

Highlights from the 2025 Professional Growth Summit

The Managing Partner's Forum held its inaugural Professional Services Growth Summit. **Kim Tasso** was there.

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A star-studded group of practice leaders assembled at the Institute of Directors on Friday 28 March for the inaugural Professional Services Growth Summit. Many were fresh from the Professional Services Management Excellence Awards the evening before. For those who missed it, Pinsent Masons won the marketing and business development gong with Trowers & Hamlins securing the thought leadership prize. The day was packed with learning and networking, with the head of a professional services membership body calling it “the single most useful day I’ve spent in years”.

While every session provided valuable nuggets of insight, there were some marketing and business development highlights to be savoured.

Lessons from fast-growth firms

Julia Hayhoe, formerly Chief Strategy Officer of Baker McKenzie and now co-chair of the Centre for Professional Services Research, chaired a panel of leaders from fast-growth firms.

Quietly confident Adrian Jaggard of Taylor Rose and AIIC described their use of Salesforce as an enterprise system which went live last summer. The firm was tough in its non-tolerance of stubborn partners – “there are no carve-outs”. Surprisingly, he described the importance of celebrating Google Reviews.

There was an interesting diversion into the challenge of transitioning from expert to relationship-trusted adviser – with throwbacks to David Maister. Matthew Dashper-Hughes, Global Talent Director of Gunnercooke (a challenger firm with 500 lawyers of which 400 are partners who all work on a fixed-fee basis) talked about the power of coaching where you either told a story or asked a question.

It was good to see occasional PM Forum trainer Alastair Banks, founder of digital marketing agency Optix Solutions, sharing the fast-growth stage and predicting the value of data science qualifications in the future.

Leadership lessons included curiosity to drive innovation, keeping pace with a fast-changing world and the value of speaking to universities and business schools – especially those working outside the sector. There was strong support for ‘hiring for diversity’ and I enjoyed the anecdote of a ‘taxi test’ to assess cultural fit.

Supercharge for your market analyses

There was plenty of fuel to supercharge your PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental) analyses supporting market research and strategic decision-making.

Economist John Ferguson highlighted the combined impact of geopolitical trends (with a focus on the differing strategies of the US and China and the concept of ‘friendshoring’), the AI-driven industrial revolution and climate change. He argued that Trump’s tariffs pose the gravest threat to the global economy. He proposed

active risk management, monitoring the impact on neutral markets and addressing the human-machine partnership with culture, experiment and alignment.

John Rowland provided his usual lively update of a particularly volatile UK political landscape just two days after the Spring Statement. The death of the middle class, intergenerational inequality, tax locks on working people and the impact of defence spending and immigration were mentioned.

At an afternoon breakout, Raquel Ortega Argiles from the Manchester Institute of Innovation Research presented a tsunami of rich data from The Productivity Institute focusing on UK law firm mergers. There was a distinctly Ansoff undertone when she described the different motivations for mergers and alliances including market extensions, product extensions and reducing risk with diversification. Reasons for buying law firms included security, specialisation and scale.

Leadership support for established strategic frameworks

Sir Nigel Knowles – the former driving force behind DLA Piper and now leader of DWF – reflected on his past learnings from Harvard Business School. He talked fondly of the value of the McKinsey 7S framework, mentioned Kotter’s eight steps to change management and talked about the innovation pyramid.

He shared insights on the use of private equity too – DWF had an IPO in 2019 but reverted to private ownership after the global shocks of Brexit, Covid and Ukraine. His touchstones were vision, alignment, governance, innovation, transparent communication, avoiding complacency, persistence (“try and try again”) and passion.

Spotlight on brands and winning marketing campaigns

Ruxandra Radulescu (with whom I was a judge for the management excellence awards) provided a fascinating explanation of the neuroscience of brand emotions to explain the value of these business assets. For those managing the client experience, she warned that negative experiences activated stronger and longer-lasting memory traces.

Lee Grunnell, CMO of Womble Bond Dickinson, talked about how the New Perspectives campaign was



being refreshed with client research. He described the 10 KPIs they monitor and argued for investment in brand tracking research.

Matt Allen at Bidwells talked about their award-winning thought leadership marketing campaign which brought clients into the conversation. It had evolved into the Cambridge supercluster where a £180m joint venture, half a million of Government funding and the involvement of 60 universities was now a driver for a third of their business.

Both commented on the challenge of managing multi-year payback to avoid resistance and short-termism.

Skills focus

While others joined workshops on client relationships (with Alastair Beddow), innovation (with Rosemary Nunn), funding (John Aldred of Barclays), Government (Roger Barker and Neil Carberry), research (Stephen Mayson and Clive Webb) and technology (Janet Day), I joined Paul Matthews and Nigel Spencer (formerly learning and development lead from Reed Smith) on skills.

The discussion focused on the challenge of accelerating demand for skills (professional, technical, technological, commercial and soft skills) in an increasingly time and

attention-poor world. Whilst all agreed that online training was efficient, engagement and effectiveness remained stubborn challenges. There was a debate on how the traditional pyramid of professional firms (multiple juniors supporting a few seniors) might shift to a diamond structure as AI reduced the need for large teams of juniors. The growing value of apprenticeships was mentioned.

Earlier in the day, Nigel Spencer advocated juniors being sent out to clients for experiential learning as part of a career journey matrix so that autonomy, competency and relatedness ignited intrinsic motivation.

Retuning your firm

There was a live presentation of the 102nd *Retuning* broadcast featuring Meirion Jones, a veteran of professional services marketing, who appeared on the first show back in 2020. Flora Hamilton, CEO of the Chartered Association of Business Schools, talked about one of the Government's Help to Grow initiatives – a leadership and management course for 10,000 small businesses.

Concluding remarks

Chair Neville Eisenberg reminded us that the professional services sector is responsible for over 11% of UK GDP and is one of the eight growth sectors in the Government's Industrial Strategy. He summarised his takeaways from the day:

- Increasing unpredictability of the global landscape (requiring adaptability)
- The value of strong and empowered leadership
- The power of brands
- Continued disruption by AI and emerging technologies
- How to measure the momentum of growth strategies.

It was great to see Kazee Clement, formerly part of the PM Forum team, and now Founder and CEO of IncludiVision, managing the conference. Everyone expressed gratitude to Kazee, Richard Chaplin, Morag Campbell and Larysa Hale for creating such an innovative and invigorating event. ■

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