



Beverly Landais and Matt Duggan

How does the 'world's leading global law firm' run marketing in its biggest and most profitable office? Baker & McKenzie's marketing and business development director and head of communications in London explain their approach to Neasa MacErlean.

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Baker & McKenzie is ranked seventh in terms of world fee income by Wikipedia. But it calls itself the 'world's leading global law firm' as it believes it is, essentially, more genuinely international than any other firm. Founded in 1949 by Russell Baker, the son of farmers in the US's Mid West, Baker & McKenzie was certainly way ahead of the game internationally until other firms started to catch up in the last decade. Whether it can continue to reap the benefits of having been there first, in many parts of the world, is something we will see in the next crucial ten years – as the big law firms slug it out on the international arena.

Despite the fact that it is so well-established, Baker & McKenzie suffers from certain big misconceptions in the public mind. Matt Duggan, head of communications in the London office, has been working to brush away two particular misunderstandings in the UK – that Baker & McKenzie is an American firm and that it has no domestic presence. In fact, the London office (established in 1960) is the biggest and most profitable Baker & McKenzie office in the

world (with 84 partners, 220 other lawyers, total headcount of over 700 and revenues in the financial year to June 2007 of £112 million). UK journalists are now starting to recognise this and, he says, to portray the firm as one "very much in the ascendancy" and one which is finding "great opportunities" in the City now regarded by many as the world's pre-eminent financial centre.

Duggan joined the firm in 2005 – when the firm moved to integrate the three different functions of business development, marketing and communications. The person who recruited him is Beverly Landais, marketing and business development director – the architect of the integration plan. "Some firms separate their business development and marketing functions," she says. "But it has worked much better for us to provide a service that is joined up." So now, when a partner approaches the marketing team, he or she can rely on the piece of news or intelligence being used in an integrated way across the most appropriate mediums – such as a basis for PR, client presentations, internal communications, events, award submissions and legal directories.

This article originally appeared in *professional marketing* magazine.
For further details go to www.pmforum.co.uk

This particular change in the way the 20-strong marketing team relates to partners is a good example of how the marketers are making themselves more and more valuable and accessible to the lawyers. In the interview with *pm*, Landais and Duggan probably spent slightly more time talking about how they are working on internal relationships than how they are relating to the firm's clients. They would attest this is because without strong internal relationships they wouldn't be in a position to support partners with their client management and development challenges

This process which involves highlighting business risks of concern to clients, the legal issues underlying them and then the services which Baker & McKenzie can offer. An example of this is the 'dawn raid hotline'. This was developed by the competition team, ready to provide an immediate response if competition authorities descend, as they do, on clients without warning, was packaged and promoted to General Counsel along with eight other services identified as being of value to boards of UK PLCs. Alongside this is, of course, the preventative service – advising clients on how to be whiter than white and, as important, seen to be whiter than white.

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When asked what the major marketing achievements of the last few years have been, Landais embarks by saying: “Over the last seven or eight years, we've really transformed our role from being just about communications. We have changed to being a business partner [with the partners].” The latest example she gives of this process is the way that partners and marketers worked together at the last annual partners meeting – held in October, in London. It was a huge event – bringing together 1,500 Baker & McKenzie partners, significant others and staff (a good proportion of the 10,000 who are on the Baker & McKenzie payroll worldwide). But,

These product lines are just two examples from “a plethora of opportunities” identified, according to Landais, by lawyers and marketers working in tandem together. She is now working with her global counterparts on a business risks process which they are building along the same lines.

Landais, with 25 years of business-to-business marketing under her belt, is one of the most senior professional marketers in the UK. Her status is reflected in the fact that she is a director and participates in committee discussions outside the remit of marketing. She

firm in the ascendancy

as well as conducting internal Baker & McKenzie business, there was a client side to the meeting – in the form of 15 client conferences and a one-day business forum for 30 in-house General Counsel. At the forum, partners and marketers worked together to design the presentation, discussion format and case study that were used for this event. The most interesting aspect of the day from the marketing point of view, however, was the way that partners (acting as facilitators) worked with marketers (acting as 'scribes'). On every table that included a General Counsel there was one facilitator to run the table and one scribe to make notes and follow up. “We've been moving towards this for some time,” says Landais. “We've tried to get under the skin of business internally.” What this means is that, rather than being support staff who rarely talk to clients directly, “business development and marketing staff now participate in discussions with clients.”

Being this close to clients helps the marketers to do the rest of their job better. For instance, marketing works shoulder to shoulder with partners on the firm's approach to Risk Management services.

has contributed to discussions on motions which, for instance, set the Baker & McKenzie strategy overall and the targets for its growth. “I'm very proud I'm considered as a business partner by the management committee,” she says. “And I can bring back a clear understanding of what senior management are looking for and want from the marketing and business development function.”

Baker & McKenzie are certainly going to need every ounce of marketing expertise they have in the next few years. Until now, you could say, the top ten law firms in the world have played a phoney war. Some of them were not really truly international – and some did not really understand what marketing meant. Even in the last couple of years some of the top firms have still been getting to grips with these issues. Now, however, they all accept that the way they market themselves to international clients is going to sort the winners from those that fall behind in the next decade or so. And in this battle it seems as if the Baker & McKenzie marketing team is going to be in the front line alongside the partners. It has won its place. Can it now help win the war?