

DAILY REPORT

LAW INC.

The first step to overcoming the presumption is to forget about trying to “out-credential” the competition and instead focus your pitch on solving the prospect’s legal problem.



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Beat a better-branded firm

LESSER-KNOWN FIRMS can win business if they execute the pitch better than the bigger legal brand

THE OTHER DAY I was doing a program for a law firm on how to win a new business presentation. At one point, one of the attorneys raised his hand and asked “How do we win a pitch against King & Spalding?”

Of course King & Spalding, in addition to being a great firm, has one of the most powerful legal brands in Atlanta. By contrast, the firm where I was speaking had excellent attorneys but wasn’t as prestigious. The attorney that asked the question felt it was almost impossible to win a pitch against a firm like King & Spalding simply because of the power of the brand.

But a lesser-known firm can win if it executes the pitch better than the better-branded competitor.

The strong brand provides a presumption that needs to be overcome

My favorite saying about the value of a brand is “No one ever got fired by hiring IBM.” Choosing to partner with a great brand is usually a safe choice, especially if you have to justify your decision up the corporate hierarchy.

In a competitive pitch situation, the dominant brand has what amounts to a favorable presumption. All things being equal, the prospect is probably going to go with the established brand.

Identify hot buttons and propose a solution

The first step to overcoming the presumption is to forget about trying to “out-credential” the competition and instead focus your pitch on solving the prospect’s business and legal problem. An assistant general counsel told me about a “beauty contest” she held seeking counsel for an employment discrimination class action. Competing were a large prestigious firm and a lesser-known employment boutique.

The better branded firm also was an

incumbent, having done work for the company in the past. But this incumbent relied on its reputation and didn’t give much of a presentation. The employment law boutique detailed a very specific and powerful litigation strategy.

The boutique attorneys had also had several telephone calls prior to the presentation discussing the case with the assistant general counsel seeking to understand the key issues and hot buttons. Those conversations, in addition to helping focus the presentation, helped the boutique firm build a relationship with the assistant general counsel. That relationship helped to overcome the brand presumption. The boutique won.

Speak with passion

The next key to beating a superior brand is personal style. One general counsel told me that when they invite several firms to compete for a piece of business, the selection can come down to who they connect with on a personal level. “If we invite you in for a presentation, we know that you can do the work,” she told me. “At that point we’re often looking for chemistry.”

The easiest way to connect is to speak with passion and intensity. Speak like your speaking to a close friend over dinner.

Rehearse like crazy

Another way to help overcome a brand presumption is to rehearse. Decision-makers tell me all the time how easy it is to tell who has prepared for the pitch and who hasn’t. “Good preparation always shows,” one chief executive told me. “Poor preparation also shows.”

Firms like King & Spalding have established a great brand by performing at a high level for many years. But that doesn’t mean that in a given pitch, you can’t outperform these firms. If you execute these fundamentals, you can beat a better-branded competitor. ☎