



# It's all about the client

**Elliot Moss offers insight into Mishcon de Reya's new business development strategy and reveals why selling should be less about what firms offer, and more about what clients need.**

**W**hen I left a high profile role in the advertising world to go in-house with my then former client, Mishcon de Reya (Mishcon), my aim was to bring more of the commercial 'client-first' thinking to the firm, which has historically (and successfully) relied on lawyers setting the path for marketing activities. The firm saw the value in taking its marketing activities to the next level and hoped hiring someone from a non-legal background would help them achieve this goal. The marketing team needed to be part of the business of the firm, rather than merely supporting it

Prior to joining the firm, I worked closely with Mishcon, helping them to refine their positioning in the legal market place. In my capacity as managing director of the advertising agency Leagas Delaney, I led the project that involved looking at what the competitive set said about themselves, what insiders believed Mishcon was about, what clients felt about the firm and what the firm's management believed it was in business to do.

The process unearthed two simple observations. First, firms talk a lot about themselves and what they offer. There is very little mention of clients and what they need. Second, the way in which law firms articulate what it is they do is almost identical. Take the copy from one website and replace it with another and you will be hard pressed to notice the difference. All firms are 'partner-led, meritocratic, value-motivated, innovative' and so on. The opportunity, therefore, was clear: develop a positioning that is true to the spirit and capability of the firm that is externally client-focused rather than internally focused and express the difference in a fresh and less clichéd use of language.

## **Great products need great marketing**

Elite law firms have not hired marketing professionals of the same calibre as their lawyers. If consumer goods manufacturer, Procter and Gamble, had taken that approach and allowed the intellectual strength to lie in their chemists, or sportswear retailers, Nike, had allowed their shoe designers to

retain full control of the direction of the company, then we probably would have heard of neither. Somehow, most law firms are convinced that only lawyers understand what they do. I understand this position, and have heard it recounted many times, even in the few months since I have been Mishcon's director of business development. But I worry about its implications. Indeed, I see its implications as I look at the elite firms' literature both online and off.

What this has led to, therefore, is a dissonance between the products and services that lawyers actually deliver, and the way in which they are marketed. The marketing is generally inferior to the product and I imagine this reinforces the lawyer's belief that marketing people simply don't get it. An intervention is required. Imagine if a law firm hired a team full of marketing experts of the same calibre as Procter and Gamble, Tesco supermarkets or a professional service firm like BDO Stoy Hayward or business consultancy Accenture. I am not suggesting that the

marketing talent isn't with some law firms, however I'm not convinced that their advice is actually being listened to and acted upon.

**An appetite for change**

I joined Mishcon because it was clear the management of the firm wanted to dramatically improve the way that it marketed itself. They believed that someone with over 15 years of experience in the communications and business-development world would be able to help transform their marketing. This belief, I know, is unusual in the industry – it takes an entrepreneurial attitude to make that decision in the first place, and to continue to back up the proposals for changing the profile of the team and the marketing output. Creativity applied to everything we say and do is now central to the business development ethos at the firm.

The process has been straightforward: the first step was getting everyone to agree that:

- We want to be focused on fostering a 'client first' culture;
- Talking about ourselves is not going to help us differentiate;
- We will be ruthless and single-minded in our pursuit of being client focused at every touch point;
- We want to articulate our position in a fresh non-clichéd manner;
- We will hire talent that is going to challenge the *status quo*;
- We will bring in a range of different skilled people to deliver against the various complexities that marketing and developing a professional service firm encounters; and,
- We will use external experts where appropriate to deliver internal and external communications that are

genuinely 'best in class' and that are as good as the best of other non-legal companies.

Structure and process need to be right, but they won't solve the problem alone.

Structures have to be elegant and simple to understand. However, these features alone do not guarantee the right results.

Getting the best out of those people already involved with business development has been a critical part of the plan. Four lawyers at the firm now work closely with the rest of the business development team; Lisa Hommel is practice development director working across all the practice areas; Susan Freeman, a real estate partner, also focuses on business development; Miles Geffin, a legal director in family, is the practice's professional support lawyer



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## Case study: Mishcon de Reya

and, Alexandra Fawcett, a solicitor in the public advocacy group, focuses on developing the practice.

Additionally, the department's link with the firm's knowledge management team and the information services (IS) function has been strengthened. The restructured teams now sit together in each practice area; business development and professional support lawyers sit together with IS people hot-desking around specific tasks.

### New talent by design

The new team is a collection of talented individuals from notably varied backgrounds – most of them have not previously worked in the legal sector. Together, they cover all the critical bases for developing and executing a strong marketing and business-development strategy.

from professional network business, Winmark, where she led the general counsel network. She understands what drives general counsels, what they are looking for, and has personal relationships with many of them. At a time when off and online communities are so important to business development, hiring someone with such a profile is critical.

The new position of strategic analyst, filled by Charlotte Bienvenu from Hilderbrant management consultancy, was created to deliver genuine business insights into our work with current and future clients. Insights that would ensure that a client felt we wanted to understand their business before we offered legal advice in a vacuum. She has a Masters in International Law – so again she possesses an affinity with the law.

strategy to life. This will manifest itself online and off, in media, our pitch approach, our approach to product development and marketing, our focused approach to client development, our approach to building meaningful and useful communities for our clients and referrers to be part of, and, of course, in a concerted internal communications drive. We will be tough on ourselves and measure the effectiveness of what we do. None of this can happen unless the team is part of the business of the firm rather than merely supporting it.

### Going forward

The future will require us to change the solutions we think are right today. The pace of both technological and economic change will require us to rethink our specific solutions. The

## Creativity applied to everything we say and do is now central to the business development ethos at the firm. Structure and process need to be right, but they won't solve the problem alone.

The new business development manager for litigation and private client, Verity Roberts, is from leading legal insurance broker, The Judge. She comes with a deep knowledge (equal if not more than most lawyers) of these insurance products, as well as a good overview of most of the elite law firms – having met the majority of them over the past year. She has a law degree and a natural affinity with, and interest in, the law.

The new business development manager for corporate and employment, Faye Gardiner, is from a leading UK brand consultancy, FutureBrand. She has experience of branding, client management and business development. She also has a law degree and an enthusiasm for, and interest in, the law.

The new senior business development executive in corporate and employment, Jenny Stebbing, comes

Underpinning all this new talent the talent that already exists within the firm to deliver against the important work that requires a pre-existing inside knowledge of how a law firm functions. This includes submitting entries to directories and awards as well as graduate recruitment processes.

### Connection to the business

The team, once assembled, would only work well if they not only understood the business of the firm, but they also placed themselves 'in the hub' of firm business processes both physically (there is no central area for the team – everyone sits in the practice areas) and intellectually. I am asking a lot of the team. I want them to understand what clients really need beyond what we and the lawyers might think they need.

We will be engaging in a number of areas that will bring the 'client-first'

messaging will change; the form in which we engage in pitches will change; and, the nature of the products will change. But what will not change is our client-focused approach. That will define how we articulate what we do and how we behave towards our clients and prospective clients. By definition, our clients' needs change rapidly; many of them have an entrepreneurial mind set. We always strive to understand this because our understanding will lead to deeper and more profitable relationships with clients. Our mantra is shamelessly stolen from Procter and Gamble's simplest articulation of their approach: 'the client is always the boss'. As long as we stick to that, we'll be okay. LegalMarketing

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