



An interim success story

How a new appointment helped a company deal with changes to its client base

Crispin White, Interim marketing director, Cornerstone Barristers

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In October 2010 Cornerstone Barristers experienced something of a wake-up call. Chancellor George Osborne had just unveiled the UK's biggest spending cuts for decades. As part of a whopping £81bn cuts package, the Government said local authority funding would be reduced by 27%. Those same local authorities represented the bulk of Cornerstone's client revenue, and it was a defining moment, as Bryan McGuire, a QC with the chambers, explains:

"We work with about 300 local authorities and that news meant their spending ability would soon fall by almost a third. There would inevitably be losers and it created what was our 'burning platform' moment; we had to act quickly and decisively to protect our leading position in what would soon become a much smaller market."

McGuire is a member of a small group which guides how the chambers' organisation operates. At the start of 2011 that group made two key decisions: to hire a chief executive, a newly created role to lead and manage the organisation on more commercial lines; to invest in some senior-level marketing expertise as a way of protecting its market share and modernising.

McGuire added: "We recognised it might take up to a year to find and hire the right chief executive but we had to start immediately with marketing because the cost of delay would be loss of market share. That's why we began to look for an interim marketing director."

Crispin White has been an interim marketing director for six years. His background includes roles in well-known management consultancies and more recently as part-time marketing director of BIE Group, an executive search firm and specialist provider of senior level interim executives. When BIE executive director Nick Diprose was asked to discuss Cornerstone's needs, he met them with an open mind but soon recognised BIE Group's own marketing director was the perfect fit.

White takes up the story: "I went in to see them and was panel-interviewed twice by five barristers; it was a memorable experience but it soon became apparent how I could help. There were many improvement opportunities that individually were relatively minor but collectively would have a huge impact."

Although speed was critical, McGuire says he

and colleagues took time to create a very detailed specification for White, showing what they wanted to do and why but without being overly prescriptive.

McGuire explains: "On reflection, that was crucially important. The delivery expectations were clear, as was the budget. We are an organisation with 55 decision makers so having this agreed early was vital."

White's six month assignment, in outline, was to:

1. Review the existing marketing strategy, adjusting it to reflect the changed market circumstances and protect market share
2. Conduct a 'gap analysis' of existing support resources and recommend how to fill any identified gaps
3. Review all existing market and client communications, to better showcase expertise, build dialogue and deeper engagement with both clients and referring solicitors
4. Overhaul the website to better represent the organisation and its areas of expertise, and make it content-driven to increase visits and the amount of time visitors spent on the site.

Cornerstone Barristers McGuire says the results after six months have been impressive: "It is fair to say that we were unaware of what we'd been missing until someone showed us. Crispin asked some tough questions but they were quite fundamental ones. He initiated the process of getting us properly to define not just who we are and what we do, but also how we should sell our expertise in a much more professional way.

"Crispin's experience and contacts allowed us to do everything we wanted to do. The new brand and website have been extremely well-received outside Chambers, and that has re-invigorated our culture.

"On reflection, what we needed was quite a tall order: good value, an immediate start, a fast operator who was also very capable in both strategy and execution. BIE showed us with Crispin that this was, in fact, possible".

The effects of those original local authority budget cuts that spurred Cornerstone Barristers into action have still not fully played out, but already there are signs of a hard financial return on its marketing investment: revenue at Cornerstone is up 11%, year on year.

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