Chief Marketing & Business Development Officer (CMBDO) Interview Playbook for Law Firms

At the CMBDO level, firms are not hiring a marketer—they are hiring a **growth executive**. The Managing Partner and Executive Committee want to know whether you can help the firm attract clients, strengthen its brand, support lateral growth, improve cross-selling, and drive revenue.

The most successful candidates position themselves as a **strategic business leader who happens to lead marketing and business development**, rather than as a communications or marketing professional.

What You Will Be Evaluated On

Strategic Growth Leadership

- Ability to align marketing and business development with firm strategy
- Experience supporting revenue growth
- Market positioning and differentiation
- Industry and practice growth strategies

Revenue Generation

- New client acquisition
- Cross-selling and client expansion
- Key client programs
- Pipeline development and opportunity management

Partner Influence

- Ability to influence high-performing partners
- Driving accountability for business development
- Building consensus among stakeholders
- Coaching reluctant rainmakers

Talent Development

- Building high-performing marketing and BD teams
- Developing business development capabilities across the partnership
- Creating a culture of client development

Data and Analytics

- ROI measurement
- CRM utilization
- Opportunity tracking
- Competitive intelligence

Change Management

- Technology implementation
- Process improvement
- Marketing modernization
- Adoption of AI and digital tools

Best Practices for Interviewing

Speak the Language of Revenue

Avoid:

“I managed marketing campaigns.”

Instead:

“I helped create a client development strategy that generated a 22% increase in cross-selling opportunities and supported double-digit growth in key industry sectors.”

Quantify Everything

Be prepared with metrics such as:

- Revenue growth
- New matters opened
- Cross-selling increases
- Lateral integration success rates
- Pitch win rates
- Website lead generation
- Event ROI
- Client retention improvements
- Industry group growth

Focus on Business Outcomes

Every answer should connect marketing activities to:

- Revenue
- Client acquisition
- Competitive advantage
- Firm profitability
- Market share

Core Interview Questions and Answer Frameworks

Strategic Leadership

Q: What do you believe is the role of a Chief Marketing and Business Development Officer in a modern law firm?

Strong Answer Themes:

- Strategic advisor to firm leadership
- Revenue growth partner
- Client-centric leadership
- Market intelligence
- Growth execution

Example:

“The CMBDO should serve as a strategic growth partner to firm leadership. The role extends far beyond marketing communications. It involves helping the firm identify growth opportunities, deepen client relationships, support partner business development efforts, and align resources around the firm’s long-term strategic objectives.”

Q: How do you develop a firm-wide business development strategy?

Discuss:

- Firm strategic plan
- Practice strengths
- Market opportunities
- Client feedback
- Competitive positioning
- Measurable goals

Framework:

1. Analyze market position
2. Identify growth opportunities
3. Align leadership
4. Develop initiatives
5. Measure outcomes

Revenue Growth Questions

Q: Tell us about a significant growth initiative you led.

Strong Answer Structure:

Situation

Growth opportunity or challenge

Action

Specific strategy implemented

Result

Quantifiable outcome

Example:

“We identified an opportunity to expand our healthcare practice nationally. We created an industry-focused go-to-market strategy, aligned attorneys around key targets, implemented account planning, and launched thought leadership campaigns. Within three years, practice revenue increased by over 40%.”

Q: How do you measure marketing and business development success?

Strong Metrics:

Financial

- Revenue growth
- New client revenue
- Cross-selling revenue
- Client retention

Business Development

- Pitch win rates
- Opportunity pipeline
- Meetings generated

Marketing

- Brand awareness
- Website engagement
- Content performance

Client Development Questions

Q: How do you strengthen client relationships?

Discuss:

- Key client programs
- Client listening initiatives
- Relationship mapping
- Industry-focused engagement

Strong Answer:

“The most effective business development strategy is often retaining and expanding existing clients. I focus heavily on understanding client needs, facilitating cross-practice collaboration, and creating intentional relationship management programs.”

Q: How do you drive cross-selling?

Key Components:

- Client teams
- CRM visibility
- Partner incentives
- Account planning

Example:

“Cross-selling succeeds when lawyers understand the client’s broader business needs. We implemented client team structures and formal account planning sessions that led to significant growth across several key relationships.”

Partner Management Questions

Q: How do you work with partners who resist business development efforts?

Critical Question.

Strong Framework:

Understand the Resistance

- Lack of time
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of perceived value

Create Practical Solutions

- Coaching
- Targeted support
- Demonstrate results

Example:

“I focus on making business development easier and more effective. Once partners see peers generating opportunities through structured efforts, participation often increases organically.”

Q: How do you coach attorneys who are not natural rainmakers?

Discuss:

- Individualized coaching
- Industry expertise
- Relationship-building skills
- Practical action plans

Lateral Growth Questions

Q: How do you evaluate and support lateral partner integration?

Discuss:

Due Diligence

- Portable business
- Market reputation
- Client fit

Post-Hire Success

- Integration plans
- Internal introductions
- Cross-selling opportunities
- Brand support

Q: What causes lateral hires to fail?

Strong Answers:

- Poor cultural fit
- Lack of integration
- Unrealistic expectations
- Weak relationship building

Marketing Leadership Questions

Q: How has legal marketing changed over the last five years?

Strong Topics:

- Digital transformation
- Content-driven engagement
- Data analytics
- AI adoption
- Client-centric marketing
- Industry specialization

Q: How do you determine marketing ROI?

Discuss:

- Revenue attribution
- Pipeline contribution
- Client acquisition cost
- Retention impact

Team Leadership Questions

Q: Describe your leadership style.

Strong Themes:

- Strategic
- Collaborative
- Accountable
- Empowering

Q: How do you build high-performing teams?

Discuss:

- Clear expectations
- Professional development
- Accountability
- Succession planning

Market Awareness Questions

Q: What do you see as the biggest challenges facing law firms today?

Strong Topics:

- Increasing competition
- Pricing pressure
- AI disruption
- Talent retention
- Client demands for value
- Alternative legal service providers

Q: What opportunities do you see for growth?

Potential Answers:

- Industry-focused strategies
- Client expansion
- Technology-enabled marketing
- Strategic lateral recruiting
- Thought leadership

Questions You Should Ask Them

Firm Strategy

- What are the firm's top strategic priorities over the next three years?
- Which practice areas represent the greatest growth opportunities?

Business Development Culture

- How would you describe partner engagement in business development today?
- What behaviors distinguish your most successful rainmakers?

Client Development

- Does the firm currently have a formal key client program?
- Where do you see the greatest opportunities for cross-selling?

Marketing Infrastructure

- How effectively is CRM being utilized?
- What marketing and BD investments have generated the greatest returns?

Leadership

- What would success look like in the first 12 months for this role?

Your 90-Second Executive Introduction

Prepare this before every interview:

“I am a strategic marketing and business development executive with extensive experience helping law firms accelerate growth, strengthen client relationships, and enhance market positioning. Throughout my career, I have partnered closely with firm leadership to develop growth strategies, improve cross-selling, support lateral integration, and build high-performing teams. My approach combines data-driven decision making, client-centric planning, and strong partner engagement to produce measurable business results. I am most energized by helping firms translate strategic goals into sustainable revenue growth and competitive advantage.”

Final Preparation Checklist

Prepare at least:

3 Growth Success Stories

- Revenue growth
- Practice expansion
- New client acquisition

2 Partner Influence Stories

- Overcoming resistance
- Building consensus

2 Client Development Stories

- Cross-selling
- Key client growth

1 Team Leadership Story

- Building or transforming a team

1 Failure/Lesson Learned Story

- What happened
- What changed afterward

1 First 100-Day Plan

The strongest CMBDO candidates consistently demonstrate that they can help a firm achieve four outcomes: **grow revenue, deepen client relationships, strengthen market position, and influence partner behavior.** Every interview answer should reinforce one or more of those themes.