

Effective Proposals Jump Start a Good Marriage

As in marriage, effective client engagements always begin with an effective proposal. Proposals create the opportunity to explicitly communicate the scope and understanding of the engagement between the client and provider of services. If it is done properly, it can minimize and alleviate potential misunderstandings and allow the client to achieve his or her goals and the law firm to fulfill the client's needs. Proposals should:

- Establish clear boundaries of what the engagement and fees entail
- Set preliminary start and stop dates
- Communicate accountabilities and responsibilities of the service provider and client
- Provide methodologies to be used
- Provide any options available to the client
- Explain how progress and results of the engagement will be measured and communicated
- Convey the value of the matters being addressed and stipulate the outcome
- State conditions and terms of fee and reimbursement arrangements
- Offer reasonable assurances and guarantees

A Quick Check Up

It is easy to get caught up in day-to-day business and lose sight of some key areas that should be analyzed on a regular basis. Legal services firms should regularly "check up" and consider analyzing some of these areas:

- Financial and leasing relationships and agreements
- Professional licensing and continuing education status
- Insurance
- Security issues
- Office policies and procedures
- Referral sources
- Client statistics
- Retirement plan compliance
- Technology and capital requirements
- Hiring/attrition trends and related policies and procedures

Steve Brown, CPA is the Partner-in-Charge of the Legal Department at Rubin, Brown, Gornstein & Co. LLP (RBG&Co.), certified public accountants and business consultants located at 230 South Bemiston Avenue in St. Louis, Missouri.