

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Recover, Refocus, Reunite—Reform?

By Jeff Scalzi & Melissa Hoff



He Said

As Andrew Zolli of Z+ Partners asked of us in Denver, I am in the midst of defining what the “new normal” is, both personally and professionally. Within the firm, current events seem increasingly to drive our collective focus each day. Reform has become the new catch phrase, attached with everything from healthcare to financial services. But how is this change visiting the law firm, and by extension, legal marketing and business development? How can we lead our firms in this area?

I write this edition of *He Said, She Said* in the middle of a reformation, which is exhilarating on some days and wearisome on others. This is my first column from my new post (or, at least, authored post-move), with new challenges and changing marketplace dynamics. Many of us have worked at numerous firms in the course of our legal marketing careers. It’s no surprise that my third office is a composite of my previous positions, replete with geographic and cultural nuances, as well as, firm-wide initiatives that are both familiar and yet markedly different.

Should there be a renewed focus on law firm diversity, which while always important, may seem very circa 2002? Perhaps. But what can be different and better this time? Most firms have adopted eco-friendly strategies, whether simply using recycled stationery or taking the initiative to build out LEED-certified offices, but what’s next in this area?

My seven-year-old son downloads apps on my iPhone (and, with more faculty than I). Were he to become a first-year associate in 15 years, what might he be doing then out in cyberspace? Does this mean a lawyer ‘tweeting’ today is something with which we should feel more comfortable? [Note: I am asking rhetorically, my opinions aside]. How can law firms turn the tables on industry trends and take the lead? Or, is the nature of law and legal practice inherently reactive to market forces? (Look, just because I am now working in NYC, I don’t mean to go all Carrie Bradshaw on you and end my comments with provocative questions. But more episodes will follow, certainly.)

Zolli’s insight into demographic trends and their effects on the marketplace suggests that we cannot afford to let several generations of legal marketers try with limited success to embrace new realities and affect change.

Over time, we will seek and find the answers. As we continue to reform, I look forward to the dialogue.

Jeff Scalzi, 212/768-6914, jscalzi@sonnenschein.com

She Said

Of the many valuable sessions at the LMA Conference in Denver, I found myself lingering on the presentation by Andrew Zolli. His humor, combined with his knowledge of the marketplace, made for plenty of lively post-presentation discussions among attendees. While we look to establish a “new normal” at our law firms, we can use some of the points raised by Zolli to inform our thinking about longer-term trends and goals.

In law firm marketing, we spend a lot of time thinking about emerging markets and growth industries, but we tend to spend less time focusing on bigger-picture matters like demographic shifts. Zolli spoke of several key shifts that have implications for our evolving industry, including a lower birth rate combined with a higher life expectancy; women outpacing men in terms of the number who receive college and advanced degrees; an aging population that requires care from adult children who in turn require greater flexibility to juggle the demands of work and family; and a generation of new leaders who are less socially invested and connected than the Boomers, but at the same time have an extensive online network and community.

Zolli also spoke about growing international markets like China and India and movements toward “greener” business practices—and he suggested that law firms are a bit behind the curve in terms of fully embracing these developments and building strategies around them.

Many of these trends aren’t new. For instance, “work/life balance” is hardly a new topic. That China is a growth market is not a surprise to anyone in our field. But even if we know the information, choosing to act on it is another matter. The implications are far-reaching, and influence how law firms recruit and retain new lawyers, the kind of work environment firms provide, how we identify and target buyers of legal services, and how we connect with those buyers. Like it or not, law firms are already feeling the effects of these demographic and cultural shifts, and it will only be more pronounced over the next five, 10 and 20 years.

As we look to recover, refocus and reunite as an industry, it seems that we are also on the cusp of some broader-based industry reforms—if we are prepared to look at the data and open a dialogue about the longer-term trends and all that they imply. ■

Melissa Hoff, 425/822-5262, melissa@mbhstrategies.com