

# Lessons in pitching and presenting to clients

Business development skills come to some lawyers more naturally than others. Pippa Blakemore talks to Ben Maiden about practical tips to make winning business easier

**G**iving presentations, asking clients for feedback and pitching for new business are skills that many lawyers would like to improve. At the conference this week delegates will have the opportunity to take part in three sessions intended to develop their confidence in these areas.

Pippa Blakemore of the UK-based PEP Partnership will lead the sessions, which take place in the afternoons of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Each will involve a high degree of audience participation, with delegates working in teams on role play exercises. Participants will also receive an action plan to take away from the conference, putting together the theory they have discussed with some practical suggestions for what to do when they get back to the office.

According to Blakemore, who has worked with more than 30 UK and US law firms as well as investment banks and barristers: "There is no value in having a strategy unless you can implement it."

The aim of Monday's session (2:30pm to 5:30pm, Herald Theatre, Aotea Centre), will be to help professionals prepare eye- and ear-catching talks for seminars and conferences, an increasingly important part of generating client links and building professional status. Blakemore says the key lesson for many lawyers is to remember that "you don't have to tell everybody everything".

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Speakers often believe they must tell their audience everything there is to know about a subject or risk being thought of as a bad lawyer, she says. It's a perception that often stems from law school training, but it can be avoided if speakers focus on what the audience needs to know.

Tuesday's session (2:30pm to 5:30pm, Limelight 2, Aotea Centre) will focus on maintaining good client relationships, something that lawyers are increasingly approaching in a proactive way. Most would agree, and studies have supported the view, that one of the key elements to keeping clients happy is communication. The problem, says Blakemore, is that lawyers often feel, once they have been instructed, they can simply get on with completing their work. Instead, she says, they need to find out what the client's expectations are, monitor how those expectations are being met, then debrief at the end of the instruction to assess how things went from the client's point of view. This last stage can be the most difficult. One approach, suggests Blakemore, is simply to ask: "What would you like us to do differently next time?"

The final session on Wednesday (2:30pm to 5:30pm, Herald Theatre, Aotea Centre) will address the tricky subject of taking leads and turning them into work. For many lawyers, the thought of calling a potential client to tout for business is abhorrent, or at least embarrassing. But



Advice on pitching for business: Pippa Blakemore

using contacts to win instructions is an increasingly important part of law firms' business. The key, says Blakemore, is for lawyers not to think of themselves as door-to-door salesmen but as contacting an individual they have personally met, perhaps at an industry event. And, as with all selling, the important skill is not just asking questions but listening to the answers. Doing so can show how you can offer to help a potential client.