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L A W P R A C T I C E M A N A G E M E N T

Three ways your small law firm can meet today's legal consumer needs

By Mark Melago

One thing that stands out in the 2022 Thomson Reuters State of Small Law Firms report is that the leaders of small law firms are an optimistic bunch.

Another? They have their work cut out for them if they want to keep that rosy outlook.

Between August and September 2022, Thomson Reuters performed research interviews with leaders of law firms with 29 or fewer attorneys. The resulting report found that leaders of small law firms have a generally positive outlook on the near future, but would do well to focus on several key areas if they want to continue to thrive and meet the needs of today's legal consumers.

In this post, we'll take a look at three of the priorities leaders of small law firms mentioned and share why they're worth focusing on. If you haven't given thought to how you'll meet these challenges in 2023, now would be an excellent time to start.

Providing better service to clients

There's a time-honored saying in business that the best client is one you already have. Repeat clientele are a superb way to safeguard the long-term success of your law firm, and satisfied clients are likely to spread the word about you, leave positive online reviews, and generally act as your advocate.

What counts as client service, let alone good client service, depends on your practice area. That being said, the end of the year would be an excellent time for any law firm to take a hard look at the whole of a client's journey – from intake to conclusion of a matter – and ask yourself where it can be improved. It's very likely that there are some pain points you don't know about simply because you have not thought of them. For example: when you send an invoice, would it be clear to a non-lawyer why they are being billed this way, or could you better describe the reason for the charges? When a matter is over, do you make an effort to maintain a connection to the client, such as by sending a holiday card? These are the types of little things that go a long way and can help you provide better client service.

Differentiating your law firm from competitors

In all the years FindLaw has been researching small law firm business development and legal consumer behavior,



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this stands out time and time again. It's difficult to distinguish your law firm from the one down the street, but essential to do so because prospective clients may have a hard time determining what they perceive as comparable law firms.

The best and easiest way to differentiate yourself from competitor firms is to determine what makes you who you are and express that everywhere – your website, your social media presence, your printed collateral, and so on. Be consistent and be comprehensive. Try to avoid cliches and generic descriptions and instead talk about what it's like to work with

you, because that's what consumers with a legal need want to know. If you're a compassionate and understanding elder law attorney, make sure the market knows you grasp the delicate and sensitive nature of your work. If you're a vigorous and thorough criminal defense attorney, your prospective clients want to know that you'll stand up for their rights. Articulating the ways in which your law firm is different isn't always easy, but it's well worth doing.

Enhancing the value your law firm provides

Consumers with a legal need require representation, but they don't require that representation comes from you. Far too many lawyers and law firms think that because they provide a necessary service, they're somehow guaranteed or entitled to a certain amount of business. That simply isn't true. Consumers with a legal need have many law firms to choose from, and it's all too possible to overestimate the demand for *your* services.

To increase the value you provide your clients, put yourself in their shoes. Many law firm clients don't have much experience with the legal industry, so they're looking for the reassurance of a steady guiding hand. This starts with being responsive (not allowing phone calls to go straight to voicemail, for example, or waiting too long to return emails) and continues by using your expertise to give your client as much context as possible. In short, the more of a partner you are, rather than just a source for legal information, the better client service you will provide.

Download your complimentary copy of the 2022 State of Small Law Firms report to learn more at tmsnr.rs/3Qz0Vs5. ■

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