

PRE-CONFERENCE PREVIEW

CHANGE...NOW WHAT?

2009 LMA Conference Changes How You Manage Change

When change presents itself, rarely do we eagerly respond, “Yes, please.” Change can be daunting, and it can be exciting. Most people believe it’s inevitable – and it will be this year at the Legal Marketing Association’s annual conference. Emerging ideas on what to expect in technology, social responsibility, firm management and leadership are all on the agenda. All those big issues that fill your daily to-do list.

Operating at the center of this sea change, there is a constant – you.

Change influences your work, professional development and ambition. The more change abounds, the less it revolves around the specifics of an initiative or pilot program. Hitting at such a rapid pace, successful change becomes about how you manage new events, people and realities, welcome or not.

What’s New? Everything

Managing change provides a timely theme for a springtime conference in Washington, D.C., LMA members and friends will gather in a city awash with new leadership. Fresh ideas, people and potential will enliven our surroundings. Simultaneously, within our law firms, LMA recognizes that the groundswell of change is unprecedented. Phrases like “catching our collective breaths” and “harnessing the power” regularly appear in legal marketing literature, describing our wish to embrace change before it overwhelms us.

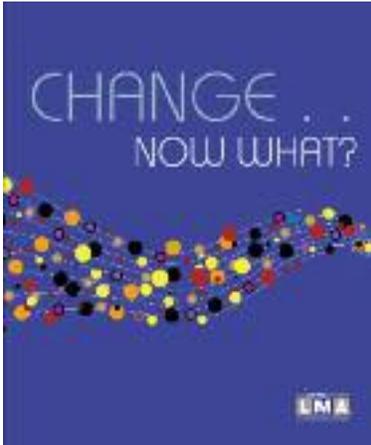
One area where many legal marketers feel the most vulnerable to change is in technology. Rightfully so. “Technology is always changing. You can’t keep up with every piece of it,” according to Per Casey, LMA Technology Committee Chair and president of Tenrec. If that is how a law firm technology and Web development company founder views technological evolution, is there any hope for civilians?

Yes. Stop trying to master each innovation.

What’s Next? Sharing

Frequently, legal marketers become stuck on the latest, greatest tools, observes Casey.

Instead, he advocates evaluating, processing and leveraging what’s new, focusing less on tech specs and more on the benefits. He’d like to see firms reach beyond static Web sites and enhance client relationships by giving away fresh content and knowledge. Another needed area of change, says Casey, is how marketers communicate their firms’ technology to clients.



Technology that clients care about is already the big message for some firms, such as at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. The firm provides more than 900 client-facing extranet sites, a collaboration between the knowledge management (KM) department, IS, attorneys and marketing teams.

Akin Gump’s KM director, Mary Panetta, believes that whichever firm responds to corporate counsels’ increasing demands for law firms to share their work in a central location, and delivers it elegantly, wins a competitive advantage. For Panetta, “Whenever we view changes through the single lens of technology, we’ve missed

the ‘why’ and benefits of change.”

Why Change? Because Clients Say So

The whys driving change in law firms include better business intelligence, automating billing and proposals, and leveraging the power of social networking.

When asked to adopt Facebook by his marketing department, Matt Kesner, chief technology officer at Silicon Valley’s Fenwick & West LLP, refused initially with the directive, “No outside applications.” And Facebook was even a client of the firm. Eventually finding the common ground with marketing, Kesner’s resistance changed to acceptance and enthusiasm, and now Facebook is part of the firm’s marketing resources. “Marketers need to keep pushing IT, eventually we’ll get it,” says Kesner.

Keep pushing. Keep changing. That’s the conversation LMA invites you to join at this year’s conference. New perspectives, such as those from our technology thought leaders, will educate, provoke and inspire you. They might even change you. Let us show you the fun side of change.

Next Installment: Change, Social Responsibility and Law Firms

The 23rd Annual LMA Conference takes place April 1-4, 2009, at the Gaylord National Harbor Resort in Metropolitan Washington, D.C. For more information, visit the online events section at www.legalmarketing.org.



Written by Amy Spach, Principal of AS Written Communications. Ms. Spach helps law firms change and create Web content, articles and marketing materials. She can be reached at www.aswritten.com or 323/876-6374.