

THOUGHT LEADER PROFILE

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BETH MARIE CUZZONE,
Director of Business
Development,
Goulston Storrs

This is the 12th installment in a monthly series profiling "thought leaders" in the field of legal marketing and client development. Each installment features the thoughts of a different expert in legal marketing on a topic that they see as a critical concern. This month's profile features Beth Marie Cuzzone, the director of business development for Boston-based Goulston Storrs and the leader of a marketing department ranked among the top 10 in the country by American Lawyer Media's, "Marketing the Law Firm." Profiles are created and produced by the LMA Resources Committee thought leaders Catherine Alman MacDonagh and John Cunningham.

Innovative Marketing That Produces Results

BY JOHN O. CUNNINGHAM

Given the outlook for 2009, marketing departments can expect to be challenged by the management mantra: "Do more with less." Marketing leaders who want to meet that challenge should consider looking to Goulston & Storrs, a 200-lawyer firm with offices in Boston, DC and New York, with just six full-time marketing professionals who have consistently produced innovative programs with substantial measurable results.

Beth Marie Cuzzone, the director of business development, who sits on the firm's executive committee, contends that "there is a direct relationship between individual empowerment and productivity." She also asserts that giving people "permission to fail" is the key to empowerment.

"Empowering people to fail gives them a sense of freedom, it makes them willing to stretch beyond their comfort zones, and consequently enhances innovation and collaboration," Cuzzone insists.

For example, Cuzzone points to an award-winning idea that expanded contacts with in-house counsel but was initially met with skepticism by firm lawyers because of its unusual nature. "Theresa Bomba, our marketing and business development manager, just said 'Trust me,' and we took a risk."

The result was a unique social event now imitated by others and lauded by the original participants from the Association of Corporate Counsel—a game of Jeopardy featuring legal teams that humorously battled over answers to categorical legal questions.

The firm's modest-sized marketing group has racked up many awards from LMA and other organizations for a slew of innovative programs, including:

- An electronic, print and multi-media advertising campaign highlighting successful transactions by the firm's clients as "done deals", which measurably increased the firm's market awareness by 23 percent in just three years.
- The first of its kind co-branding campaign with the TD BankNorth Garden's premium club, which hosts executive luxury suite owners who view the Boston Celtics, Boston Bruins and various Garden events. The partnership includes client entertainment, firm outings, market visibility and even a CEO Roundtable of Club members.

- A series of training videos featuring firm lawyers as actors in scenes that demonstrate the “do’s and don’ts” of client service, sales and interactions for Goulston Storrs University.

“We’ve had our failures, but there is never any retribution,” says Cuzzone. “Our philosophy is that every time you fail, you learn something from it,” she adds.

Cuzzone also asserts that her team’s productivity is directly related to a flat organizational structure that is unencumbered by ego-driven titles or layers of reporting. “Nobody has to seek out approvals to do their job. We are all innovators [but] we are all tradesmen as well. Everyone does windows in this department,” she adds.

Working Toward Empowerment

Beth Cuzzone offers the following suggestions for working effectively to nurture a culture of empowerment and productivity:

- Never take personal credit when ideas succeed. Emphasize “we” and not “I.”
- Remember your team is only as strong as its weakest link and take responsibility for strengthening each link.
- Communicate with others as equals. Do so regularly and proactively to set expectations and to set the table for acceptance of innovative ideas that may challenge current thinking.
- Remember that push-back is a valuable form of communication, and don’t react to it with hostility.
- Develop emotional intelligence if you want to be a leader and don’t rely on your title to get things done.

“We also commit time for creativity. We have a ‘3:00 thoughts’ program where department members leave the firm and devote two hours to thinking about new and practical ideas,” Cuzzone says, noting that these sessions have produced several innovations.

“For instance, Shawna Richard, our business development coordinator, came up with our sustainable service initiative this way. It includes a 20-minute initial service orientation and ongoing tools related to best practices and service tips for lawyers and staff who are new to the firm.” Cuzzone says.

Cuzzone emphasizes one other ingredient in Goulston’s success, calling it the “match and mirror approach” to dealing with lawyers. “We have to practice what we preach. Among other things, we coach lawyers to build relationships and learn about client industries while avoiding communications in legalese. So we, in turn, walk the floors for spontaneous visits with attorneys, we attend CLE programs to learn their business, and we avoid “marketing speak” as well.”

Cuzzone’s approach has yielded not only permission to fail from the lawyers, but uncommon repeated success!



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