

Empowering Your Lawyer Brand: From Doctor Know to Doctor How (Part 2: Law Firm Lawyers)

Law Department Management



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One defining trait of a strong lawyer brand is being seen as a “Doctor How.” A Doctor How is a lawyer — whether at a firm or in-house — who listens actively, leads with empathy, and applies sound judgment to solve problems and drive the business forward. Conversely, a “Doctor Know” is a lawyer who is perceived as taking a more legalistic and less pragmatic approach. Over the course of their careers, lawyers who focus on brand-building often evolve from being seen as a Doctor Know to a Doctor How. Businesses inherently assume risk every day just by operating. Lawyers can become a Doctor How by understanding the company’s risk appetite and tailoring advice to offer practical, business-minded and risk-calibrated solutions.

In this two-part article, former General Counsel Judith McKay and Bindu Cudjoe, former Chief Legal Officer, Corporate Secretary, and ACC Board member — now principals of their own consulting firms, share practical tips to help you shift how you’re perceived as a lawyer so that your full value is recognized. Part 1 focused on in-house lawyers and Part 2 focuses on law firm lawyers. The overall theme of these two articles is that in-house and external counsel, working together, can leverage their complementary skills to strengthen one another’s contributions and deepen each of their Doctor How reputations.

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How can external lawyers shape their brand to be seen as “Doctor How?”

Early-career law firm lawyers often focus on showcasing their legal knowledge and passion, aiming to be seen as a Doctor Know. However, providing too much information that is full of legal jargon can overwhelm clients and dilute the impact of your advice. What clients really want is succinct communication that helps them understand how lawyers can help them strategically solve their specific problems or capitalize on business opportunities. Lawyers can add tremendous value by simply asking more thoughtful, strategic questions and sharing stories of how they and/or their colleagues have helped clients navigate similar challenges. Below are some recommended actions, based on years of experience, to help external lawyers shift perceptions:

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Provide greater thought leadership by focusing on what clients really need to know

Create meaningful, relevant, and actionable content for clients rather than a recitation of the law. While it is tempting to dive into the details of a legal development (it is fascinating!), clients care more about what the change means for them and their business. Offer insights on **how** they can prepare and respond, which is a far more powerful way to build your brand. In-house counsel are inundated with information from law firms 24/7. If you can curate content to what they really need to know, you can stand out from the pack.



Gain perspective beyond the legal world

Join your firm's industry groups that are most relevant to the clients you are working with to gain access to helpful group insights and information. Use this opportunity to learn from more senior lawyers in the firm about how they transformed their reputations to be seen as industry experts rather than narrow technicians.

Participate in industry associations to learn more about what is happening in the market in real time. It is a great way to get in front of and learn from prospective clients — and often you will be the only lawyer in the room, which is another business development opportunity. Being in the know about what is happening in their world is the best way for clients to see you as someone who provide value beyond legal knowledge.

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Build your network by adding value to your target audience

Lawyers can greatly enhance their impact in broader networking activities when they use the "how" as an opportunity to build meaningful relationships. Prepare ahead by finding out who will be at the event and research what is happening in their business. Identify topics they're likely to find relevant and engaging. For specific or more intimate networking events, preparing a few high-level insights or recommendations in advance for the client will help strengthen the relationship and position yourself as a Doctor How.

Always be on the lookout for ways you can help in-house counsel be seen as Dr. How

Whether it is inviting an in-house counsel client to co-author a thought leadership article or blog, participate on a panel, be considered for a prestigious award, or connect with business colleagues in your network, your generosity will help build both your and your client's reputations. When clients see your genuine commitment to caring about them and their success, they will naturally want to work with you.

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How can in-house and law firm lawyers help each other become "Doctor How?"

Stronger collaboration between external and in-house counsel can help both move from being seen as a Doctor Know to a Doctor How. In-house counsel often have deeper insight into the business, offering context on specific issues and the organization's risk appetite. External counsel bring a cross-sector perspective, drawing on market trends and experiences with other clients in similar

situations. When they work together effectively, they provide a complete picture that adds significant value to the business and strengthens both of their Doctor How reputations. They can also help elevate one another's brands by generously providing opportunities to build their market profiles and grow their careers.

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The possibilities are endless when lawyers support each other!

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Bindu Cudjoe is the Principal & Strategic Advisor of Bindustries Consulting, and a former executive and chief legal officer in the complex and highly regulated financial services industry as well as a former law firm partner. Bindustries Consulting helps law firms and organizations understand the art of the possible and reimagine what you can do — with bold thinking, governance and risk expertise and the insights of a general counsel and client of 200+ law firms.

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Judith McKay is the Principal & Strategic advisor at JEM3 Consulting where she draws from her unique law firm and client-side experience to help firms unlock business opportunities, deepen client connections, and amplify their voice in the market. Previously, she served as chief client and innovation officer at a firm of over 800 lawyers, where she helped drive revenue growth and expand

the firm’s client base. She also served as vice president and general counsel at a global subsidiary of a Fortune 50 company.