

In Era of Remote Engagement, Actionable Guidance Remains Crucial in Law Firm Communications, New Study Finds

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Incumbent law firms have advantage in the battle for clients' attention, but substantive content creates openings for challenger firms

Chicago, December 1, 2020 – By bringing in-person client interactions to a virtual halt, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a digital content explosion as law firms compete for the attention of clients and prospects. A new study of in-house counsel shows that providing substantive, actionable guidance remains the best way to rise above the noise, preserve existing client relationships, and win new ones.

These findings are detailed in the report, "How to Win and Protect Client Relationships in the Age of Remote Engagement," released today by strategic communications firm Greentarget, legal consultancy Zeughauser Group, and B2B branding agency Right Hat. The August 2020 survey of 75 in-house lawyers, including 37 general counsel, offers important guidance for law firms anticipating an extended period of remote outreach.

The survey's top findings include:

- **Stick to Substance:** 53 percent of respondents say they most want communications from outside counsel that relay substantive legal or business information. And

substantive legal or business information is also most likely to generate a response from in-house counsel, especially for incumbent firms. For challenger firms, content that provides actionable guidance is the best route to sparking a conversation.

- Incumbent Firms Beware! 68 percent of in-house counsel say communication from existing outside counsel is of greatest value, but 31 percent say they place great value on communications from firms introduced to them by friends or colleagues. This suggests a clear opening for challenger firms with the right connections and approach.
- Pick Up the Phone – to Call or Text: Amid the age of digital communication, in-house lawyers most prefer the simplicity and intimacy of a telephone call or text. Picking up the phone affords outside counsel the chance to check in on a client personally before raising an emerging business or legal issue.
- Stay Relevant to be Read or Shared: More than half of in-house lawyers surveyed are willing to give communications from existing law firms (56 percent) and unfamiliar law firms (50 percent) at least a perfunctory read for relevance. Twenty-eight percent go further, saying that they appreciate good content sent from both types of firms, and they forward these communications to peers when appropriate.
- Perspective Wanted on Pressing Legal and Business Issues: 69 percent of in-house counsel say they want content on COVID-19's impact on the economy and their businesses; nearly as many (65 percent) want content on business and legal topics not related to COVID-19. When we asked in-house counsel to name issues they'd like to hear about from firms, diversity, equity and inclusion topped the list.
- Forget Zoom Cocktail Hours: Seeking to fill the vacuum created by the inability to entertain clients, some firms have gotten creative with virtual social events.

But virtual entertainment has little appeal for most in-house lawyers; 51 percent of respondents say they simply are not interested, and 40 percent say that they don't want to engage with law firms in this manner.

What Law Firms Should Do

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for breaking through in the age of information overload, particularly given the increased flow of digital communication clients are receiving during the pandemic.

These recommendations start by reminding outside counsel that phone calls and texts are a welcome alternative to email; that evaluating content for its relevance, urgency, novelty and utility will distinguish it from the bulk of what clients are receiving; that all communication to clients and prospects should be customized; that incumbent law firms should avoid complacency; that investing in prospects can differentiate a firm seeking to develop a new relationship, and that bigger and bolder thought leadership projects – like research reports and podcasting – can show clients that a law firm is sensitive to their preferences and priorities.