

Submitted to Contra Costa County Lawyer Magazine by Austin Holian

Adopt a Member Benefit Mentality to Retain and Grow Your Client Base

I am biased. I am a huge proponent of professional associations. Way back in the 1990s I worked for the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). In addition, I have been a member of the Legal Marketing Association and have worked with several associations and groups in the legal market throughout the country.

While working at IABC I was amazed by the amount of care the staff gave their members. Business communicators do not have very easy jobs and must answer to several constituencies. Just as most association members should expect, the IABC member professionals found real value in their association memberships. This brings me to my point: I believe that if a law firm treated its clients and prospects as well as associations treat their members, that firm will stand out in a crowded market and achieve the result of winning more business, keeping attorneys at the firm, and retaining a larger percentage of its clients.

We Already Provide Excellent Legal Service, What More Can We Do?

I know several people who talk with general and in-house counsel up and down the Fortune 500 about the level of service that their outside law firms provide. Let's face it, if every law firm provided top-notch service, there would be no work for consultants.

If firm leaders took advantage of the membership benefits of the associations of which they are members they will see that there is a very high value received. Furthermore, if these leaders offered "member" benefits, their clients and prospects will be positively surprised and I believe more likely to do business with these firms.

Here are some suggested benefits that a firm can offer its clients and prospects.

Complimentary CLE Opportunities

Many firms offer sessions to their in-house clients and prospects. I have seen some very impressive efforts that are greatly appreciated. Two examples that come to mind are a full-day litigation trends conference that is hosted by a Missouri law firm that attracts close to one hundred clients and a three – day conference held at a luxurious desert resort where a large international employment firm holds a conference filled with substantive legal content.

Resource Library

Firms should make it a practice to provide complimentary periodicals to their key clients.

Business Building Networking Efforts

Firm leaders should take a look at their rosters of clients to see if there are any that complement each other. I heard an example of this fantastic idea years ago: A firm had a client that was a real estate developer specializing in multi-unit apartment buildings. Another client was an Internet-based grocery delivery service (you can tell how long ago this was). An enterprising associate went out of her way to introduce these two concerns and a fruitful relationship resulted. I am surprised more firms do not try to package and present this idea to benefit their clients.

Complimentary Research

Firms should provide their clients with useful research that is provided from companies such as MergerMarket, Hildebrandt, ALM and others.

Complimentary Association Membership

Firms can work with various associations to sponsor the memberships of their key clients.

This is easy for you to suggest, it's not your money

I agree with this statement but am suggesting that not only are these investments in time and money well worth it but the firms that begin to think this way will truly be adding value to their relationships.

Turn the Yacht

This is a mindset. I know that to shift a law firm of any size's mindset and attitude is a very long process, much like turning an 80-foot yacht. I also know that these kinds of changes are set from the top down. A managing partner of a fairly large firm once told me that it was going to be easy to shift his firm to focus on cross-selling to key clients. When I asked him how, he responded, "Because I am telling everyone in the firm that's what we are going to do." I have also seen prominent practice groups take hold of an attitude or a different way of doing business, and when that began to benefit the firm as a whole, the rest of the firm eventually followed. The point is, an individual attorney,

practice group, and firm leaders can all begin to adopt the membership mentality. I am willing to bet that it will make a positive difference.

Bio

Austin Holian has nearly 25 years of media and business development experience. Austin recently started Big Picture Business Development, focusing on helping attorneys, firms and legal service providers find the most effective and creative ways to get and remain in front of clients and prospects. Contact Austin at Austin@bigpicturebusinessdevelopment.com and (925) 849 2429