CHANGING THE WORLD

LMA Conference Leads on Corporate Social Responsibility and Law Firms

By Amy Spach, AS Written Communications

Enacting change in law firms can often feel like a task for Sisyphus, the mythic character who ceaselessly pushed the boulder up a hill as it continually rolled back by its own weight. So the thought of initiating change beyond your own firm, especially in the areas of social and corporate responsibility, can be overwhelming.

Managing the challenges of change is the theme of LMA's 2009 conference and change within the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a primary focus. It has to be. CSR is influencing how firms view their clients, communities and the global market. Law firms must answer the wake-up call from the outside world to remain competitive.

Calling for Change

Clients are perhaps the most compelling force, if not the initial driver, in the demand for greater social action and corporate citizenship.

In the past decade, global corporate leaders have expected action in diversity and expansion in pro bono programs. No longer content just to demonstrate their own values, clients require that the people representing them also be representative of their corporate creeds.

Big muscle, such as Wal-Mart's corporate law department, issued diversity imperatives that law firms could not refuse. Aided in many areas by marketing and recruiting departments, law firm diversity efforts have bourgeoned and are significant today. From hiring chief diversity officers at the partner level to aggressive minority recruitment programs, firms realize that meaningful institutional moves are required to change the social fabric.

Change, One Styrofoam Cup at a Time

Over the past few years, CSR in law firms, and throughout the world, has meant green initiatives and environmental stewardship.

Spurred by last year's "Law Office Climate Challenge," a joint effort between the American Bar Association and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, law firms seek green best practices and resources. The blueprint for going green is as varied as nature and there are many inspiring leads for legal marketers to follow.

One standout is the Legally Green(SM) initiative by global law firm Nixon Peabody LLP. Its comprehensive program includes the first chief sustainability officer in a U.S. law firm and establishing the first law firm office in the U.S. to be certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) in the category of "Commercial Interiors."

According to Rachael Loper, the industry teams manager in the Washington, D.C. office, the green and renewable energy practice evolved from its tax credits practice and grew through concerted efforts by several attorneys and staff. The marketing department helped build the multidisciplinary practice through speaking engagements, seminars, branding efforts and media coverage.

Pushing Change Forward

Part of the equation in social change is not just doing well, but helping others do well too. That's exactly the mission of Thompson Hine's Director of Business Development Alvidas Jasin.

In conjunction with the successful implementation of his firm's Think Green program, Jasin speaks to law firms nationwide about launching their own green projects. He urges firms to "be inclusive and involve teams of people representing everyone, at all levels and geography."

Everyone having a stake in the common whole is the basis of social responsibility. LMA invites you to have a stake in the 2009 LMA Conference, "Change...Now What?" Join your fellow law marketing professionals at the at the Gaylord Resort and Conference Center, National Harbor, MD (greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area) where we can all do a world of good. More information on the conference, is at www.legalmarketing.org.

Next *Strategies*: Changing You

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