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## Lawyers Often Lack the Skills Needed to Draw, Keep Clients

By JANE PORTER

**In January, Sara Canuso hit upon some fertile ground for her Philadelphia-based image-consulting business: helping lawyers make a better first impression.**

Ms. Canuso noticed that law firms were scrambling to get more clients amid the souring economy but that many individual lawyers were badly in need of a makeover. So Ms. Canuso put together a three-hour seminar on body language and how lawyers should dress for their clients and the courtroom. She tells lawyers that "within seven seconds, someone is going to decide whether or not they want to do business with you."

**Since creating the program, she has presented at five firms and is slated to visit three more this month. "The market is so competitive that you really need to create an image that speaks to success," she says.**

In the last few months, law firms have become increasingly aware that training lawyers in marketing and business development is a key way to drive business. According to a February survey of 120 marketing directors at large law firms -- conducted by legal market researcher, BTI Consulting Group -- business development is one of the few marketing areas where law firm executives are most willing to increase spending. Nearly 70% said they planned to provide more marketing coaching to lawyers.

Marketing coaching fills in where law school falls short on training. Firms are enlisting coaches who work one-on-one with their lawyers on how to keep up with existing clients and court new ones. While it's certainly not a new concept to the legal world, this kind of strategic networking becomes critical as business wanes. "As business falls off everywhere, all of us need to have an eye on where the next thing is coming from," says Edward Winslow, partner at Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard LLP, an 85-lawyer firm based in Greensboro, N.C.

To do that, the firm hired Tom Kane, a legal marketing consultant this February as part of 90-day pilot program to coach eight of his lawyers. For Ed Turlington, one of the lawyers in the program, Mr. Kane's weekly to-do lists -- which included having coffee with one client and sending a "get well" card to another -- helped drum up business elsewhere in the firm. In April, a client he had coffee with weeks earlier called about doing work in another practice area, a request Mr. Turlington referred to another attorney. "Everyday I need to be thinking about these existing clients," says Mr. Turlington of what he learned.

Brooks Pierce is one of a growing number of firms looking to Mr. Kane and outside consultants for coaching. Since March, Mr. Kane has gone from meeting with one or two clients a week to about 15. "I have never been busier than I have been in the last couple of months," he says.

Larry Bodine, an Illinois-based law firm business-development consultant, has been working nights and weekends to accommodate his new influx of clients, which has tripled from 20 to 60 lawyers since January. "Business development is not something taught in law school," he says. "Basically you spend three years reading appellate court opinions and you don't learn anything about building a clientele," he says.

While many firms are looking outside to hire coaches, others are ramping up internal efforts. At Boston-based Nixon Peabody, where the marketing budget is down 20% this year, chief marketing officer Mark Greene says there has been a distinct shift in how resources are allocated, with more emphasis on coaching individual lawyers. "A year ago the department was more focused on marketing in the traditional sense of brand creation," says Mr. Greene. "We have shifted resources toward one-on-one relationship building.

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