

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Tactics for ‘Strategy’



By Jeff Scalzi & Melissa Hoff

He Said

A very un-strategic and cursory study of the AmLaw 10 firm websites uncovered at least 2,696 instances of the word *strategic*. I cite at least 2,696, as one of the sites seemed to populate additional pages with the word as I scrolled through its search results. They included everything from a lawyer describing herself as such, to the many references to “strategic advice.” It appears as though this word is used so freely that its meaning may be entirely lost. What exactly does *strategic* mean anyway? Does simply adding it to a phrase make it true? Not to mention, should LMA consider changing the name of this prestigious journal for which I write?

It’s certainly no secret that the best organizations are those that blend high-level — dare I say strategic — thinkers with tactical doers. As I continued my high-level research, my friends over at Wikipedia defined *strategy* as “a word of military origin ... refers to a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal.” Clicking over to the word *tactic*, our hypothesis seemed to be flashing before my eyes as I read the words, “tactics are the actual means used to gain an objective, while strategy is the overall campaign plan.” Another word of military origin. Hmm, law firms are sort of organized like the military if you think about it. I was on to something.

I know all too well the frustration of not having a moment in the day to truly *think*. But working in the law firm (and, I suppose, being on the front lines of a military operation) requires us all to combat a variety of moving targets each day. Everything from “I just received a RFP from a client that is due tomorrow morning” to “I have a pitch in an hour and need 15 packages pulled together.” We’ve all heard it. We make to-do lists to organize our professional lives. We help our lawyers develop business plans and slave over budgets with excruciating detail. Are we being *strategic* in these activities? Maybe, maybe not.

I agree wholeheartedly with my esteemed co-executive editor. Let’s give ourselves a break, people. It’s OK to be tactical some or even most of the time. Not everyone can be the General Petraeus of his firm (though many of us know law firm partners who think otherwise). But call a spade a spade. Save the use of the word *strategic* for those things that truly are. They need not be expensive or even long-term. Seize the opportunity to peel that proverbial onion when you can, and remember to always consult your latest issue of *Strategies: The Journal of Legal Marketing* for guidance. Yes, I said it, *Strategies*. Now back to that RFP. ■

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She Said

I’ve said before that I’ve always been a lover a words. But here’s a word, seemingly benign, that I am coming to despise: Strategic. Lately—or perhaps it’s always been thus, and I’m only now becoming intensely irritated by it—the word is ubiquitous. Everywhere there is talk of strategic alliances, strategic partnerships, strategic targeting, strategic planning, strategic recruiting, strategic client development, the increased need for improved strategy or changed strategy or perhaps just any strategy.

Of course, the question is: When *isn’t* strategy important? Isn’t strategy at the heart of target marketing—arguably the hardest aspect of legal marketing to get right? Strategy is and has always been important. However, when a word becomes overused or too all-encompassing, it loses meaning. Is strategy becoming a word that everyone uses and hopes that others will assume it as well? Or more provocatively: Is the word *strategic* used excessively to cover for a lack of it?

Not all of what we do falls under the category of strategic. And the mere act of describing something as strategic does not make it so. Perhaps the problem is most evident when we are attempting to prioritize projects and are under pressure to dedicate time and resources to a pet project that we know to be off-strategy. Often, and even in the most progressive firms and with seasoned marketers, we are expected to implement ideas, even if it means diverting resources from more worthy projects.

A shared definition of what it means to be strategic does not exist in any given context. Most legal marketers define strategic as digging beneath the surface, peeling back the layers of the onion—one thin layer at a time—to reveal the pith, the center of the issue, and devise a process that starts with the end goal and works backward. Of course, if we knew at the outset what would work and what wouldn’t, being strategic would become a moot point.

But strategy is not a moot point. It’s relevant to what we do—from the allocation of resources to the direction and guidance that we provide daily whether at the individual, group or firm-wide level. It’s fundamental to our role. Let’s not cheapen an important part of our work by declaring everything as strategic. Let’s own that which is, recognize that which isn’t, and acknowledge that the high-level and mundane aspects of our work can successfully coexist. ■

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