

## **MARKETING A SOLO OR SMALL OFFICE LAW PRACTICE: SOME REAL WORLD TIPS AND STRATEGIES**

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### **I. THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING YOUR PRACTICE**

- A. You are a professional, but you are also a small business.
- B. The key to success in any small business is marketing yourself and the services you offer.
- C. If you do not learn how to market yourself and your services, you will fail – it's as simple as that.
- D. If you are not spending at least 20% to 25% of your total working hours on marketing activities, you are not giving your marketing program the attention it deserves.
- E. Never stop marketing – even when you have more clients than you can handle ☺.
- F. If you are an associate in a law firm, there are only two ways you will ever make partner:
  - 1. Develop an unusual practice specialty that your firm's clients need but that isn't done by any of the other lawyers in the firm.
  - 2. Build a "book" of clients that look to you – not your firm – as their lawyer, and that account for more than 5% of your firm's total billings each year.
  - 3. For more information, see my new book *Partner Track: How to Go from Associate to Partner in Any Law Firm* (Kaplan Publishing, \$12.95).

### **II. WHAT YOUR CLIENTS LOOK FOR IN A LAWYER**

- A. People don't hire lawyers, they hire people who can help them with certain types of problems.
- B. Your personality and ability to empathize with a client's situation are your two biggest marketing tools.
- C. People do not want your legal services – they want YOU. If they don't buy you, it doesn't matter how great your credentials are.
- D. People are frightened of lawyers, and (sometimes) a little ashamed that they're in a situation where they have to hire one – after all, people don't call their lawyers when they're having a nice day ☺.

- E. Anything you can do to humanize yourself and demonstrate that clients can trust you and communicate with you with help you attract and keep clients over the long term.
- F. Don't overlook your ethnic background, sex, and other personal characteristics – people feel comfortable working with people whom they perceive as being “like them”. I don't think of myself as Italian-American, and wasn't brought up in that culture, but I sure have lots of clients with vowels at the end of their names . . . know what I'm sayin'? ☺

### III. THE FOUR PILLARS OF YOUR LAW FIRM MARKETING PROGRAM

- A. Your involvement in organizations and community activities.
- B. Your personal interaction with potential clients and referral sources and your “elevator pitch”.
- C. Your public speaking strategy.
- D. Your law firm Website

### IV. PILLAR # 1: YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS

- A. Bar associations and other professional groups are great, but you rarely get business from them unless other lawyers are a major referral source for your type of practice (e.g. specialized litigation, patent and trademark law, international trade).
- B. It is better to join and get involved in organizations where lots of potential clients and referral sources are hanging out.
- C. Some rules for choosing the right organizations and community activities:
  - 1. Make sure there are lots of potential clients and referral sources in the membership.
  - 2. Make sure there are as few other lawyers as possible in the membership who are going after the same markets you are targeting (for example, I join organizations of franchisors because while the other lawyers are looking to represent them, I'm looking to represent their franchisees).
  - 3. Make sure you believe in the organization's mission – nonprofits, especially, can be “time vampires” and you don't want to spend lots of time working on projects that don't mean anything to you. Also, if people see that you are only interested in getting business from the membership, they will isolate you sooner or later.
  - 4. Look for organizations that have a low “flake ratio” – number of flaky people as a percentage of the total population ☺.
  - 5. If you join an organization, roll up your sleeves and get involved.
  - 6. Look for organizations that will help get your name and/or photo in local newspapers or otherwise generate positive publicity for you and your practice.

## V. PILLAR # 2: YOUR PERSONAL NETWORKING AND “ELEVATOR PITCH”

- A. Be sure to sell “benefits,” not “features” – don’t tell people what you do, tell them how you can solve particular problems or otherwise improve their quality of life.
- B. Get people talking about their “fears” – the things that keep them awake at night – and their “passions” – the things that turn them on or get them excited. People love to talk about these two things more than anything else in the World, and showing a sincere interest in people’s fears and passions make them much more likely to like you.
- C. When giving an “elevator pitch,” here’s what you should say:
  - 1. Describe the customers or clients you “serve” in your practice.
  - 2. Describe the problems you solve, or otherwise say how you make your clients’ lives better by what you do for them.
  - 3. Describe what distinguishes you from your competition.
  - 4. Tell a story, a humorous anecdote, or a weird fact that will stick in the person’s head and make them remember you weeks and months from today (for example, the fact that I once wrote a book that, according to yearly surveys, is the book “most frequently stolen from law libraries around the country”).

## VI. PILLAR # 3: YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING STRATEGY

- A. Probably the best way to market your practice is to get up on some podiums and start giving talks, teaching classes, or hosting webinars on your law firm’s Website (you do have one, don’t you?)
- B. Get hold of lists and schedules of local organization meetings – call the “program director” of each organization and volunteer to speak for free at an upcoming meeting. Most “program directors” are always on the lookout for interesting, free speakers, and you will rarely be turned down. You will also eat extremely well at least once a week without paying ☺.
- C. Do not talk about what you do – talk about problems and issues members of the organization are facing and how they can be solved. Be sure to use lots of stories, illustrations and examples, as people tend to remember these longer than they will your information points. The more colorful, the better (but avoid off-color or politically incorrect stuff that may alienate your audience).
- D. If you have a sense of humor, don’t be afraid to use it – people cannot dislike someone who makes them laugh.
- E. Remember that you are in “show business” whenever you speak – people today have shorter attention spans than they used to, and expect to be entertained as well as informed. As a mentor of mine once put it, “if you can’t keep them awake, you can’t teach them nothing”.
- F. Whenever you speak on a legal or law-related topic, be sure to include a disclaimer that “this is legal information only, not legal advice.”

## VII. PILLAR #4: YOUR LAW FIRM WEBSITE

- A. What should be on your Website:
  - 1. What you do – in layperson’s terms
  - 2. How much you charge
  - 3. Free information
- B. What should not be on your Website:
  - 1. Your photo
  - 2. Your biography
  - 3. Any other information your clients don’t care about
- C. “Attorneys are reminded that pursuant to Practice Book §2-28A(a)(3), a list of website domain names used by the attorney must be filed with the Statewide Grievance Committee quarterly on the first business day of January, April, July and October.”
- D. A further warning: this applies to Facebook pages, LinkedIn profiles, and any other Web page that relates specifically to your law practice.

## VIII. SOME ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Familiarize yourself with Rules 7.1 through 7.4 of the Model Rules of Professional Conduct (note that the New York and Connecticut versions of these are slightly different, if you practice in both states).
- B. If you have a page on LinkedIn, Facebook or another social networking website that is focused on your law practice, note that the State Grievance Committee in CT may view that as a “website” that you must register and update quarterly with them.
- C. Never make claims about your practice that cannot be backed up by hard facts or data. For example, I never say I am a “leading authority on small business law”. Instead, I say “I am the author of 14 books on small business law, management and marketing” – that gets the message across just as well and can easily be supported by fact if anyone ever questions it (I will gladly send the Statewide Grievance Committee copies of each of my books if they request to see them, and will even autograph them without charge ☺).

## VIII. THE BOTTOM LINE ON MARKETING YOUR LAW PRACTICE

- A. Whether you like it or not, “ya gotta do it”.
- B. Do it ethically and professionally, but do it.
- C. Yes, it takes up valuable time that you cannot bill, but do it.
- D. Find a way to market your practice that fits your personality, the amount of time you have available, and your practice specialty . . . but do it.

- E. Set aside an hour or two each day that you devote exclusively to marketing related activities . . . and do it.

*CLIFF ENNICO, best known as the host of the PBS television series “MoneyHunt”, is the author of the nationally syndicated newspaper column “Succeeding in Your Business”(www.succeedinginyourbusiness.com) and the legal editor of the Small Business Television Network at www.sbtv.com. His latest books are “Small Business Survival Guide” (Adams, \$12.95) and “The eBay Marketing Bible” (AMACOM, \$19.95).*