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CLIENT SPEAK

Client Co-Marketing

By Allan Colman

Client co-marketing builds relationships and sends an unmistakable message. Imagine you're Senior Intellectual Property Counsel of a Fortune 100 company. Every law firm within two continents of your main office has begun posting commentary, sending communiqués, and publishing articles about the latest milestone ruling — as of this writing, that would be *KSR v. Teleflex*. There's an article in a national journal by someone at the Smith firm. Someone at the Jones firm has a piece in the local legal newspaper. Another publication, however, has an article co-written by the general counsel of a major manufacturer and a partner at the Thomas firm about the possible effects of *KSR* on business and legal management.

There's a very good chance that the general counsel's article will be the first that you as an in-house lawyer

will read. There's an equally good chance that you'll assume the Thomas firm represents that company. And, there's an awfully good chance that you'll also assume the GC thinks the world of the Thomas firm to let his good name run on the same byline.

Seem obvious? Then why don't we see more such co-written articles? Are clients resistant? One shouldn't think so inasmuch as it's simply good marketing for them as well. And, if you offer to do the first draft of the article, the added advantage for the client is that it's good marketing with relatively little effort.

Here's another example that approximates a recent situation I observed. A law firm partner was being profiled in a legal trade publication. Among her major achievements is a stellar litigation record on behalf of the XYZ Company. During and after the interview, the partner (and her PR firm) urged the reporter to call the AGC at XYZ, not just for a quotable endorsement, but to learn more about the astonishing things the client has done in-house to deter lawsuits and reduce in-house costs. When the article was finally published, it was as much about

the client as the law firm, and both profited equally.

GREATNESS BY ASSOCIATION

To be sure, marketing the law firm is not an "us or them" proposition. You can recruit inside counsel and even CEOs as parties to your own marketing and business development efforts. They will typically appreciate the request because they want to be marketed too.

Perhaps the in-house lawyer is looking for another job and a little notoriety won't hurt. Or perhaps more public prominence is politically beneficial in terms of his or her internal career track. Maybe the client wants to highlight the fact that, as in our example above, his is the last company in its industry that a smart plaintiff's lawyer should want to target.

Periodically, certain in-house legal managers emerge as spokespersons for the in-house sector. In the past, such spokespersons (my own memory stretches back as far as Robert Banks at Xerox in the 1980s) give speeches, write articles, and spearhead programmatic efforts to enunciate what they as inside counsel expect from outside

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counsel, and how, in general, in-house services ought to evolve.

Right now there seems to be available space for another such in-house market leader to emerge. Could that leader be one of your clients? Imagine the marketing benefits that would accrue to your firm if you helped him or her fill that space, especially if your “partnership” were widely known via joint conference appearances, for example, or a few of those aforesaid co-bylined articles.

The relationship benefits are obvious. Even more important in some ways, by being an identifiable part of the client's efforts to define and implement new professional standards, you become *a part of the solution* to whatever problem is under discussion. You're now part of a collective campaign — a close-knit community of buyers and sellers — to improve law firm billing practices or discourage frivolous law suits or enhance diversity in the legal profession or in the client's own industry. The relationship that ensues with the client is very nice. The message you're sending to untold numbers of other legal service buyers and decision-makers is very, *very* nice.

A WEALTH OF OPPORTUNITIES

Remember all the favors that clients have asked of you: “Take a table” ... Donate a silent auction item ... Sponsor a hole in a charity golf tournament ... Offer a summer associate position to the CFO's daughter at Cornell Law ... Donate to the GC's law school alumni fund drive.

These requests all more or less help clients' own marketing with little direct benefit to you, but they're not shy

about asking. So don't you be shy with them — especially with requests that, as we've seen, benefit them at least as much as you.

We've mentioned professional events and publishing as two obviously salient examples of how to co-market. But there are other venues that will likewise enhance your relationship as well as send a valuable message about both the company and you to the broader market. Two in particular deserve mention.

Community Service Projects

First, community service projects offer a number of opportunities, particularly welcome to clients if their companies happen to sell stuff to that community. Some community service projects provide a bigger, more national bang for the PR buck: Habitat for Humanity comes to mind. If there are pro bono award events, invite the client to sit at your table.

Diversity

Second, diversity initiatives are near and dear to many legal service buyers. Explore ways for you and your client to jointly contribute to or support non-profit organizations fostering diversity (the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, for instance). Don't be deterred if your firm's own diversity numbers are disappointing. There's nothing wrong with acknowledging that one reason for your increased involvement is to improve the firm's diversity recruitment efforts.

The examples above remind us that conjoint marketing with clients is — like all marketing — ultimately based on the delivery of value. As we like to

emphasize, the person to whom you are marketing should be better off as a result of your doing so, regardless of whether or not they invest in your services as an immediate result. By co-marketing with clients, this “value proposition” operates in a uniquely multifaceted way.

VALUE

“Value” is delivered to the marketplace via the content of a speech or article — here's an issue bedeviling our industry, and here's how a corporate expert and outside counsel size it up.

“Value” is simultaneously delivered to the community and the profession as a result of specific actions, such as pro bono efforts and diversity initiatives.

“Value” is delivered to your clients because they have serious marketing agendas of their own. By joining with you in efforts to be helpful to the profession, to their own industry, and to the community at large, they directly advance those agendas.

For the law firm, the leverage is powerful: You build tangible credibility in front of unseen corporate decision-makers even as you take a single important client relationship to a wholly new and collaborative level. It's a no-brainer. Call a client today and brainstorm projects.



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