

## **Another Top 10 Event in a Decade of Law Firm Sales and Marketing: 9.11**

For the last several weeks, I've been using the New Legal Normal blog to list several of the major changes that have taken place in the legal sales and marketing world during the 10+ years since I became one of the profession's first sales professionals who actually used the word "sales" on the business card.

Returning from the Marketing Partner Forum in Miami last week, I realized that one of the biggest changes during my law-firm sales tenure has been the effects of 9.11.

The terrorist attacks on the United States occurred just three weeks into my new job at Womble Carlyle. I was using the time to restore (and leverage) contacts with some of the business executives that I had met during my preceding 16 years of sales work at accounting firms. I distinctly remember that on the morning of 9.11.2001, I was on the phone with the CFO of a large DC-based conglomerate. As our conversation progressed, I gradually became aware of an eerie change to the symphony of the city. Normal street noises were replaced with sirens, care horns blaring, helicopters, and even fighter jets buzzing the city at low altitude. Shortly after I finished the conversation with my CFO contact, I learned the dreadful reality: One of the New York World Trade Center towers had collapsed, and there had been bombings somewhere in DC, perhaps the Mall."

The attacks of 9.11 brought legal sales to a standstill. No one wanted to meet or to discuss legal needs. The nation wanted to mourn and perhaps to exact retribution. What a way to start a new job!

In reality, within three or four months, the conduct of business began to normalize to some extent, and I was able to undertake the activities that have characterized my tenure as one of the profession's first sales executives – initiating and following-up on meetings with clients and prospective clients.

Lest we forget, however, 9.11 has left a permanent imprint on legal sales and marketing. Prior to 9.11, travel was manageable and at times pleasurable. No more. New regulations and restrictions have rendered business travel a nightmare. Those of us who sell and buy legal services still travel as necessary, but we certainly have found other ways to conduct business, including more meetings utilizing phone, video and web conferences. The diminution of person-to-person sales meetings is an unfortunate, but understandable, effect of 9.11.

September 11 also led directly to one, and indirectly to one or more major armed conflicts costing tens of billions of dollars. These armed conflicts have, in turn, fomented political and economic instability in the U.S. and around the globe. In the aftermath of 9.11, and certainly at least partially as a result of it, we have experienced two significant global economic traumas, and we are still mired in the second one nearly four years after its advent. We are much more suspicious of one another than we were prior to 9.11, and we have learned how to operate in a business and social environment of continually looking over our shoulders.

On the legal front, 9.11 led to the generation and adoption of significant new legislation, regulation and business practices related to individual rights, criminal defense, privacy, data protection, multinational relations, government contracting, lobbying and more. Ever opportunistic, law firms have responded by creating discrete services that address post-9.11 realities. September 11 also resulted in significant re-thinking of building security, and in locales such as Washington D.C., where I operate, government offices and government-contractor buildings for years have been fortifying and/or relocating, creating not only real-estate law opportunities but also a new wave of traffic and logistical nightmares.

On a strictly personal front, I would guess that the aftermath of 9.11 has reduced my airplane business travel by 50%, and it has increased my weekly commuting time by 2 hours over what it was a decade ago. I would guess that 9.11 has directly or indirectly increased the number of Womble Carlyle web pages by 20 or more, as new lawyer groups have formed to address new needs related to Base Realignment and Closure, Privacy and Data Protection, cross-border tech transfer, government contractors with boots on the ground overseas, and more.

Ten years have muddied the memory of 9.11, and we don't often tally the effect on law firms of the 9.11 terrorist attacks. But upon reflection, 9.11 forever changed the legal sales and marketing profession, and it certainly merits a place among the Top 10 developments in the last decade of legal sales and marketing.

If you know of other effects on legal sales and marketing of the 9.11 attacks, please let me know.