

# Chambers' marketing 2024

How to enhance your chambers' brand and client service in an increasingly competitive environment? Hayley Duggan sets out five factors every set should consider in relation to marketing at the Bar in 2024

**A**s the calendar year comes to a close and barristers' chambers are looking ahead to 2024, many are investing more heavily than ever before in their marketing and business development (BD) activities, a trend that is evidenced by the increasing size of marketing teams across the Bar. Just ten years ago, chambers generally had one marketing professional among their staff, often part-time; now, the majority of sets in London have two or three full-time individuals focused solely on maintaining and improving their chambers' visibility in the market.

But how does a chambers enhance its brand amid an increasingly competitive environment, an uncertain economic and political landscape and ever-changing client pressures? This article examines five factors every set should consider in relation to marketing at the Bar in 2024.

## 1: ESG and brand purpose

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) has been high up business leaders' agendas for many years now and as clients place increasing pressure on solicitors to operate in a fairer, more sustainable and more responsible way, this then filters down from law firms to barristers' chambers. In the 2010s, the focus was firmly on improving equality and diversity in the legal sector, while in the 2020s, the wider ESG remit is coming under scrutiny at the Bar, as chambers not only need to market themselves as being committed to improving diversity, but also show that they have a community impact strategy, sustainability targets, effective data governance, strong employee relations... the list goes on. In short, law firms (and their clients) want to see that your chambers *cares* about doing the right thing.

Looking to the future, global environmental concerns are likely to hit chambers hard in the coming years. The Bar Council has set up the Bar Sustainability Network to help chambers act on their climate impacts in order to transition to a more sustainable way of working, and it is not outside the realms of possibility that, in 2024, law firms will be collecting information from chambers on their Net Zero Plans (or lack of), for example. Professional clients are driving the change and if they are already asking law firms to meet ESG criteria, it is only a matter of time before this reaches the Bar.

## 2: A fresh perspective on events

Thought we'd make it through this article without mention of COVID-19? You thought wrong. Coronavirus rears its ugly head here as we look at how the legal events landscape has changed post 2020.

Cast your mind back to 2019: seminars and conferences were all in-person, BD events were predominantly in the evening and almost always involved alcohol, and webinars were rare. COVID came along and changed everything: it taught us how to be imaginative with events. Of course, at the time, everyone was resorting to online alternatives, which, first and foremost, meant that the Bar was able to provide thought leadership to clients remotely – a tool we are still able to take advantage of today for reaching those not located nearby and those working from home. COVID also brought to the fore the value of family life and meant we started to look beyond evening drinks as the primary form of BD. Since 2021, we have seen more daytime socials so as not to eliminate those with childcare needs, networking activities that are more memorable and inclusive (and don't have to involve alcohol), and hybrid events that allow for flexibility.



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### 3: Innovation

Innovation is a broad topic and many of the conversations around it show there is confusion around what innovation actually is and how to achieve it. For the purposes of this article, let's look specifically at technology. There is strong motivation for chambers to create an innovative brand, mainly because new technological solutions can greatly improve client experience. Leveraging technology to simplify internal processes is, of course, key but in the context of marketing, it can enhance client communication, diversify delivery of thought leadership and improve brand image. For marketers, innovation opens doors to 'doing something differently' and, in turn, creates a competitive advantage.

The difficult thing about technology is that it is constantly evolving and digital marketing trends don't stay 'trendy' for long. Remember when the legal sector first embraced social media? Or when chambers first started launching YouTube channels? What starts out as innovative use of technology soon becomes the norm. Perhaps in ten years' time, we'll be saying, 'Remember when we first ran our seminars on the Metaverse?' or 'Remember when we first used ChatGPT to write our chambers business plan?'

### 4: Data, data and more data

As chambers' marketing teams continue to expand, so does the ability to reflect in the form of analysing data. The tools to enable greater proactivity in this regard already exist, it is just that up until now, many chambers' marketing departments have been too stretched to pay close attention to them. Social media and article-sharing platforms are able to provide useful data on interaction rates, number of reads, topics of interest to clients and so on. Client relationship management (CRM) systems are becoming more

advanced, as is event-management software, both of which help track client behaviour patterns. And then there are the litigation analytics platforms, which help us to better understand trends in the marketplace, the journey of a claim from start to finish and competitor activity. Even the directories now offer data packages so chambers can better track rankings progress and benchmark themselves against competitors.

There's the assumption that a greater focus on marketing by the Bar in turn allows for a larger marketing budget to invest in some of the paid-for programmes above, but much of the data is available for free, it's just finding the time to make use of it.

### 5: Client service and strategy

In a crowded marketplace, chambers across the Bar are investing more time in tailoring client offerings to market conditions and case-by-case circumstances. By increasing the dialogue with clients (through client-listening exercises, for example), sets are able to better understand client needs, which helps make better business decisions and focus on client retention.

Heightened competition drives chambers to become more specialist and many are creating client segmentation programmes to target specific firms identified as supporting core practice areas. Regular analysis of data allows marketing teams and practice managers (clerks) to work together in forming bespoke client strategies and monitor progress.

A strong management structure is key for clearly communicating the strategy and a collaborative culture is equally important for creating internal buy-in. However, as the average size of a barristers' chambers is larger than ever before and sets continue to embrace remote working, challenges in establishing shared values and a move away from a culture of individualism can affect strategy implementation.

### Conclusion

A theme to emerge as we look at modern-day marketing of chambers is the impact of an increasingly competitive marketplace. Client choice drives change and nowhere is this more apparent than at the Bar. The ability for a barrister to create a personal brand is harder than ever before in some respects, but then again, technology can make it easier in other respects. The challenge for any chambers is to find a way of conveying individual personality *as well as* brand personality. At the end of the day, to market a chambers is to market people. And if those people are able to emulate client values as well as display the attributes of being a good barrister, then they will stand out from the crowd. If marketing at the Bar has taught me one thing, it is that, nowadays, having the legal expertise isn't always enough; what is equally important is the client experience. ●

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#### About the author

Hayley Duggan is Head of Business Development & Marketing at Wilberforce Chambers and co-founder of Marketing in Chambers Group (MICG). Her team was shortlisted for Marketing Team of the Year at The Legal 500 Bar Awards 2023.