

Client relationship marketing practices: an exploratory study of the legal industry

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to identify practices used by marketing specialists and legal practitioners who have direct contact with clients in establishing and nurturing relationships with clients in the legal industry. In particular, it seeks to examine their responsibilities at different stages of the relationship development process. A conceptual framework is proposed to analyse the single case study of this research.

Design/ methodology/ approach –The relationship marketing practice of the marketing specialists and legal practitioners from a global law firm, Z (one of the ten largest law firms in the world measured by income in 2010) was examined through 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with key personnel.

Findings - Ten client relationship marketing practices by firm Z have been identified. Whilst organising and attending social events; managing the communications or interactions process; managing the cross-selling; service recovery; changing the impression; truly understand your clients' businesses and industries and other small little “gestures” are similar to the findings found in the previous study by Claycomb and Martin (2002), social bonds beyond professional level; treating every job seriously regardless of the size and utilising Client Relationship Management (CRM) software are three practices which have emerged from this study.

Research limitations/ implications – Although the ten practices presented are pivotal in contributing to a client relationship success, the effects of each practice should also be assessed. Further research is needed to develop a study to measure these effects and the quality of the client relationship. The underlying intention is to find ways to apply the practices more effectively.

Practical implications – This paper demonstrates that in order to succeed in the highly competitive marketplace; law firms need to understand not only the potential outcomes of each relationship marketing practice but also how to practice it systematically.

Originality/ value – A new relationship development process model incorporating the essence of the customer relationship life cycle was developed and its practicality was confirmed by the research findings.

Keywords Client relationship marketing practices, legal professions

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Earlier studies have demonstrated a paradigm shift away from the traditional marketing mix to a relationship marketing approach in the services industry (Levitt, 1983; Webster, 1992; Gronroos, 1994; Holmlund and Kock, 1996). Relationship marketing practice is vital, especially for the professional services industry, due to its distinct nature. Unlike tangible goods and business-to-business services, clients usually have difficulties evaluating professional services confidently not only prior to making a purchase commitment but also following purchase and consumption (Sharma and Patterson, 1999), because they often lack technical knowledge, skill, expertise and experience to do so (Darby and Karni, 1973; Bloom, 1984; Shemwell, Yavas and Bilgin, 1998). The intensifying of competition (Barr and McNeilly, 2003), a rapidly changing marketplace (Cravens and Piercy, 1994), globalisation (Buttle, 1996) and a declining public image of professional services (Vidal, 2011) has forced professional services firms (PSFs) to take relationship marketing more seriously. Recent studies have shown that service providers started to recognise building, maintaining and enhancing long-term relationships (Zinkhan, 2002; Eisingerich and Bell, 2007; Nitzan and Libai, 2011) with their clients is essential in improving a firm's market position (Yang and Peterson, 2004) and in increasing its financial performance (Barry, Dion and Johnson, 2008; Liang, Wang and Farquhar, 2009). Numerous scholars have contributed to buyer-seller relationship marketing literature by proposing different conceptual models. In order to identify relationship marketing practices by marketing specialists and legal practitioners at different stages of the client relationship development process, three relationship development process models (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Wilson, 1995; Ford et al., 1998) and a customer relationship lifecycle model (Gronroos, 2000) have been revisited and carefully examined. Although these models differ somewhat, they all recognise that relationship marketing practice is not limited to marketing specialists, but in fact also require a commitment from practitioners from departments other than the marketing department who have direct contact with customers. This explains why this paper focuses not only on relationship marketing practices by marketing specialists but also includes legal practitioners in the research.

Whilst extensive research has examined what firms could and should be doing in relationship marketing practice (Gronroos, 2000; Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne, 2002; Claycomb and Martin, 2002; Sin et al., 2002; Roberts, Varki and Brodie, 2003; Huntley, 2006; Theron and Terblanche, 2010; Alvarez, Casielles and Martin, 2011), little effort has been given to finding out how law firms actually implement relationship marketing in developing relationships with their clients at different stages in the relationship development process. This constitutes a major gap in the existing literature since an understanding of the relationship marketing practices currently in use is essential for PSFs in order to sustain and prosper in the highly competitive marketplace. ***The objective of this paper is therefore to identify practices used by them in establishing and nurturing relationships with clients in the legal industry. In particular, it seeks to examine the responsibilities of marketing specialists and legal practitioners at different stages of the relationship development process.***

This paper consists of four sections; firstly, the literature regarding the importance of relationship marketing practice in the professional services industry is reviewed and conceptual models proposed by previous scholars pertaining to the relationship development process and the customer relationship life cycle are examined. Secondly, the research methods employed for this paper are discussed; the findings are then presented and discussed within the context of the literature with reference to the conceptual framework proposed. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion on the implications and limitations of the findings and directions for future research.

Earlier research and the conceptual models

The importance of relationship marketing practice in the professional services industry

In recent years, relationship marketing, which recognises the importance of relationship building and management in doing business, has emerged as a sophisticated new marketing practice. Relationship marketing has been studied by many scholars in an industrial marketing context (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Coote, Forest and Tam, 2003) and in a services industry context (Cyr et al., 2007; Eisingerich and Bell, 2007; Barry, Dion and Johnson, 2008; Liang, Wang and Farquhar, 2009; Theron and Terblanche, 2010; Alvarez, Casielles and Martin, 2011). A paradigm shift from the marketing mix approach towards relationship marketing has been observed (Levitt, 1983; Webster, 1992; Gronroos, 1994; Holmlund and Kock, 1996). This is due to the traditional marketing mix approach providing an incomplete picture of what happens in business markets (Ford et al., 1998) and does not sufficiently capture all the key elements which must be addressed in building and sustaining relationships (Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne, 2002). For example, during the service consumption or usage process where the interactions involve non-marketing staff, the importance of relationships is not taken into account and is not being managed properly (Gronroos, 2000). Levitt (1983) argues that a seller's focus should shift from simply landing sales and ensuring buyer satisfaction after the purchase to maintaining constructive interaction with buyers.

Today, the focus of marketing has progressed from a simplistic idea of "giving the customers what they want" to building and maintaining mutually satisfying long-term relationships with clients and developing long-term strategies for client retention (Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne, 2002; Reinartz and Kumar, 2003, Xu, Goedegebuure and Van der Heijden, 2006). This new paradigm asserts that buyer and seller are engaged in a mutual exchange situation where both parties benefit from the relationship (Gounaris, 2005). Firms benefit from the increasing sales and volumes, declining operating costs and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Gilpin, 1996; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990; Gronroos, 2000), whilst customers benefit from risk reduction in complex transactions (Hart and Hogg, 1998) and have the ability to control, reduce and potentially eliminate the transaction costs (Buttle, 1996).

Due to the fact that the customer interface is broader in the services industry, the functional quality which relates to the customer's perception of the various interactions with the firm (Gronroos, 1994) should not be neglected because firms have the opportunity to provide its customers with added value (technological, information, knowledge and social).

This is inevitably true for professional services where the differentiation of the service offerings is low and when competitors provide a similar technical solution (Gronroos, 1994; Wang and Mowen, 1997). Their technical as well as functional skills thus become a critical source of differentiation (Sharma and Patterson, 1999). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the relationship marketing approach is essential for businesses seeking to differentiate their offerings from those of their competitors. This has led to many professional services emphasising their business not only on the service delivery but also on the quality of their customer relationships (Dibb and Meadows, 2001).

The overall objective of relationship marketing is to build, maintain and enhance a long-term buyer-seller relationship. Enduring relationships with customers can provide firms with a unique and sustainable competitive advantage (Liang, Wang and Farquhar, 2009) because it is not easy to be duplicated by competitors (Buttle, 1996; Perrien and Richard, 1995). Without any sense of relationship, unfaithful customers can be fickle and switch easily to competitors by taking advantage of the low prices or other deals offered by other suppliers (Holmlund and Kock, 1996). This fickleness has fostered a growing sense of awareness of the long-term financial benefits relationship marketing can convey. Relationship marketing is based on two economic arguments: it is more expensive to win a new customer than it is to retain an existing customer (Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos, 1994); the longer the association between a company and a customer the more profitable the relationship for the firm (Buttle, 1996). This is further supported by Gronroos (2000) who introduced a three-phase customer relationship life cycle: initial phase, purchasing phase and consumption or usage phase. He argues, it is always cheaper to make a satisfied customer purchase again compared to taking a new customer through the customer relationship life cycle to the end of the purchase stage. In other words, it is more fruitful to have as many profitable long-term customer relationships as possible. Reichheld and Sasser (1990) have observed a cross-industry trend and discovered sales and profits per account rise the longer a relationship lasts. According to Reichheld and Sasser (1990, p.107), *“as the credit card company cuts its defection rate from 20% to 10%, the average lifespan of its relationship with a customer doubles from 5 years to 10 and the value of the customer more than doubles – jumping from \$134 to \$300”*. Although Reichheld and Sasser (1990) found that the typical service firm loses about 20 per cent of its customers annually, those that can reduce their customer defection rates by 5 per cent could increase their profits from 25 to 85 per cent, depending on the type of company. Reichheld and Kenny (1990) indicate in similar findings that even a small improvement in customer retention for retail banks leads to higher margins and faster growth. These findings have prompted businesses to build, maintain and enhance long-term mutually beneficial relationships with its target customers in order to maximize its customer retention performance and to increase sales, growth and profitability (Sin et al., 2002; Reinartz and Kumar, 2003, Yang and Peterson, 2004; Rust and Chung, 2006; Barry, Dion and Johnson, 2008).

The relationship development process models revisited

The process of relationship development has become “strategic” and is accelerated as firms strive to achieve their goals by creating long-term mutually beneficial buyer-seller relationships (Wilson, 1995). Wilson (1995) stresses the expectations of performance have

increased, making the development of a profitable relationship even more difficult. Numerous scholars have contributed to buyer-seller relationship marketing literature by proposing different conceptual models of the relationship development process (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Wilson, 1995; Ford et al., 1998). Three models have been identified and these models are conceived as a series of sequential stages which demonstrate the shift from transactional to relational exchange. They have developed from the conceptual work with underpinnings in the social exchange theory (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987), the collaborative relational exchange (Wilson, 1995) and the business markets (Ford et al., 1998).

The relationship development process model proposed by Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, (1987) contends that buyer-seller relationships evolve through five general stages identified as awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment and dissolution by contrasting discrete and relational exchange using concepts from modern contract law. Looking at the mergers, acquisitions and joint venture relationships, Wilson (1995) conceptualises the relationship development process into five stages: partner search and selection, defining purpose, boundary definition, creating relationship value, and hybrid stability. On the other hand, Ford et al. (1998)'s model explicitly recognises that managing business relationships is not merely about moving the relationships towards the ideal state. In fact, it involves a considerable effort from both parties in coping with different circumstances that occur at different times including managing varying aims and expectations. They propose a four-stage buyer-seller relationship development model. This model consists of the pre-relationship stage, exploratory stage, developing stage and stable stage. Although the above three models differ somewhat, they all offer information on how a relationship develops over time and the benefits of moving buyers from one stage to another. In general, relationship development process can be divided into pre-relationship, exploratory, expansion and stable stage. ["Except where indicated otherwise, the description of the relationship development process set out in this section is drawn from Ford et al. (1998:25–40)"]. The "pre-relationship" stage is the initial stage of the relationship development process. At this stage there are many uncertainties and very little trust between the buyer and seller. A considerable two-way communication is required to evaluate the benefits of forming a relationship and to assess the investment and adaptation required to make the relationship work. In addition, the external marketing efforts such as advertising and branding are vital to create a clients' awareness towards the brand or service offerings by the firm (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987).

Subsequently, a series of discussions and negotiations about a possible purchase of a business service or a piece of capital equipment will initiate the "exploratory" stage. At this stage, there is a high possibility that a trial purchase will take place. This is the stage where the expectations for promising future interactions will be formed (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987). The pattern of the interactions between both parties is vital in determining the future tone and structure of the relationship. The exchange outcomes at this stage will demonstrate the ability and willingness of the seller to deliver satisfaction to the buyer (Blau, 1964). In addition, the attractiveness of the buyer will increase by fulfilling the perceived exchange obligations in an exemplary manner (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). According to Wilson (1995), defining the purpose of the relationship will help the exchange partners to clarify their mutual goals.

Mutual considerations and interactions are important elements to move the relationship into the “expansion” stage as direct experience is likely to be the principal basis for judging the quality of the relationship (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987). “Expansion” refers to the increased interdependency between the buyer and the seller and the continual increase in benefits obtained by exchange partners (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987). A relationship is in the “expansion” stage when the uncertainties of the two companies about each others’ abilities and ambitions have been reduced and the business is growing in volume or changing in character in a positive way.

The stable stage could take place after the delivery of a product and service has become routine. This stage in a relationship can lead to the establishment of trust, standard operating procedures and business exchange norms. Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) refer this as “commitment”, the most advanced stage in the buyer-seller relationship. According to them, “commitment” refers to the stage where exchange partners have achieved a high level of satisfaction from the exchange process which in turn motivates both parties to stay in the relationship and to exclude other primary exchange partners who could provide similar benefits. In conclusion, these models clearly demonstrate the process and the benefits of developing a buyer-seller relationship from one stage to another.

The customer relationship life cycle model revisited

Gronroos (2000)’s customer relationship life cycle model outlines the responsibilities of service providers in different phases of the relationship life cycle. It provides a useful guideline on how to incorporate the traditional marketing mix approach more effectively with interactive marketing efforts. According to Gronroos (2000), the life cycle consists of three basic phases: the initial phase, the purchasing phase and the consumption or usage phase. [“Except where indicated otherwise, the description of the customer relationship life cycle set out in this section is drawn from Gronroos (2000:236–260)”]. At the “initial” phase, the traditional marketing mix approach plays a very important role in generating the interest of buyers towards the firm and its services. When the need arises, prospective clients will move into the “purchasing” phase.

During the purchasing process, the service provider should turn the general interest of a prospect into sales by giving promises or undertaking. At this stage, the traditional marketing mix practice and the interactive marketing efforts are both vital. Interactive marketing efforts are marketing tasks performed by the service provider during the service production and consumption process. In other words, the service provider is responsible for managing the moments of truth in the buyer-seller interactions (service encounter). The positive outcomes of these interactions will motivate the customer into making a first purchase. This takes the customer into the “consumption” phase.

At the “consumption” phase, the traditional marketing function as defined by the 4Ps of the marketing mix is limited due to the nature of the interaction process required. During the “consumption” process, Gronroos (2000) stresses that the interactive marketing function should be given priority where the service provider should focus on creating interactive marketing impact by providing effective process-related functionality as this offers firms with the opportunity to provide customers with added value. The ability of the firm to take care of the customer’s problems and to fulfil its promises will increase the customer’s satisfaction. If

the customer is satisfied with the perceived service (technical and functional) quality of the total service offerings, it is more likely that the customer relationship will continue. This in turn will potentially generate the possibility of repeat purchase and cross-selling. In short, interactive marketing effort is vital especially during the consumption process in developing a customer relationship. Whilst traditional external marketing efforts are still important, it is more of a supporting role and mainly only present in the “initial” and “purchasing phases” of the life cycle. In conclusion, this model highlights the importance of interactive marketing efforts at each phase in building and enhancing a buyer-seller relationship. It provides a useful guideline to incorporating the traditional marketing mix approach with interactive marketing efforts (Gronroos, 2000). Table 1 summarises the models of the relationship development process and customer relationship life cycle mentioned.

Advantage and disadvantage of the models

After considering the models, we agree that client relationship models clearly demonstrate the process and the benefits of developing a buyer-seller relationship from one stage to another, but unfortunately the “purchasing” and “consumption” phase highly emphasised by Gronroos (2000) in his customer relationship life cycle model have not been captured. These phases are important for this research as it demonstrates different phases require different interactive marketing efforts in building a sustainable client relationship. On the other hand, the customer relationship life cycle model had drawn our attention to the interactive marketing tasks at each phase. However when it comes to the study of client relationship marketing practices by service providers, it does not provide a complete picture of the client relationship development process. It stresses that positive outcomes of the interactions will move customers from the “purchasing phase” into the “consumption phase”, but it has not explained that the “purchasing phase” and “consumption phase” can in fact occur at the “exploratory” stage and “expansion” in the client relationship development process with different sets of relationship marketing practices. For example, the first purchase (trial purchase) by the buyer is to explore the ability of the service provider in delivering the service as promised. We believe at this stage the marketing effort required to motivate clients into the “consumption phase” is different from the effort needed when the satisfied buyer is returning for further purchases or is comfortable to be cross-sold by the same firm at the “exploratory” stage. In view of all the reasons outlined, a conceptual framework (Figure 1) is developed to analyse our research.

Table 1. Theoretical Underpinnings to Develop Conceptual Framework

	Models of Relationship Development Process			The customer relationship life cycle
Author(s)	Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987)	Wilson (1995)	Ford et al. (1998)	Gronroos (2000)
Stages/ phases	Awareness Exploration Expansion Commitment Dissolution	Search and Selection Defining Purpose Boundary Definition Creating Relationship Value Hybrid Stability	Pre-relationship Stage Exploratory Stage Developing Stage Stable Stage	Initial Phase Purchasing Phase Consumption/ Usage Phase
Applying to	Buyer-seller relationship	Buyer-seller relationship	Buyer-seller relationship	Buyer-seller relationship
Focal area	Industrial and consumer relationship	Collaborative relationship (mergers, acquisitions and joint ventures)	Business relationships	Services industry
The concept	This model offers sufficient generality to cover both inter-firm and consumer relationships but lacks empirical detail to operationalise key variables outlined	The relationship variables have been incorporated in this model but the characteristics of other forms of buyer-seller relationships which are not bounded by legal structures have not been fully addressed as the focus of this model has been geared towards mergers, acquisitions and joint ventures	This model demonstrates the process and the benefits of moving a buyer-seller relationship from one stage to another	This model highlights the importance of interactive marketing efforts at each phase in building and enhancing a buyer-seller relationship. It provides a useful guideline to incorporating the traditional marketing mix approach with interactive marketing efforts

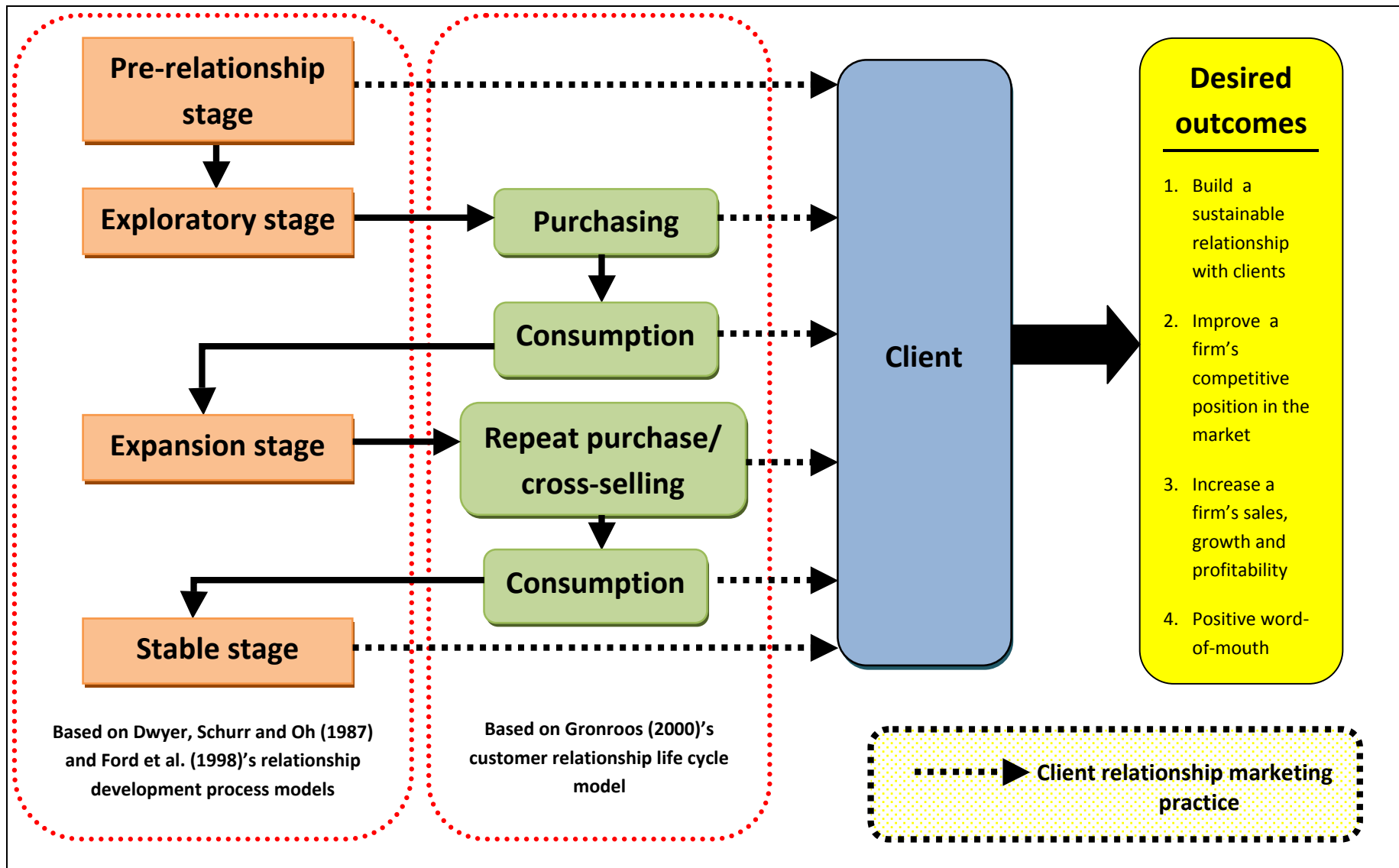


Figure 1: Client relationship marketing practices at different stages of the relationship development process towards achieving the desired outcomes of a firm (conceptual framework). Based on Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987), Ford et al. (1998) and Gronroos's (2000)

Research methodology

The research methodology is based on qualitative research using the case study approach and interviews to facilitate an in depth study of the practice of client relationship marketing in the legal profession. Qualitative research has been adopted because it allows researchers to explore the inner experience of participants (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Case study strategy was judged most appropriate as we intend to answer the question of how participants establish long-term client relationships with relationship marketing practices (Yin, 2003). By conducting case studies, it is aimed to discover detailed, valuable and useful insights into the firm's client relationship marketing practice which could not have been achieved by a survey method alone (Yin, 2003). The interview method has been chosen in order to explore participant's own experiences, feelings and opinions (Denscombe, 2007; Lee and Lings, 2009a). Furthermore, it allows researchers to interact with the informant (Harris and O'Malley 2000), prompting more specific questions and exploring unexpected topics that arise during the data collection. A semi-structured approach was adopted because it allows interviewees to develop ideas and to speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher (Denscombe, 2007). The interview consisted of open-ended questions and topic guides were produced in order to provide the general structure of the questioning. The overall intention was to move from the general and less contentious questions to more specific questions in order to better understand the client relationship marketing practice.

This research involves the study of a firm's client relationship marketing practice and the client relationship development process. The legal profession has been chosen as a study subject because of the sector's positive growth in revenues (DiPietro and Rusanow, 2011) and the increasing importance of client relationship marketing practice in this industry. This study is conducted focusing on a leading law firm in the world with the intention that the findings would be able to contribute to the literature relating to client relationship marketing practice in the legal profession. Firm Z has been selected as a suitable firm to study. Firm Z is one of the ten largest law firms in the world measured by income, generating revenues in excess of US\$ 1,300,000,000 in 2010 alone (Anon, 2011). For reasons of confidentiality, the firm name will not be disclosed. This paper aims to present informative and constructive findings and was not designed to represent the entire legal industry. Hence the investigation is limited to a single law firm.

In-depth data was collected via three main sources: semi-structured interviews, observations and secondary data. Secondary data collected included information from the firm's website, marketing brochures, online and newspaper articles. The reactions of the interviewees in answering the interview questions were observed and recorded. The observation note is later examined with secondary data collected in order to triangulate the data (Lee and Ling, 2009b; Ghauri and Gronhaug 2010). The triangulation approach is adopted to increase the validity (Lee and Ling, 2009b; Ghauri and Gronhaug 2010) of this paper. In order to do so, efforts were made to ensure the data was collected in different ways such as asking the same questions of different key interviewees and verifying the interviews against secondary data. Fifteen face-to-face semi-structured interviews of approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length were conducted with three partners, seven associate solicitors, three trainee solicitors, an international business development assistant and an international business development manager all of whom have to interact with clients. Multiple informants from different practice areas and positions were interviewed in order to ensure that client relationship marketing practices undertaken at different levels and positions were all included in the data collection. A convenient sample was drawn from personal contacts in order to

access key informants in firm Z. Personal contact (convenient sample) was used as this increases the chances of securing participation from the sampling. A request letter was sent to the international business development manager (who was known personally by one of the researchers) explaining the purpose of the research and requesting participation from the firm. Subsequently, snowballing sampling was carried out when, upon completion of each of the interviews, interviewees were asked to suggest others who may have useful information regarding the research topics. Snowballing sample is useful as initially only a few respondents are willing to participate in the study; it helps to extend the sample of participants by asking participants to suggest others who may be able to contribute to the research topics (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). At the beginning of each interview consent was sought to audio-record the interview. On the occasion where consent was granted, the interview was audio-recorded and later fully transcribed. Care was taken to ensure that extensive notes were made where audio-recording was not permitted in few interviews. These field notes were rearranged as soon as possible in a tidier format in order to capture the essence and details of each interview. Verbatim quotations from interviewees were given significant emphasis during the analysis of data. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants, their identity will not be disclosed in this paper.

In this study, data analysis was conducted right from the first interview as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) alongside the data collection in order to allow the research problem to be formulated or reformulated accordingly. To analyse the data, we began by coding and categorising the extensive data collected. This helps us to relate the data to our questions and conceptual framework. Subsequently we identified the obvious trends and established the findings by comparing it to the conceptual framework developed from the existing literature (Ghauri 2004).

Findings

In bringing together the current research in the related fields of this paper, this study has been carried out in order to identify practices used by marketing specialists and legal practitioners at different stages of the relationship development process. In order to summarise the findings from the data collected, only an overview of the key issues are discussed. In addition, to avoid excessive quotation, this paper presents only selective direct quotes from the interviewees which best represents the phenomena under investigation in order to facilitate the analysis. Based on the data collected, ten client relationship marketing practices have been identified. According to a previous study of relationship-building practices examining 205 US commercial service providers by Claycomb and Martin (2002), seven similar practices have been outlined. Three out of ten practices identified from this particular study are emerging client relationship marketing practices, namely - social bonds beyond professional level; treating every job seriously regardless of the size and utilising the Client Relationship Management (CRM) software.

1. Organising and attending social events

Social events have frequently been mentioned by the interviewees as an important interaction opportunity for lawyers and clients. It includes one-to-one or group type casual meetings. One-to-one meetings are often organised by partners or associate solicitors; usually involving treating clients to a lunch or taking them out to dinner. The underlying intention is not simply a free meal; it is about being visible; being in touch with the client's thinking, staying in touch with clients and fostering the relationship. This type of meeting can occur at the initial phase where interaction is crucial in convincing the prospective client to consider the firm's

service offerings. The more often a lawyer sees his client the higher the possibility of being invited by his client into the pitching process when a need arises.

The second type of social event is a meeting involving a larger group of people. Marketing specialists are responsible for organising this type of “drinks event”. The “drinks event” is organised to build contacts and generate clients’ interest in the service offerings. It also serves as an opportunity for communication between lawyers and clients. In addition, team members from both parties can get to know each other better. This facilitates a smoother ongoing client relationship during the entire consumption phase. From the career perspective, associate and trainee solicitors are encouraged to attend “drinks events” in order to meet people at their level from the client side, because those people will potentially become the key decision makers in the future.

Overall, the findings from this study reveal different social events serve tactically different purposes. At the initial stage, it creates a platform for both parties to exchange information, to get to know each other better and to stay in touch. During the consumption phase, it serves as an opportunity in strengthening the client relationships as lawyers often spend most of their time communicating with clients via emails and phone calls, not through face-to-face interactions. In addition, “social event” can also be utilised as a token of appreciation. For example, male partners who share a common interest with their clients could take their clients to a football match or tennis tournament such as Wimbledon. Female partners who find these male dominated events unsuitable for their female clients could organise social events such as wine tasting to bring their female clients together. On a broader scale, with the partners’ involvement, the international business development manager may organise annual ski-trips to demonstrate a firm’s appreciation of its core business clients. A restructuring partner concludes:

“...It is important to demonstrate that you value them (clients), by doing so, it increases the bonding and eventually it is hoped they will commit even more”

This finding is consistent with Claycomb and Martin (2002)’s view on the importance of social events (which includes open houses for clients) in building buyer-seller relationships.

2. Managing the communications or interactions process

Managing the communications and interactions process between service providers and clients is essential in order to foster client relationships. Interviewees expressed the belief that good interactions can build the “trust” and increase the clients’ satisfaction towards the firm and its service offerings which in turn will prolong the relationship. This view is supported by Sharma and Patterson (1999) and Selnes (1998). Sharma and Patterson (1999) stress that clients who trust the competencies and abilities of their service providers will be happy to continue the relationship. In studying 177 institutional buyers of a food producer, Selnes (1998) finds that satisfaction is the key variable when the decision relates to continuity of the relationship.

Communications can be personal or non-personal (Claycomb and Martin, 2002). Non-personal forms of communication plays an important role in initiating the client relationship. This includes sending clients marketing brochures, firm’s newsletters and articles written by partners to inform and update them about the firm’s capabilities and new services offered. It helps to generate interest and construct a solid foundation for legal practitioners to strike up a conversation in order to move the prospective clients to the purchasing phase and subsequently to the consumption phase in the relationship life cycle. This view has been demonstrated by Gronroos (2000) in his customer relationship life cycle model. Personal communications were recognised on three different levels – partners, associate solicitors and trainee solicitors. At the “partners” level, interviewees said that continuous communication is

the key element in positioning the firm at the top of a clients' mind. Their main concern is to maintain a strong client relationship at a senior level. Constant telephone calls to ensure clients' needs are met or to identify any changes in their interests and circumstances are necessary in enhancing the relationship. In addition, partners and associate solicitors also take the initiative to give technical presentations to their prospective, existing and ex-clients free of charge. Technical presentation refers to meetings where legal practitioners present useful and pertinent legal advice or technical solutions to their clients. This allows the lawyers to have continuous communication with their clients as clients are more receptive to this type of communication. The underlying logic is that the presentations are free of charge and usually relate to clients' interests whether a new law is about to be implemented or there is a development in the industry that may affect the client. Furthermore, the technical presentations will give a positive impression to the clients and can potentially generate new business for the firm. This is reflected by a claim from a partner:

"...this is a way to show that you are aware of what is happening in the market and that you are concerned about looking after their (clients) interests".

An associate solicitor further extended this view by stressing:

"When giving presentations, we are not only presenting something happening now but something which may affect their (clients) business even 3 years down the line. They need to be comfortable that we are constantly doing that".

This practice is vital in the purchasing phase because clients need to be able to trust the abilities of the firm in delivering a good service before making a purchase. Furthermore, as suggested by Gronroos (2000), positive perceived service quality is achieved when the "experienced quality" meets or exceeds the expectations of the customer. During the service delivery (consumption) phase, associate solicitors are responsible for managing the process. Their responsibilities involve keeping clients updated about work progress, being responsive in answering calls and emails and focusing on delivering exceptional services on time. The idea is essentially to eliminate competition by increasing the clients' satisfaction. It is based on the notion that satisfied clients are more difficult to be lured away by competitors. This finding is consistent with Ambrose, Hess and Ganesan (2007)'s argument that satisfaction is the key for building a sustainable relationship.

One third of the interviewees, five out of fifteen also suggested managing the client's expectations as an important practice for relationship building. This view is shared by Ford et al. (1998). In a similar approach, Gronroos (2000) claims that many relationship development processes are jeopardised by early over promising improved service by service providers. At the service delivery phase, legal practitioners should strive to deliver the service based on the date agreed with clients. The most important practice in the services industry is "never over promise and under deliver". Furthermore, partners have the responsibility to ensure suitable people are assigned to the deal. Clients will be upset if all the work is done by partners and they have been charged excessively. On the other hand, they might be equally unhappy to know that the partner who pitched for the work is not overseeing the deal.

3. Managing the cross-selling

Cross-selling involves selling an additional service to an existing client as defined by Claycomb and Martin (2002). It can only be initiated within a solid existing client relationship. All the interaction outcomes through the relationship life cycle for the existing service are vital as they will determine the possibility of cross-selling. This view is supported by Theron and Terblanche (2010). Both authors stress that good relationship marketing practices at every point of client interaction is essential in building client relationships. As stressed by Gronroos (2000), the ability of the firm to take care of the customer's problems and to fulfil its promises will increase the customer's satisfaction. This in turn will potentially

generate the possibility of cross-selling. Legal practitioners from all levels for the new service offering are required to understand the existing client relationship and to establish the client's expectations and requirements in order to better meet those needs. The way the new relationship is built, maintained and enhanced will not only affect the perceived service quality provided by the new department but will also affect the firm's reputation. A considerable effort from the top management (senior partners) is required to manage the cross-selling process properly. Senior partners from the existing service offering have the responsibility to ensure the new relationship will not jeopardise the existing one. When things do go wrong, senior partners from both departments have to come up with an ideal solution to recover the new relationship whilst maintaining the existing one. For example, if the existing client expressed his or her dissatisfaction about the new service provided by the "restructuring" department to Partner A from the "corporate" department, Partner A should meet up and discuss this matter with partner(s) from the "restructuring" department in order to improve the new relationship and avoid the existing relationship being jeopardised.

Managing the cross-selling process effectively can accelerate business growth and increase a firm's profits. Perhaps this is why Buttle (1996) argues the longer the association between a company and a customer the more profitable the relationship for the firm. In addition, with a strong client relationship, selling an additional service to an existing client can be less challenging compared to generating a new client. A successful cross-selling process can also increase a clients' commitment towards the firm.

4. Service recovery

The importance of service recovery has been recognised by almost half of the interviewees (six out of fifteen) as part of their client relationship marketing practices. Service recovery refers to the ability of a firm to correct its mistakes or errors before the dissatisfied client decides to terminate the service or to generate bad WOM (Claycomb and Martin, 2002). Considerable research has shown that negative WOM has more significant influence than positive WOM (Goldenberg et al., 2007; Nam, Manchanda and Chintagunta, 2010). This explains why, when mistakes occur or complaints are filed, partners tend to immediately resolve the problems and ensure it does not happen again. A quick follow-up action and resolution can strengthen the broken relationship. The underlying logic is that the client feels more satisfied when their complaint has been taken seriously and their problem has been resolved promptly. The findings also reveal that service recovery should not be neglected even if the existing relationship has reached the "stable" stage. This is in line with Ford et al. (1998)'s argument that it is possible for one or both parties to revert back from any of the relationship stages (exploratory, developing and stable stage) to the pre-relationship stage with another counterpart.

5. Changing the impression

Discussions with almost half of the interviewees, six out of fifteen revealed that the lawyer's image often suggests money-minded, unapproachable, arrogant and unfriendly. The lawyers also have the reputation of manipulating the justice system to reach their objectives. To them, every hour has to be billable and every minute is money. Most people understand that they may need a lawyer when they are in a trouble and that they would need to pay highly in order to get them out of the crisis. The interviewees believed that changing this impression can help strengthen the client relationship. Clients have to be made aware that a good lawyer is the one who is always looking after their interests and who will prevent them getting into trouble. "Changing the impression" requires lawyers to take a more proactive approach in communicating and interacting with existing clients. This can be achieved perhaps by providing technical presentations whenever there is an opportunity to do so during the service

delivery (consumption) phase. Partners and associate solicitors can take the initiative to set up a meeting with existing clients to provide them with the legal advice free of charge regarding the latest news and development in the industry that may affect them. This is the stage where clients are constantly exploring and testing the relationship with service providers. Although this practice could possibly mean giving clients something valuable without any certainty of the return in increasing the sales, these six interviewees recognised the principle that clients frequently feel the obligation to reciprocate in some way after receiving valuable information from someone. This view is supported by Christiansen (1983). In conclusion, “changing the impression” not only may enhance the client relationship but also create a unique differentiation for the firm.

6. Truly understand your clients’ businesses and industries

Over half of the interviewees, eight out of fifteen, recognised the importance of “truly understanding their clients’ businesses and industries” in the client relationship development process. The rationale for this is that clients trust a lawyer with good legal knowledge, who knows the market trends and truly understands their business. This view is shared by Claycomb and Martin (2002). “Trust” is one of the fundamental building blocks in establishing a long-term relationship. Ambrose, Hess and Ganesan (2007) express the same view when establishing the link between “satisfactions” and “trust” in their article. In firm Z, librarians will look through each daily quality newspaper and provide legal practitioners with an update as to what is happening in their practice areas. Partners and associate solicitors are encouraged to read industry publications regularly. As shown by a number of interviewees, reading the “Press Release” section from a clients’ company website help them stay on top of things happening in the clients’ businesses and industries. In the weekly meetings, legal practitioners will discuss the latest client-related news and client relationship issues will also be covered in the discussion. All these efforts will indirectly enhance the client relationships. This in turn can potentially facilitate business growth. In general, the findings reveal that regardless of what stage legal practitioners are at, they should constantly update themselves with all client-related news in order to better meet their clients’ needs.

7. Social bonds beyond professional level

In some cases social interaction between lawyers and clients extends beyond the purely professional. It has evolved from being a business relationship into one which is more personal in nature. Interviewees expressed the belief that a personal relationship evolved from a business relationship can only occur when both parties invest a considerable amount of time and effort in nurturing that relationship. This usually happens at the “expansion” stage after clients have gained considerable trust through the “exploratory” stage. This view is consistent with the concept mentioned in the relationship development process and customer relationship life cycle (Ford et al., 1998 and Gronroos, 2000). Four out of fifteen interviewees claim “trust” is one of the fundamental elements in building a personal relationship with clients. The advantage of having a social bond with clients is that clients may be more committed to the firm’s service offerings. This view is supported by Sin et al. (2002) who stress that building strong relationships with customers can help firms increase the customer loyalty and/ or commitment to the firm. The underlying logic is that the more a client is committed to a relationship with the lawyer, potentially the more he or she will be committed to the services offered by the lawyer. In other cases, personal relationships can also be formed before both parties engage in any business transactions. A private funds associate solicitor recalls:

“...look at the big law firms in the market with big clients, you will see some personal relationships somewhere, for example, KKR (Kohlberg Kravis & Roberts & Co.) always

use law firm X, because the managing director is a good friend of a senior partner in law firm X. I remember my previous boss asked me about one thing in common that he and the head of HSBC have, the answer given was – we all went to the same law school”

In short, personal relationships play an important role potentially in securing business deals and increase the client’s commitment towards the firm’s service offerings. It is important to note that inadequate evidence was found in existing literature to argue that the development of personal relationships guarantees the benefits mentioned.

8. Treating every job seriously regardless of the size

Another key practice to maintaining a good client relationship is to treat every job seriously regardless of the size. Ford et al. (1998) claim there are many uncertainties and very little trust between the buyer and seller at the “pre-relationship” stage. This assertion has certainly been supported by the interview findings from this study. A restructuring partner commented on this point:

“...most of the time new clients will test your ability by giving you a small piece of work, when the job is done well and with the relationship strengthened, more work or bigger jobs will be given”.

This clearly demonstrates that during the trial purchase, very little “trust” has been created and there are many uncertainties. This suggests that the main focus of the legal practitioners at this exploratory stage is to deliver a good service regardless of the revenue the job can bring in, otherwise known as a “loss leader”. Full resources should be assigned to achieve that objective. If the small job has not been taken seriously it may not only jeopardise the possibility of securing repeat business, but might also result in bad WOM. A number of interviewees stress that a leading law firm like firm Z could not afford to have bad WOM because good reputation is essential in maintaining its position in the marketplace. Perhaps this explains why Murray (1991), Ettenson and Turner (1997) and Nam, Manchanda and Chintagunta (2010) suggest WOM communication is particularly important for the service industry.

9. Other small little “gestures”

Discussion with four out of fifteen interviewees showed that there are some little “gestures” along the client relationship development process that enhance the existing relationship, for example, remembering the events or celebrations that are important to the clients. A birthday, anniversary or even a “congratulations” card to congratulate them for the job promotion can positively enhance the relationship. Other considerations include saying “thank you” whenever there is an opportunity to do so. It can be a simple follow-up “thank you” note or call to clients thanking them for showing an interest in the service offerings and for a purchase. This view is supported by Claycomb and Martin (2002) who conclude that existing customers who received a thank you letter or call are more likely to repeat a purchase than those have not been thanked.

In addition, a private funds associate solicitor suggests:

“It is always good to find out more about a client that you are going to meet from your colleague who has had previous interactions with the client. For example, a colleague of mine once told me – I would not book this seafood restaurant because I know this guy is allergic to shellfish”.

Obviously, this is something clients do not necessarily expect but usually something they appreciate. This suggests that the internal relationship within the firm is vital because it is beneficial to learn from other people’s experiences.

10. Utilising the Client Relationship Management (CRM) software

CRM software - "Inter-Action" has been recognised as a very powerful marketing tool in client relationship marketing practice. It plays an important role in the initiation and formation of a client relationship. It provides up-to-date contacts and monitors the development of the relationship. All the dates, intelligence, expenses and attendees will be logging into the system. This helps determine who should be invited to the next event; what services should be introduced; which clients have not been contacted recently. In short, client relationships can be managed more effectively by ensuring which clients are not being over or under marketed to. For example, a client may feel uncomfortable when he or she has been contacted by too many people from the same law firm. In addition, the business development budget can also be monitored and controlled. Many interviewees expressed the view that "Inter-Action" not only helps in building the brand but also helps to ensure everyone in the firm speaks with the same voice. "Inter-Action" also plays a vital role in cross-selling. Client information must be shared across the firm in order to succeed in the cross-selling process.

In essence, even though this client relationship marketing practice does not involve direct interaction with clients, its role in supporting the continuity of the relationship should not be underestimated. It is important to note that inadequate evidence was found in existing literature to support the role of CRM software in cross-selling. However, almost half of the interviewees, seven out of fifteen stressed their belief that "Inter-Action" can be very useful in undertaking marketing tasks and generating cross-selling.

Discussion

Overall the findings demonstrate that the relationship marketing practices employed by marketing specialists and legal practitioners at different stages in the relationship development process are different. Marketing efforts by marketing specialists' are more geared towards to initiating the relationship. They are playing a significant role in creating a platform for legal practitioners and potential clients to meet by organising social events at the pre-relationship stage. Once the connection has been made, legal practitioners (partners, associate and trainee solicitors) will take over the role of developing sustainable relationships with clients by motivating and taking them through the rest of the stages in the relationship development process. This is due to the fact that legal practitioners will have a broader interface with clients than marketing specialists at the purchasing and consumption phase. Marketing specialists' role will then be limited to utilising the CRM software to organise big social events such as annual ski-trips to thank their existing clients at each consumption stage.

The findings have confirmed that relationship marketing practices at both the "purchasing" and "consumption" phases are quite different and that the conceptual framework proposed is justified in providing a more complete view of the relationship marketing practices by legal practitioners than the four separate models of the client relationship development process and customer relationship life cycle. We have been prompted by the findings to separate the "repeat purchase" and "cross-selling" phase in the expansion stage as "managing the cross-selling" practice involves building relationships with another department who offers the new service. Analysis of the interview data reveals that the ten client relationship marketing practices outlined are a prerequisite for the formation of long-term profitable client relationships. In addition, the findings also demonstrate positioning the firm at the top of a client's mind, generate new businesses and cross-selling, increase the positive WOM and consolidate its market position as desired outcomes of practicing relationship marketing. This finding is consistent with the existing views by

various scholars (Sin et al., 2002; Reinartz and Kumar, 2003, Yang and Peterson, 2004; Rust and Chung, 2006; Barry, Dion and Johnson, 2008).

In conclusion, whilst “social events” create the opportunities for interactions, it all comes down to “managing the communications or interactions process”, “managing the cross-selling”, “service recovery” and “treating every job seriously regardless of the size” that generate client satisfaction. Only when the “changing the impression”, “truly understand your clients’ businesses and industries”, “social bonds beyond professional level”, “other small little “gestures”” and “utilising the CRM software” practices are all in place will the client relationship be fully effectively established. The data collected is summarised in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2. Client relationship marketing practices by marketing specialists and legal practitioners at different stages of the relationship development process

Different Stages/ phases	Marketing specialists’ client relationship marketing practices	Legal practitioners’ client relationship marketing practices
<u>Pre-relationship stage</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Managing the communications or interactions process • Other small little “gestures” • Utilising CRM software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Managing the communications or interactions process • Truly understand your clients’ businesses and industries • Other small little “gestures” • Utilising CRM software
<u>Exploratory stage</u> Purchasing phase		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the communications or interactions process • Truly understand your clients’ businesses and industries • Other small little “gestures” • Utilising CRM software
Consumption phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Utilising CRM software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Managing the communications or interactions process • Service recovery

<p><u>Expansion stage</u></p> <p>Repeat purchase phase</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing the impression • Truly understand your clients' businesses and industries • Treating every job seriously regardless of the size • Other small little "gestures" • Utilising CRM software <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the communications or interactions process • Truly understand your clients' businesses and industries • Social bonds beyond professional level • Other small little "gestures" • Utilising CRM software
<p>Consumption phase 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Utilising CRM software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Managing the communications or interactions process • Service recovery • Truly understand your clients' businesses and industries • Social bonds beyond professional level • Other small little "gestures" • Utilising CRM software
<p><u>Expansion stage</u></p> <p>Cross-selling phase</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the communications or interactions process • Managing the cross-selling • Truly understand your clients' businesses and

<p>Consumption phase 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Utilising CRM software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> industries • Other small little “gestures” • Utilising CRM software • Organising and attending social events • Managing the communications or interactions process • Managing the cross-selling • Service recovery • Changing the impression • Truly understand your clients’ businesses and industries • Treating every job seriously regardless of the size • Other small little “gestures” • Utilising CRM software
<p><u>Stable stage</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Utilising CRM software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and attending social events • Managing the communications or interactions process • Managing the cross-selling • Service recovery • Truly understand your clients’ businesses and industries • Social bonds beyond professional level • Other small little “gestures” • Utilising CRM software

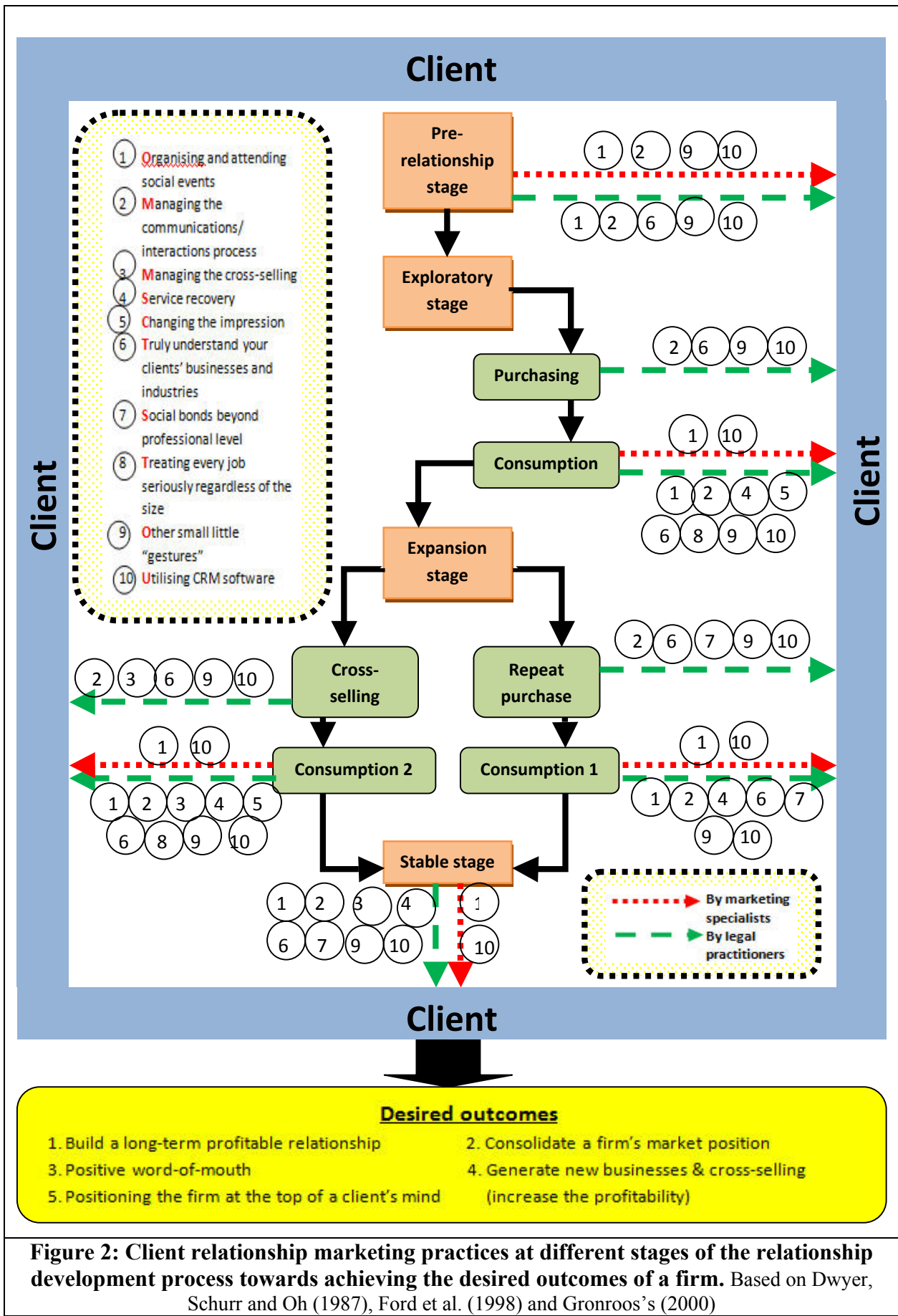


Figure 2: Client relationship marketing practices at different stages of the relationship development process towards achieving the desired outcomes of a firm. Based on Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987), Ford et al. (1998) and Gronroos's (2000)

Managerial implications

This research has shown that the relationship development process with clients is far from straightforward and is complex in nature. Interviewees also revealed that there is no formal business development training in general or client relationship development training in particular. Several associate and trainee solicitors revealed their concern at their lack of knowledge in how, why and what partners are doing in terms of client relationship development due to their limited exposure and the absence of training. No one is born as a marketer; therefore training definitely helps in building marketing skills necessary to fulfil the client relationship development process. “Business interactions” and “client communications” can be very useful topics for client relationship development training. Informal training such as giving internal presentations can also help facilitate public speaking skills. “Learning from others” by attending client meetings with partners and weekly meetings with other departments is an effective way to build interaction skills. Any training within the firm will improve legal practitioners’ client relationship development skills.

Furthermore, whilst the ten practices outlined are essential in initiating, building and enhancing client relationships; doing it systematically is the key to success in the highly competitive marketplace. For example, partners can start by identifying one or two key clients in their industry or practice areas. They should focus and commit to strengthening and expanding these key relationships because, as often cited, eighty percent of a firm’s new business comes from the top twenty percent of its clients (Claycomb and Martin, 2002; West, Ford and Ibrahim, 2010). It is based on the idea that by learning more about these clients’ businesses, industries and legal needs, partners can provide more useful and rounded advice. This is not to suggest that other relationships are not important; full resources still have to be assigned to maintain every client relationship. Partners should commit to visiting the client regularly (e.g. quarterly) free of charge in order to understand their businesses and operations. This can help partners to be aware of any changes in clients’ needs or circumstances that require adjustment on the service offerings. In addition, partners can also offer to attend client’s internal meetings quarterly at no charge to learn more about their business and provide legal advice to accomplish their business goals. Partners could also arrange to give a presentation at a conference or write an industry article on a topic related to the key clients’ businesses and industry. Although this recommendation requires significant investment in time and resources from the firm, the relationship with key clients will be reinforced and strengthened. The reinforced client relationships are not only more secure but also potentially facilitating business growth.

Other recommendations include practical advice to legal practitioners at all levels. At the senior level, partners should not focus merely on business development or looking for business opportunity. Their primary focus in client relationship marketing practices should be on assisting clients to achieve their business goals and to solving their legal matters. Building a close client relationship centred on clients’ interests will potentially bring in business to the firm. At the associate solicitor level, associate solicitors should consider every meeting as an interaction opportunity to impress. People they meet in conferences and meetings might be the key decision makers of the future; a good impression will make the future business interaction easier. In addition, associate solicitors could consider building on their writing skills by co-authoring industry articles with partners. At the junior level, trainee solicitors should recognise that relationship and reputation building do not happen overnight. They should fully utilise every interaction opportunity with clients and consider the building of relationships with junior representatives from the client side.

Limitations and future research

Although rigorous research methods have been adopted, the findings are not without limitations. Firstly, as this is an in-depth case study looking specifically at a single law firm in the very wide and variable legal profession, the findings may not represent the entire legal profession and might not be generalised into other professional services industries. Nevertheless, they offer useful insight into the client relationship marketing practices by a leading law firm. Law firms with similar size and market position offering full legal services could greatly benefit from this study. Secondly, although this study interviewed a broad range of staff from most of the practice areas in the firm, there is one practice area in the firm – “white collar criminal defences and securities enforcement” which was not able to be included within the snowballing sampling method. Requests for participation from practitioners in this practice area were not successful. The authors are aware of this limitation although it is not inherently a problem for firm-specific (not practice-area-specific) exploratory research. Due to consent for audio-recording not being granted by some of the interviewees, those interview conversations are not reported with verbatim accuracy. Some of the data may be lost in the data recall and writing process. Extra care was taken in these cases to ensure that extensive notes were made and the field notes rearranged as soon as possible in a more tidy format due to inevitable limitation of human recall.

The conceptual framework is proposed as a basis to study the client relationship marketing practices in the legal industry, it is important that future research explores the validity of this conceptual framework. Further empirical testing of the model in the legal sector should first take place before the application to other professional service industries can be considered. Multiple case studies will be needed to provide a full review of client relationship marketing practice of the entire legal industry. This study was conducted from the firm’s perspective; it would be useful to evaluate the ten client relationship marketing practices outlined from the client’s perspective. The findings are fruitful in helping legal practitioners to fine-tune and enhance their existing practices. Although the ten practices presented in this paper are pivotal in contributing to a client relationship success, the effects of each practice should also be assessed. Further research is needed to develop a study to measure these effects and the quality of the client relationship. The underlying intention is to find ways to apply the practices more effectively.

In conclusion, this paper makes a positive contribution to the under-researched area of how detailed client relationship marketing practices are undertaken by marketing specialists and legal practitioners at different stages of the relationship development process in the legal industry. The findings have revealed ten important client relationship marketing practices employed by one of the ten largest law firms in the world – firm Z. Other law firms of similar size and market position could benefit from these findings in defining their own client relationship marketing practice. In addition, a conceptual framework has been introduced to highlight these practices by marketing specialists and legal practitioners at each relationship development stage. Client relationship marketing has been seen as an important management philosophy in building, maintaining and enhancing long-term client relationships. Indeed, a key conclusion of this paper is that whilst the intensifying of market competition is inevitable it is clear that client relationship marketing practice should continuously be revisited, fine-tuned and improved in order to ensure primacy in a competitive and specialist industry.

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