

## Somebody that I used to know....

Over that past 5 years I have engaged with at least 5 legal practices for a number of different requirements. I didn't particularly plan it that way, generally I try and maintain a great working relationship with just the one service provider – my thinking being that it promotes a deeper understanding of us, our preferences and our business that should ultimately benefit us.

One of the side effects of engaging with a new firm is that you subsequently find yourself on their mailing list and I now regularly receive various marketing communications from pretty much all the firms I have at some point engaged with. I'll save my thoughts on the relevance of these for another time, but for the moment suffice to say that by virtue of being on their respective mailing lists that it's very likely each firm considers me a client.

But am I? What specifically constitutes being a client? Is it just "somebody I used to know" to steal a line from pop culture? Or does the relationship need to be deeper than that?

When I consider my own perspective as a client, it occurs to me that I have reserved a degree of loyalty to a particular firm that served me exceptionally well many years ago but on closer examination I have never really been able to replicate that "sweet spot" since. Furthermore more, the mere fact that I have engaged with so many different firms perhaps suggests that "I still haven't found what I'm looking for" (sorry, I couldn't help myself). I guess I don't yet feel that I am a client of any specific firm just now even though conversely there are quite a few firms that consider me as their client.

The catchall term "client" can therefore be misleading and is distinctly different from "contact", which is likely to be a far more appropriate term for many of the individuals on your database. This distinction is hugely significant as it forces you to consider the true value of individual relationships and likelihood of further future engagement.

In reality then, it's the client's own sentiment towards you that determines whether or not they are an active client of your firm and any thoughts you may have in this respect are frankly irrelevant. However, understanding that an individual is really a contact rather than a client is empowering and offers you the opportunity to reach out and re-ignite a historic relationship. It's a fundamental principal of business that it's far easier to keep or renew a client than to find a new one. It's far more cost effective and likely to yield greater success than scrabbling for new clients, (only later to see them consigned to the "somebody I used to know" folder).

Ongoing client engagement is therefore essential and should be part of your regular contact activity. This should be all about client and where they are right now - opportunities and challenges, desires and wants, frustrations and delights – let them set the agenda through their feedback and you'll find a detailed road map of sentiment that leads to a meaningful, long lasting and profitable relationship.

So, if you haven't already considered client engagement as a key cornerstone of your business philosophy then you should do it as soon as you can, especially now as opportunities may be hard to come by and if you don't look after your clients, you can be sure that someone else will.