

Happy Clients: Marketing a Law Firm and Client Retention

Most lawyers value their work by their technical ability in representing their clients, and this is only to be expected in any profession with such high standards of technical competency. However, what many forget is that clients are often unable to establish what actually constitutes excellent legal representation in technical terms.

Client Service and Marketing a Law Firm

Therefore, at least as important in client retention and marketing a law firm are the firm's client service standards. Here are five areas of client service which help to distinguish the outstanding from the ordinary:

1. Maintaining Contact

The most damaging image you can create in a client's mind is one of disinterest or complacency. Conversely, keeping in regular contact with your current client demonstrates that you care about them and their legal matters. The internet is undoubtedly the key to this aspect of client service (although clients without internet access deserve and require just as much attention). Allowing clients access to an online diary, so that they can easily make appointments, and providing web enabled case tracking are two significant aspects of this strategy. A generally proactive attitude, contacting clients as and when new issues affecting their matters arise, creates the right impression. Moreover, appointing a dedicated Client Relationship Manager makes managing the whole process much smoother, and gives the client an immediate port of call for any questions or issues they may have. A regular 'bulletin', providing primarily items of genuine interest to your client base, as well as information about the firm, helps to keep you in mind and shows that your clients' priorities are your priorities.

2. Flexibility and Service Standards

An important component of client care is to show a 'client-centred' approach. This can be achieved through a number of fairly simple initiatives, and will help to differentiate you from competitors. Examples of this approach include flexible working hours, providing 'out of hours' meetings for busy business clients or families, or holding meetings at the client's premises or home where appropriate. Keeping clients regularly updated of progress, offering telephone and video conferencing where applicable, and hosting a dedicated client area on your website will underline your commitment to making the relationship as smooth as possible. It is also important to adhere to certain service standards, such as respecting client confidentiality, standardising the way that staff communicate with clients (giving the client the option of methods of communication), and offering different levels of service (Gold, Silver, Bronze) with set pricing structures. Maintaining these standards is crucial, so the firm should require Heads of Department to continue to identify and consider possible new services for the firm.

3. Legal Finance

The prospect of paying for legal services is something that often puts potential clients off. There are, however, many ways in which the firm can help to make things easier. At first, the firm can offer fixed prices up front to help avoid worries about chargeable hours building up. Guarantees help to reassure clients, as does the option of 0% finance. If the firm has the capacity, bridging loans and interim finance can help the client to pay and to plan their finances. This can also be in the firm's interests, as a client who cannot pay a bill in full at the end of an engagement only hurts cash flow. It is also a good idea to provide flexibility in billing and collection, allowing clients to view the accounts ledger online and make online payments, and updating them of the status of their account (for example providing notification when they are nearing a set budget). Automated billing at certain key points in an engagement also help to smooth your own cash flow.

4. Promotion

Holding events with a 'wow' factor in the local community, boosting your profile and credibility, help to convince clients that they are dealing with a market leader. Your sense of Corporate Social Responsibility, demonstrated by promotion of your work with local community groups and charities, further enhances this image. A 'green strategy', including PR regarding your recycling, carbon offsetting and other environmental initiatives, is a crucial part of this profile. You can also maintain the 'client-centred' approach by holding networking events, which benefit both the firm and clients by introducing clients to each other and increasing your profile. This must all be geared towards portraying yourself as the premier firm in your area.

5. Feedback

The only way to achieve genuine service improvements is to gain honest feedback from the people who matter – clients. This is more than a question of asking clients to fill out a questionnaire, although this is generally a good place to start. A client feedback questionnaire, returned anonymously at the end of an engagement, will encourage honesty and provide opportunities for real improvements. However, it is often possible to go further, forming client 'focus groups' for feedback, and using a 'mystery shopper' to contact the firm for quotes, the client for feedback, and other firms to provide an idea of competitive positioning.



Please feel free to [contact me](#) for further advice.

Michelle Walsh

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