexible and cost effective managed private cloud service. Hosted in a List X facility that is government classified for its robust security, the platform is built with Secure by Design architecture throughout. This is augmented by end user device security and solutions to ensure that the client data is secure from the end users device.”***
- ***“Cost Predictability and Control – Capital expenditure and paying for services when staff are on furlough is a huge drain on law firms budgets. With clients moving firm more regularly now due to there being no face to face interactions, firms need to ensure that their IT budget is flexible based on demand for services. This is where a “per user per month” PUPM cost model works brilliantly. There is no capital expenditure when taking on new staff in our cloud model, plus the costs reduce when staff do not access the systems or a month or the firm downsizes.”***

- ***“Legal sector expertise and depth of technical resources – Partnering with a managed service company with Legal specific support teams and large support teams is more important than ever. Fee earners need to know that when an issue arises that the support person will be familiar with Legal specific issues and be able to call upon a vast team of engineers to solve issues. Nasstar have deployed a POD Support & Engineering service delivery model – which means that your team is able to forge a personal and familiar working partnership with a multi-discipline team (15-20 people, from a broader team of 250+ technical experts) that will be on point for 90%+ of your interactions with Nasstar.”***

Bill Kirby is a director of www.ProfessionalChoiceConsultancy.com offering advice to firms on business issues from strategy, planning, business development, the effective use of IT applications and IT hosting for compliance, business continuity and DR. He can be contacted at billkirby@professionalchoiceconsultancy.co