

Rebranding the Legal Department

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CEOs often say they want their General Counsel to be a strategic partner, but Legal Departments historically have been viewed as a cost center. Even after implementing all the Legal Operations best practices in the world, Legal can still feel trapped. So how can Legal change the hearts and minds of stakeholders in the organization? Perhaps it's time to look at how the business manages these changes to draw a roadmap for a Legal rebrand.

The Legal Department has a vision that aligns with the business—now it's time to share it so that leaders can digest it. Marketing specialists have created the 7 C's of an effective digital marketing strategy: Customer, Content, Context, Community, Convenience, Cohesion, and Conversion.

Start with the Customer

Before you roll your eyes, hear us out. We are not suggesting an awkward sales pitch. We are proposing that you refine and leverage the negotiation, persuasion, and presentation skills that already exist in the arsenal of a good Legal Department. In this case, the business is the Customer, and the Legal Department is the product they have to 'sell.' The best marketing comes from being authentic, and being authentic sometimes means putting a mirror up to acknowledge misaligned perceptions between how the business sees Legal and how Legal sees Legal.

Think about what the Customer (aka the business) needs from Legal, and communicate in language that directly addresses concerns, wants, and needs. We'll touch more on this in Context.

Content – The Rise of the Personal Brand

Social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn can be a catalyst for many businesses. They spread messages quickly and have also facilitated the rise of the personal brand. Sure, your Legal Department is one Legal team but showcasing individuals and allowing them to shine increases the Department's brand value and supports talent retention. We can learn from Social Media's ability to create and promote an individual's unique identity.

For example, Juanita is an excellent privacy attorney, but she's relatively new to the company, so people within the business do not know if or when to seek her advice. Promote her value by showcasing what she does and when to reach out to her in internal enterprise forums (intranet, email, etc.) Let her express her personality while illustrating how she adds value for her business clients daily. Juanita's skills will be clear to people within the business. By providing specific examples of her achievements they will feel more comfortable interacting with her in her areas of expertise. The Content is clear and focused.

One of the biggest fears we hear from Legal teams is that automation will hinder client relationship building. This is simply not true. It creates the space for individual team members to experience career growth and focus on strategic business initiatives, where the relationships are built.



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Convenience – Showcase Your Process & Technology

You have done the arduous mapping of your processes and implemented a new intake and workflow tool, so why has it not been getting much traction? Subtle reminders in Context (more on this later) can help. Layer how the business can reach Juanita through the quick and easy-to-use tool into her spotlight profile. Demonstrate how simple it is to work with the Legal Department while easing the administrative burden of your Legal team. Convenience builds brand loyalty, allowing Legal to build a community to help spread the word about the rebranded team.

Community – Harnessing the Power of Internal Influencers

Influencers have become commonplace in the lexicon of marketing and business. Do you want to sell shapewear? Find a celebrity who embodies the values and cache of your brand and sponsor them through ads where they demonstrate and positively talk about the product.

In pre-influencer-jargon days, Malcolm Gladwell labeled these folks 'Mavens' and described them as the "information brokers, sharing and trading what they know." Since Legal sells its services to the business, flip the 'cost center' phrase on its head and show how you provide value by building champions in the business. Have them talk up your services and how Legal provided value to them. Get a few Mavens involved in your cause, and the good news about Legal will spread like wildfire.

It doesn't always have to be an obvious connection, such as how Legal helped close a deal. Instead, identify a deeper value of the Team you want to promote and highlight. For example, publicize and encourage thought leadership or problem-solving. Find an internal influencer who can speak about how they think of Legal (or a particular individual within Legal) as a partner with whom they can brainstorm ideas while negotiating terms and who provides a few options to consider. Legal is uniquely poised to help here because it has knowledge of the pushback the business is likely to receive from the counterparty. Now you are working on the same team and building a stronger Community.

Context – Roadshow

When co-author Sumi was a capital markets attorney, she reviewed deck after deck of roadshow materials. Sure, it was her job, but she looked forward to reading it because she typically understood the deal better. The bankers told a story. Likewise, Legal needs to weave a coherent story about its transformation and why it embarked on this new model and rebrand. Questions to answer during the roadshow might be: Who are the people of the Legal Department? What do we do? Why do you need us?

After you align Legal's vision to the business, you can illustrate how Legal fits into the broader context of your target business audience's goals. How you do this depends on your organizations' culture, so think about the Context that the business needs and wants and use language that demonstrates your understanding of the customer's values.

Cohesion – Approach Legal Analyses Consistently but Allow Discretion

Now you've had some great wins, showcased the Legal team members, and had key stakeholders champion your rebrand. You've hosted a roadshow to tout the new and improved Legal team. All that is left is to deliver cohesively.

In marketing terms, Cohesion is a consistent brand presentation across all channels. Cohesion can be a complex idea for Legal teams who are used to dealing with many shades of gray. Put simply; Cohesion is a consistent approach to issues. If you follow Legal's established vision and mission, the team will operate cohesively. You'll avoid attorney forum shopping, leading to mismatched resourcing. The risk matrices you developed can guide risk tolerance of Legal as opposed to a single team member's discretionary decision. While team members are free to negotiate within guardrails, the business and the Legal Department should align on how much risk the business is willing to absorb. A Cohesive approach lets the Legal team know they are supported and creates a framework that the business understands and can rely on.

Conversion – KPIs

While conversion, or the measurement of success, is often evaluated at particular project milestones, it should be something you establish early in the process. It can be any desired action that helps Legal achieve its goals.



Typically these are key performance indicators or KPIs. If you're trying to measure the success of the newly implemented intake and workflow tool, try measuring the trends in response times to specific key questions, time to execution on certain self-service contracts, or the number of active users. Conversion measurements put rubrics around success, identify opportunities for continuous improvement, and create insights into areas where your business may need additional self-service tools.

Asking an organization to change its view of the Legal Department is not a trivial task. It requires a well-conceived strategy and a carefully crafted brand. If you love the idea of marketing Legal but are not sure where to start, the experts at UpLevel have unique experience in guiding organizations to build, promote, and evolve internal Legal brands. Come talk to us!

(See what we did there?)

Sumi Trombley practiced in law firms and in-house legal departments for more than a decade before coming to UpLevel Ops. Sumi previously served as Director, Legal at enterprise legal services provider Marshall Denning, LLC, where she managed and trained a team of junior and senior attorneys and developed and implemented resource optimizing processes for RFPs and pre-litigation disputes. She is known for her ability to provide strategic guidance and cost-effective solutions.

Prior to joining Marshall Denning, Sumi was Legal Counsel at Hewlett Packard Enterprise, serving as a de facto general counsel to top enterprise IT outsourcing accounts. She started her legal career at the law firms of Paul Hastings LLP in New York and Latham & Watkins LLP in DC, practicing corporate finance and securities law.

Sumi holds a JD from Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law, and a BA in Political Economy from Georgetown University. She is based in Maryland.

Heather Reid is a marketing and communications consultant, strategist, and content creator. She began her career as a newspaper editor and designer but quickly moved on to the (then) new Internet frontier, where she held nearly every online role, from technology to creative execution. Heather found her passion for digital branding and social media as an account executive for several agencies, including Critical Mass and R/GA, leading teams on a diverse range of clients such as SuperValu, Harley Davidson, Hawker Beechcraft, and SC Johnson.

She has a BS in Journalism from Medill at Northwestern University. Heather is also an essayist and freelance writer whose work has appeared in various magazines and culinary sites and at heatherreidwrites.com.

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