



## *Well placed for the future*

Law firms have transformed their approach to marketing over the last few years – but what about barrister’s chambers? **Beverly Landais**, CEO of Devereux, one of the UK’s top commercial sets, and **Vince Plant**, head of clerking services, talk to *pm*.

**B**arrister’s chambers, or the Bar, have traditionally been a referral profession with Counsel being instructed by solicitors on behalf of their clients. Times are changing: access to counsel has opened up; new markets are being created and competition is fierce.

Devereux has stood out for its efforts to professionalise the way the chambers is run and focus on client service. Landais, formerly head of marketing at Lloyd’s of London and director of business development at Baker & McKenzie, comments “Devereux recognised the importance of client focus and the running of the set on modern business lines. This led to my recruitment in 2009 as their first ever CEO”.

Landais quickly set about defining the strategic challenges and mapping out a programme of activity to rebrand and reposition the chambers. A first step was the total refurbishment of their facilities. The refurbishment accomplished two objectives: enhancing the client experience and delivering a better physical working environment which, in turn, enables improved client service.

Landais also created a modern and efficient ‘Business Services’

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function. The result is a lean and efficient ratio of support staff to barristers. Landais was joined by Vince Plant as Head of Clerking Services in 2010. He believes that relationship building is the key to understanding the clients' needs. These include instructing solicitors and the clients they represent, as well as in-house lawyers from local authorities as well as blue chip corporates. "Our goal is to create a trusted adviser relationship and top quality performance delivery", says Plant.

Landais comments "Our 'Client Service Principles' help us maintain the highest standards. Our client service ethos is crystallised into four values: being focused on what really matters; being commercially astute; possessing excellence in depth; and being easy to deal with".

As Plant points out in professional services it is relationships that count. In his view people instruct those they know, like and trust. "The advice our barristers provide to all our clients enables them to meet challenges arising from new legislation and rapidly developing case law, but also delivers a pragmatic solution to problems", he says.

Improving the client experience is clearly a passion for Landais and Plant. "We don't believe that you can achieve long term success without truly understanding the activities and actions that can deliver a more satisfied client". This commitment to listening to clients is demonstrated through the set's Client Service Review programme which involves obtaining feedback on all aspects of the chambers. Landais says, "Clients comment on their service experience, clerking, fees and general involvement with Devereux



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Plant picks up this point. "In the majority of sets, it's just the senior clerk who gets involved in marketing and relationship management," he says. "At Devereux, at varying levels, there are six of us." There are three 'practice managers' among the clerking team and they carry out activities such as running "regular practice development meetings and dealing with the needs of clients". Plant continues, "Practice managers spend a considerable percentage of their day talking to clients. We've got direct access to clients far more than many professional services marketing functions would have". There are eleven people in the clerking team and another eleven in the administration/business services team which Landais heads and where marketing is located as a formal function.

What sticks out most in the conversation with the two of them is the high level of client event activity at the set. There can be as many as three or four events a week, according to Landais. These would include individual meetings with clients, mock hearings, joint training sessions put on with a law firm for a business client, breakfast meetings, seminars and roundtables (which are seeing "increased attendance and demand").

One of the strands of the set's marketing is added value in the form of training. "These add value through sharing knowledge," says Plant. "We also partner up with clients in terms of being a part of what they offer to their clients. That's also proved to be very successful in cementing the bonds between us."

The set also meets journalists and members write articles. "We have received instructions directly on the back of articles," says Plant. "It works." Members also write or co-write an impressive list of prominent text and practitioners' books. A particular innovation from the clerks is the provision of data analysis to the law firms that they serve.

The marketing effort in building reputation and brand awareness has meant that Devereux is widely recognised for the high quality of its work and of its client service. In the last year, the chambers have been recognised for outstanding performances by winning awards including 'Chambers of the Year' and 'Insurance Set of the Year'. "These awards promote the set's capabilities and provide a platform for further development", says Landais. As the competition heats up Devereux appears well placed for the future.

(which can include answering calls, meeting facilities and seminar/training events)". Plant emphasises, "We welcome feedback. It enables us to continuously improve and add value". Landais comments "We believe in modelling best practice and the programme enables us to do this".

The two discuss the success of the move to bring the clerking team within the marketing structure. Devereux has recently been nominated as 'Best BD Team of the Year' and 'Best Marketing and Communications Team of the Year' by The Lawyer Management Awards (to be announced this month). Landais says "I don't believe that effective marketing can be achieved without the involvement of clerks." She explains they take a client-centric approach to marketing, even their new website involved input from a panel of clients as well as barristers and clerks. "Our clerks are involved in CRM activities that build relationships and develop a solid understanding of clients' needs. For example, our senior clerks participate in Client Service Review meetings as well as relationship building through attending marketing events," explains Landais.

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