



## New Opportunities In the Legal Industry

By Silvia L. Coulter  
Principal  
(978) 526-8316 – office  
(617) 697-4869 – mobile  
scoulter@lawvisiongroup.com

Research over the past four years is showing a slow-moving upward trend of law firms hiring professional sales people. This trend spans all sizes of firms, from small to global. The backgrounds of these professionals varies; primarily, they come to firms from a solid background of success in the sales world, many having worked against assigned quotas and on partial commission.

While some firms' leaders believe that no one can do this job except a partner, the firms taking the lead on hiring these professionals are realizing the benefits. Most of the time these professionals become valued firm members because they are very successful at generating revenue and know how to do this well. Some may earn more compensation than some partners, as is the case in a few firms. This obviously may cause some uneasiness among the partner ranks. The key is to help qualified sales professionals to be successful at your firm.

### Is Your Firm Sales Ready?

There are some benefits and obstacles to hiring sales pros. Our firm believes that the benefits outweigh the obstacles. Namely, sales professionals don't take no for an answer, they are aggressive about pursuit, and are well-skilled at knowing the next step and how to prepare for it and execute on the sales strategy. When sales professionals are paired up with lawyers who are skilled at negotiation, this team can be explosive in terms of results. Other service industries have long since had these positions in place and reaped the benefits.

"If you're still selling like we're in a Seller's Market, it's frankly, a waste of money to hire a lawyer for your sales position. Pitching people on the merits of one's law firm will fail just as miserably for a lawyer as it will for a kid making minimum wage," says Craig Levinson, Esq., Director of Sales & Client Development for Berger Singerman in Miami. "In a Buyer's Market, selling legal services is no longer about pitching; it's about Socratic questioning. One must be skilled at asking pointed questions that: a) compel someone to reveal a problem; b) lead that person reach an epiphany (that the cost of doing nothing to address said problem is too high); and c) align all of the internal stakeholders at the company behind this decision to take action.

Who better than an attorney to engage in disciplined questioning that identifies problems and opportunities, and helps explore the financial, strategic, and personal impacts of making (or not making) a decision?"

As Craig points out, salespeople are pros at asking good questions and building strong relationships. There are some advantages and potential disadvantages to integrating sales professionals into your law firm for the first time. Long-term, the firm will adapt well to the role these professionals play. In the beginning, introducing new positions like this into the firm can be challenging. Here are some of both:

## Advantages

- Knows how to sell. A solid sales track record; preferably an individual who worked on a base plus commission (in a law firm it would be base plus bonus based on specific revenue targets).
- An individual who is not afraid of a multi-million dollar revenue target that includes client expansion and new client development.
- Extrovert who likes networking; extraordinarily focused on hitting revenue targets and is self-motivated to "win."
- Does not get caught up in the details of the practices; knows when to bring in an expert.
- Has good contacts within a specific industry or geographic market. Knows how to open doors to new opportunity through these contacts.

## Disadvantages

- Successful sales professionals often need recognition of their success, which doesn't come easily in a law firm environment. Check to make sure the individual(s) you are hiring understand this.
- Sales professionals may not understand the nuances of the legal practices — often seen as a disadvantage by firm partners more so than firm clients and prospects. It is not critical to sales success by any means, since the lawyers are the experts and can be called in when needed. It's more important for sales professionals to understand the industry they are targeting and, of course, how to sell.
- Firm partners may have difficulty letting go of client relationships for selling purposes to anyone else. Let's face it, they don't even share clients, in some firms, with their partners!
- The senior-most marketing professionals may be threatened by this new professional. They will have to learn to work well as a team, but the sales pro should not report to the marketing pro. Quite simply, it generally won't work and is unheard of in corporate America, financial services and accounting firms — all of which have successful sales teams and successful marketing teams.

## Hiring the Right Fit

How do you go about hiring someone like this and what are the important skills to have? "As with every other industry, 'Product Knowledge' is key. Knowing the services offered (not just practice groups) and client demographics will be critical to ones success within a law firm environment," comments Beth Cuzzone, Director of Business Development at Goulston & Storrs. She adds, "More often than not, having a law degree lends more instant credibility internally at the law firm among partners, who are a large constituency to the success of a sales professional." Beth has a sales background and is not a JD, but has a strong understanding of the industry and is very involved in meeting with clients and prospects.

Other noteworthy items about hiring these talented revenue drivers: They may not have the best writing skills — they are verbal pros. They are super motivated and focus on busting through goals. This enthusiasm can be contagious, and spark some partners into action to focus on their contacts.

To insure success with hiring these individuals, we recommend these steps:

- Communicate the plan for hiring sales professionals with key stakeholders to solicit buy-in (these will

- be the first partners who will undoubtedly work with the sales pros);
- Communicate the plan with the firm members at firm meetings prior to hiring;
  - Meet with the senior-most marketing professional to let him or her know the plan and to discuss the need for working together for a successful results;
  - Last, be sure the individual you hire has a successful track record.

## Conclusion

The trend for hiring sales professionals will continue to grow at a steady pace. Taking the step to do so will mean a faster path to seeing stronger revenue results.

Reprinted with permission from the Volume 29, Number 6, October 2013 edition of *Marketing The Law Firm*© 2015 ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved. Further duplication without permission is prohibited. For information, contact 877-257-3382 - [reprints@alm.com](mailto:reprints@alm.com) or visit [www.almreprints.com](http://www.almreprints.com).