



Integrating lateral hires

Marketing and business development teams are playing a stronger role in lateral partner hires, says **Samantha Roberts**.

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The remit of marketing and BD professionals in professional services firms is changing. Whilst demonstrating a return on investment on budget spend remains paramount, their scope is now wider, influence has grown and firms' expectations have risen in step

This is particularly true with lateral partner recruitment. As firms invest significantly in this area to drive strategic growth, marketing and BD teams are proving essential to the success of lateral hires' integration. They are actively supporting onboarding, market positioning, client targeting and integrating the partner into the firm's brand and culture.

The challenge

While some lateral hires prosper (unlocking new clients and opportunities), many struggle. Their early promise fades due to complex dynamics, cultural mismatches or a lack of support.

Recent research by The Lawyer, utilising Atlas Codex Edge data, revealed that in 2024, 50% of new partners at the UK's top 50 law firms were lateral hires. However, despite the high volume of lateral moves, the success rate is less encouraging.

According to US-based Decipher Investigative Intelligence, 48% of lateral hires leave their new firm within five years. In their 2025 LinkedIn article, Burwood Partners noted that the average tenure of an externally hired partner in consulting firms was 3.5 years, with many leaving or underperforming within the first 18-24 months.

Why is this happening? For firms, the gap between business case projections and reality is often wide. Laterals face barriers when transferring clients, while fragmented onboarding leaves them isolated. For individuals, the transition can be overwhelming – filled with unclear expectations, information overload, and pressure to perform quickly. Confidence dips and mismatched timelines often follow.

What's working

Firms are shifting from surface-level induction to more structured, human-centred onboarding. Successful

initiatives include integration mentors, tailored business plans, facilitated introductions and extended support beyond the first few months. Some firms now appoint integration specialists to oversee this critical phase. BD and marketing teams are emerging as key enablers in successful integrations. Here's how they're helping.

Partnering with HR and talent teams

Close collaboration with HR and talent teams gives marketing and BD colleagues early notice of new partner arrivals. This aids preparation that goes well beyond press releases or website updates.

Researching the partner's background (including where they are joining from, their technical or sector expertise, client relationships, growth ambitions and the teams they will work with) brings a proactive edge. It can help to stress-test the partner's business plan, provide market intelligence to support their strengths and identify risks and opportunities.

It can also help to pinpoint specific BD and client skills gaps so, with the support of L&D colleagues, training and coaching can be arranged.

The result is a tailored support package and materials ready from day one, which accelerate the hire's ability to engage with the market. Updating CRM systems and ensuring access to digital assets also help them hit the ground running.

Dedicated marketing and BD onboarding

Clients expect innovative thinking, fresh perspectives and commercial value. For new lateral hires to deliver this, they must quickly understand their new firm's people, expertise, systems and client solutions. Without a clear programme, integration falters and the firm's ability to deliver client value suffers.

Marketing and BD teams are well-placed to break down barriers and speed up integration. Early meetings should walk new partners through campaign materials, content and resources, while explaining the firm's marketing strategy, planning processes and budget limits. They should also be added to key marketing and BD distribution lists, shown how the team operates and supports them, and introduced to simple ways to 'self-serve' so they can be active in their market from the outset.

These discussions offer an opportunity to understand how the partner has previously engaged with marketing and BD and to clarify, for example, how bid support functions within the firm and what resources are available to assist in winning work. They also enable teams to share key client information, foster connections with colleagues to coordinate targeting, and minimise internal friction.

Brand guidance is another crucial area of discussion, providing new partners with the tools to be compliant and confident from the start. If they have transitioned from another professional services firm, the onboarding process can also reveal valuable competitor insights.

Represent the voice of the client

For new lateral partners, understanding what clients say about the firm is invaluable. It helps them align their messaging with the firm's reputation and speak confidently about its strengths, values and differentiators.

Obtaining and sharing client feedback also reveals what matters most to existing clients, enabling new hires to tailor their approach and exceed expectations. Just as importantly, it highlights where the firm is strong and where it lags behind competitors, giving laterals the insight to position themselves effectively and spot opportunities to address unmet needs.

With lateral hiring now central to many firms' growth strategies, integration must be seen as a critical enabler – not a 'nice to have'. Successful integration isn't about a better welcome pack or a quick-fire induction.

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As we've outlined, marketing and BD teams are playing a crucial role. Besides the areas already mentioned, they're also connecting lateral hires to internal networks and client opportunities, helping them raise their profile in target markets, shaping value propositions to maximise new work opportunities and tracking progress against commercial goals.

This contribution is essential and provides a clear, measurable demonstration of the impact of marketing and BD teams within the firm.

The Results Consultancy has recently released its white paper – Integrating lateral hires: why firms can't leave success to chance. To obtain a copy, visit www.winningbusiness.net.

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