

# LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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## LI Feature

LEGAL INDUSTRY/BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

# Mastering the Soft Sell

Could your firm benefit from an integrated approach to growing client business?

Signing a new client may seem like the best way to grow business. But studies show the cost involved can actually negate profitability for years.



**ERIN BRERETON**

Owner, Chicago Journalist Media

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**JENNIFER L. COLWELL**

Increase client retention rates by just 5 percent instead, and the payoff could be significant — up to 95 percent profit growth, according to research conducted by a Harvard Business School professor and management consulting firm Bain & Company.

Firms that can hold onto and *expand* the amount of work they’re performing for clients may see even bigger returns.

“We know from statistics that it’s always easier to keep an existing client than to get a new client,” says Jennifer L. Colwell, CLM, MBA, Firm Administrator at McGill, Gotsdiner, Workman & Lepp, PC, LLO. “First and foremost, the reason is profitability. Also, the more you’re doing for a client, the less competition you’re facing from other firms, because you’re handling a larger market share of their work.”

To grow business with existing clients, some firms rely heavily on partners’ personal relationships. Others entice clients with write-offs and reduced costs.

In today’s competitive marketplace, to pull ahead of the pack and land new work — from either prospective or pre-existing clients — firms need to take a creative approach to business development.

### CONVINCING CLIENTS TO INTENSIFY YOUR MATTER LOAD

Sales acumen doesn’t always come easily to attorneys, who may not have relevant experience or understand the value in promotional tasks that take away from billable work.

“Great sales reps truly have a relationship with decision makers; they don’t always come to sell you something,” Colwell says. “Thinking like a sales rep is probably the No. 1 thing lawyers could constantly be doing better.”

Firm Administrator  
McGill, Gotsdiner,  
Workman & Lepp



The following four steps can be a good place to start.

- **Track client behavior:** Although firms view their relationships with clients as a competitive advantage, just over half — 56 percent — say they have a plan in place to build, track and measure client satisfaction and loyalty, according to a [report](#) from LexisNexis and ALM Intelligence.

A number of tools can help firms monitor clients' actions on social media. The free Facebook Insights tool, for example, can help page administrators understand their page's overall performance and gauge the best way to connect with users, says Kristine B. Snively, Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of law firm PR and marketing agency Pristine Public Relations, Inc.

A simple online survey can also yield valuable insight. Pristine PR suggests each law firm it works with send clients an online satisfaction survey after a case is completed.

"Obtaining customer feedback is invaluable to our clients," Snively says. "Staying in touch with what your clients value allows you to identify new trends and can have a substantial impact on expanding your client base."

## Compensation and Benefits Survey

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*"The vast majority of content needs to directly benefit the reader — answering questions that are hot on their mind. Instead of saying the firm just won a case, instead describe the legal strategy it used. That's a positive way to engage people."*

**JOLIE BALIDO**

President of PR, Roar Media



- **Encourage firm members to share client contact information:** Convincing them it's a good idea can be a challenge, due in part to the time it takes.

"It requires individual attorneys setting aside a significant portion of their hours," says Jolie Balido, President of PR and marketing agency Roar Media, which has advised regional, national and global law firms. "And attorneys recognize that entering contacts into a database means other firm members can see them. They worry about putting contacts they value at risk."

At firms where partners have traditionally been responsible for maintaining client relationships, establishing a more open, team-oriented atmosphere can require a compensation structure shift, says Colwell.

"That's the only way I've seen firms change the dynamics of having a one-on-one relationship with clients," she says. "Are [attorneys] paid to bring in other attorneys to help service the client, or on the premise that the more they originate, the more they get paid?"

- **Provide regular, relevant content:** A number of firms have shifted their marketing plan in recent years, according to Colwell, to focus more on providing information about the industries their clients work in, instead of just listing basic practice area and other information on their website.

"It's not about, 'Click here for our litigation attorneys,'" she says. "Firms need to know the business their clients are in, inside and out, and identify potential issues so they've provided value."

Distributing worthwhile information to a defined audience of current clients — also known as content marketing — can offer a number of benefits, including increased search engine visibility, greater brand recognition and, ultimately, stronger client relationships, according to Snively.

Pristine PR suggests maximizing exposure by disseminating content via multiple platforms. Share news coverage the firm received on Facebook and LinkedIn. Highlight popular blog posts. Help readers distribute original pieces by including social media share buttons.

"Content marketing is one of the most cost-effective and useful marketing strategies today," she says. "The sooner you begin investing in it, the sooner you will see results."

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**KRISTINE B. SNIVELY**

Founder and CEO, Pristine  
Public Relations, Inc



Because firms can track which links readers have clicked on, an e-newsletter, according to Balido, can be an effective method of staying in touch with clients.

"Even if they don't open the newsletter itself, we have found just seeing the name in the subject line sends a good impression that the law firm is a successful thought leader," she says.

Provided the topics are worthwhile — long lists of recent court wins or awards attorneys have won can come across as self-promotional. Balido advises firms concentrate on the topics and types of media that their targeted clients follow.

"The vast majority of content needs to directly benefit the reader — answering questions that are hot on their mind," she says. "Instead of saying the firm just won a case, instead describe the legal strategy it used. That's a positive way to engage people."

- **Use big data to gauge results:** Without insight into how the firm's business development efforts are working, you're operating in a vacuum — and risk spending a significant amount on unproductive efforts.

Review your firm website's analytics each month to determine which pages are generating longer view times. Ones with shorter view times may need better content.

"If you can effectively analyze site visitor behavior, you can continuously improve [your site's] ability to generate quality leads," Snively says.

McGill, Gotsdiner, Workman & Lepp compares clients' spending on a monthly basis to the previous year.

"We definitely watch which clients are paying us more this year. Anyone who is not on the list, we make sure that we at least understand the business is going to change because there's a change in general counsel, or whatever the issue is," Colwell says. "If you can't explain it, you'd better be in their office saying, 'What's going on?'"

### A CONSTANT CONVERSATION

Some marketing efforts won't provide concrete insights, according to Jacques Hart, CEO of Roar Media. If the placement, promotion and user response are ultimately out of the firm's control, gauging overall effect can be virtually impossible.

"Lots of clients ask us, 'So I was featured in the business section of *The New York Times*. How many impressions did my article receive?'" Hart says. "That's something you just cannot quantify, unless you have metrics from *The New York Times*' site."

However, many marketing endeavors — the number of users who signed up for blog post updates, for example, or the amount of readers who opened a firm's e-newsletter email — can provide highly useful data to drive future business development plans. Colwell suggests making at least quarterly contact.

"That would probably be the right amount of time to be reaching out to an existing client in a way you haven't before," she says. "Whether that's through a newsletter, or a lunch, or going to their office for a brief meeting just to say, 'How are things going?'"

Sales and marketing efforts to promote your services on a regular basis can help convince current clients your firm is equipped — and eager — to handle their additional legal needs.

"It's so much harder to get a new client than to have an existing client [increase business]," Colwell says. "There are different ways to make that communication consistency happen, but it's important to have some sort of program."

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erin Brereton is a legal industry marketing consultant who has written about the legal industry, finance, business and other topics for more than 50 legal associations, magazines, websites and other publications.

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