



Prepare for 2022 Trends – Four Areas of Focus

By Ioana Good

Things change. The past few years brought many disruptors to businesses of all kinds, driving new methods for conducting business, using new technology applications, and adapting to regulatory changes. Legal marketers and change are not exactly strangers, though. They have always lived in a space where services and products constantly evolve. They've made vast adaptations during the pandemic, abruptly shifting from in-person marketing to nearly 100% digital marketing efforts. The industry has also spent a significant amount of time teaching new concepts internally and pushing teams and firms to forge ahead.

As the recovery continues, change will also. Will people yearn to return to the old routines or continue to embrace habits they developed to adapt to covid? Where will they focus their efforts as they reach the post-pandemic consumer? What areas of marketing will they invest in more in 2022? Here are four trends to look for in the new year.

Hybrid Marketing and Technology Efforts Will Elevate a Firm's Offering

While the pandemic forced event cancellations, the movement towards virtual platforms has been a success. Now, businesspeople can have multiple meetings across the country in one day and be much more efficient rather than spending an entire day traveling for one meeting.

"Many of the online efforts are here to stay, and so will the investment in the technology that supports those efforts," said Barbara Bell Malin, Chief Business Development & Marketing Officer at Jackson

Walker LLP. “Interestingly, at Jackson Walker, we’ve seen clients express a clear preference for webinars over in-person CLE programs.”

For example, the firm holds a well-attended half-day symposium every year. This year, instead of offering the symposium in person or a single half-day webinar, they decided to offer it as a series of five, one-hour virtual presentations. The firm specifically included feedback on the format in their post-event surveys to determine if they should plan to go back to holding the in-person event next year. “The clients who responded have overwhelmingly indicated that they prefer the multiple one-hour webinar format over either an in-person event or a longer webinar,” said Malin.

The challenge, of course, with a migration to a marketing mix that includes a heavier focus on online efforts is that it is far easier to build relationships in person. The result is that firms need to be much more intentional in understanding client needs. “That is probably part of why we see so many firms determining that now is the time to make investments in things like client feedback, business intelligence tools, experience management platforms, and improved contact management systems,” says Malin. “Standing alone, none of these are novel. But what does seem new is a real drive to synthesize all of the internal and external data firms have about their clients and their client’s needs to develop an integrated understanding of how to better serve them and acquire new clients.”

Content and Public Relations Will Never Be More Important

If you’ve studied successful brands over time, you know they were not born that way. They work at it every day, delivering three essential items: credibility, authority, and visibility. To be leaders in their field, firms will need to align their public relations efforts with thought leadership and SEO. It is not enough to be mentioned once; credible brands do it repeatedly. Those who provide valuable content vs. promotional content will always remain at the top of the search engines.

For instance, Ball Janik LLP, a bi-coastal firm focused on real estate, land use, and construction law, recognized more had to be done after the Surfside condominium collapse of Champlain Towers South in Miami, FL. They encouraged building owners and tenants to reevaluate the condition of their buildings and be proactive. Firm lawyers received many questions. “The awful tragedy that occurred in Surfside ultimately led to building owners and tenants questioning the safety of their own properties. With Ball Janik’s focus on construction defect law throughout Florida, we had a huge opportunity to educate the community on safeguarding their properties and warning signs to look for. We approached this not only in the residential and community association industry, but crossed over into the commercial, affordable housing, and hospitality industries as well,” said Elle Walch, who oversees marketing and business development at Ball Janik LLP.

“Our firm lawyers participated in news stories, wrote articles, and hosted webinars to offer tips on how to handle construction defects which can devastatingly impact revenue and raise health and safety concerns for residents.

Once you build a solid authority based on different topics, firms can add credibility by receiving third-party endorsements from the media. Tagging and sharing on social media, posting on the firm website, and sending eblasts to target lists are good tactics to increase awareness and provide value to your end-user.

Corporate Citizenship Will Play a Critical Role

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that we must take care of one another and do good in our communities. At Promova, we have seen a significant increase in companies raising their hand in service. This trend will continue to increase, and a well-rounded marketing plan should outline partnerships with nonprofits that need help. Not only is it the right thing to do, but this should align with the philanthropic missions that are important to the firm's recruitment and retention efforts.

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, more than 1.5 million registered nonprofits in America exist. Corporate giving should be a well-thought-out process. It should include goals, percentage of sales donations, or corporate sponsorship to support organizations that align with your company's goals. These partnerships should be promoted through firm websites, social media, and public relations efforts. Some may feel it is strange to promote corporate giving, but the reality is that it helps both the nonprofit and the firm by shining a light and creating more exposure for both.

Increase in Use of Technology and Continuity Planning

Investment in technology as a tool for communication and marketing will continue. As firms plan budgets, there will be new line items for investment in CRM, data analysis, and content distribution. These investments will focus on serving existing clients and how to create new opportunities and win clients. In-person events may begin to increase again, but the industry has recognized that technology can become a strong complement to "traditional" ways of doing business.

Another trend is an investment in risk management and business continuity planning. The pandemic took us by surprise and exposed the need to better plan for unforeseen events. Firms will invest time and money in planning for business interruptions and responding to them. Marketing should always have a seat at the table in these projects as the core of success is effective communication.

As firms prepare their budgets and marketing plans, these four trends will help you stay ahead of the curve in 2022. As marketers, we must be aware of the initiatives impacting our firms and clients to find success as we move into a new year!

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