

Business Development for Lawyers: Principles and Practice

LAURIE YOUNG



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LAURIE YOUNG



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Executive summary

IN THE past three decades, as legal practices have grown, they have sought advice from consultants, academics and employees with skills in marketing or business development. Many have introduced techniques and processes to handle growth more effectively. These have, undoubtedly, increased the scope of growth activities whilst releasing fee earners to spend more time with clients. Yet, at the same time, as business development support staff have moved more extensively into professional practices, and as academics have begun to study them, a strange distortion in thinking has occurred.

Some have borrowed techniques from other industries and packaged them up in more palatable language for partners, despite the fact that these were developed for low-level, more routine purchases. Others have focused on the communication techniques involved in getting onto client panels or dealing with pitches. Although these might be appropriate for bringing in work which is commoditised, they ignore more sophisticated methods, practised intuitively by numerous partners for many decades, of winning high-quality work and avoiding being asked to do a proposal in the first place.

This report introduces the current thinking on business development (BD) and attempts to put some of the practices into context. It examines concepts like rainmakers, client account management, cross selling and client loyalty from the perspective of revenue generation and BD at partner level. It

examines mechanisms by which law firms can grow and generate work, many of which are used already by leading partners, albeit intuitive, uncodified and taken for granted. They include, for example, the development of a strong reputation and the building of trust with clients. The report also tests the viability of successful approaches to work generation and revenue growth in the changing dynamics of the international legal services market.

Chapter 1 introduces BD in the legal profession and looks at the success of leading partners who have, whilst delivering outstanding technical assistance to clients, drawn in remarkable revenues and built enduring, influential and profitable businesses.

Chapter 2 analyses the different approaches to BD that have been adopted by partners and the various growth strategies of different-sized practices. In particular, it emphasises the success of partner-level growth activities despite them being intuitive, unarticulated and erratically applied. It also explores BD in new forms of ownership.

Chapter 3 focuses on the principles of partner-level BD such as the development of a strong reputation, the measurable impact of client service on work generation, reciprocity with other professionals, asymmetry of information, deliberate demonstration of skill and knowledge, the importance of networking and maintaining links with practice alumni, and effective presentations for company panels and winning work.

Chapter 4 discusses current trends in practice development and the changes in the

legal services market. It explores changing client attitudes, the influence of professional buyers, sector knowledge and client prioritisation.

Chapter 5 advises against the pitfalls and common mistakes made in BD while Chapter 6 discusses ways to be more systematic about handling the wealth-generating principles of BD, particularly in the light of the changes affecting the legal services market.

Chapter 7 takes an international perspective on BD and Chapter 8 discusses how partners and fee earners can use BD support staff effectively.

Chapter 9 concludes by emphasising the importance of formalising BD practices so that they are effectively embedded within the firm.

The report also features the following case studies:

- Richard Susskind's single practitioner growth strategy;
- DMH Stallard;
- Axiom;
- Allen & Overy; and
- Gill Jennings & Every LLP.

About the author

LAURIE YOUNG is a businessman who likes to write. He is an internationally-recognised specialist in the marketing and selling of services; and one of the few independent advisers to the professions who has been a partner in a leading firm. Laurie's career has included senior positions at BT, Unisys and PricewaterhouseCoopers, where he was global marketing partner for their corporate advisory division. He has also founded, built and sold a practice.

Laurie now divides his time between advisory work (including teaching on the 'Executive Education Programme' of Wharton Business School, University of Pennsylvania), speaking at conferences and writing. For instance, he speaks at a range of events every year from company seminars, to larger international conferences.

As an adviser he has assisted senior executives with the resolution of strategic marketing issues, brand strategy, new service design and client care programmes. Amongst Laurie's recent assignments, he has chaired Fujitsu's 'Customer experience management' panel and is on the 'Innovation Board' of Allen & Overy. Over the years his clients have included: Russell Reynolds Associates, Deloitte, Phillips, Lucent, Ericsson, Ingersoll Rand, Microsoft, the BBC, Cable & Wireless, American Express, Nokia and BDO Stoy Hayward.

In addition to contributed articles and expert comment in the national press, Laurie has had over 100 articles published in various trade journals. He has written chapters for edited books on the IT industry and has had six books published to date. Of these, *Marketing the Professional Services Firm* (Wiley, April 2005) draws on case studies of many leading international practices to trace the steps that partners go through to create successful growth strategies.

Laurie's work is attracting increasing interest in Asia, one of which has been translated in Chinese, *From Products To Services*, published in March 2009. His latest book, *Marketing Technology as a Service* was published on 16 April 2010 by Wiley and explores developing trends in the technology sector.

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