

Law Firm Marketing

15

QUICK IDEAS TO GROW YOUR PRACTICE IN 2005

BY STACY WEST CLARK

Since the “birth” of law firm marketing in the late 1970s, lawyers around the country have experimented with scores of different marketing activities in an effort to increase their business. Some of these activities worked, many did not. Those that failed resulted in lawyers squandering away precious hours and marketing dollars.

Having seen so many lawyers waste their time on unfocused and unproductive endeavors, I wanted to put together a list of marketing activities that Philadelphia lawyers had done that HAD worked. In each case, when the lawyer did just one of the listed activities that follows, his business increased. Now, I did not say that the lawyer did the activity just one time. Rather, lawyers who picked a marketing activity they were comfortable with and did it repeatedly over a series of months for a large number of their clients met with success. Follow through and follow-up was critical to new business being obtained.

First, some immutable principles of successful law firm marketing:

■ You need to have a goal. Anything you do should be done to specifically further that goal. Spend your marketing time only on programs and activities that will get you there. Avoid gimmicks and diversions such as “For \$500, we will list you as a very excellent lawyer in our new Directory of Very Excellent Lawyers.”

■ Marketing is, and forever more will always be, a “contact sport.” You have to get out from behind your desk and rub elbows with clients, potential clients, referral sources and new contacts. You cannot delegate this activity to anyone.

■ The 80/20 rule reigns today. Eighty percent of your business will come from existing clients. Focus most of your efforts on expanding your business from clients who already KNOW you.

■ Only do things you are passionate about and like to do. I mean it. If you are a terrible speaker, don’t. If you hate asking for work, don’t. There are plenty of marketing activities that you can be comfortable doing that will pay-off.

■ Whatever you do, do it from the perspective of your audience. Your marketing activities should demonstrate how you can, for example, help the client (or prospect, referral source or reporter) solve one of his problems, increase his bottom line and/or simply get his job done successfully.

■ Get a handle on where your work has come from over the past few years (which clients, referral sources), which clients have stopped sending you work, what associations your clients and prospects are members of and what periodicals they read. This information will help you make the most-informed decisions regarding your marketing time and dollars.

■ Companies today are looking for lawyers who understand their business and industry. Make sure you market yourself as a lawyer who knows your clients’ industries. Your business cards, Web site and all collateral materials should stress this. For example, talk about your “aviation or airline industry practice” not your “litigation practice.”

And now, the ‘Top Fifteen’ (in no particular order):

1. VISIT YOUR CLIENTS AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH

Go to your clients’ offices. Take a tour of their plant. Tell the client this time is on you to help you better represent the company. Ask where the business is going, pressures and competition they face and, if applicable, whether they are facing any legislative or regulatory concerns. Meet the key people at the company. Ask them all about their jobs and what obstacles, legal or otherwise, prevent them from succeeding. Consider setting up regular office hours at the client’s offices for management or employees to ask you questions and raise legal issues or concerns. Use your visits as a chance to get to know and understand the client’s business so

you can spot legal issues. If you do this correctly, you will walk away with work.

2. CLIENT INTERVIEWS

At the conclusion of every matter, take the client out to lunch and ask him for his views on how the representation went. Tell him you are doing this “off the clock” because you value the relationship so much. Ask for input on staffing, timeliness, fees and responsiveness. Take this opportunity to ask where the business is going—growing, downsizing, moving, what obstacles are impeding the company’s (or individual’s) success. You will be able to spot cross-selling and new business opportunities from this discussion. Every time I have done such an interview with, or on behalf of, a client, we have walked away with new business—and in one case prevented the client from terminating the relationship. Follow-up is key here. If the client cites problems with any area of your representation, cure them and tell the client that you have done so.

3. REFER YOUR CLIENT WORK

Whenever possible, try to refer work to your client and introduce him to referral sources that can send him work. This can take the form of bringing him to association meetings where he can make contacts, helping him join a social or sporting club or having him speak at a program you are involved with where he might pick up some business.

4. CREATE PRODUCTS THAT CREATE BUSINESS

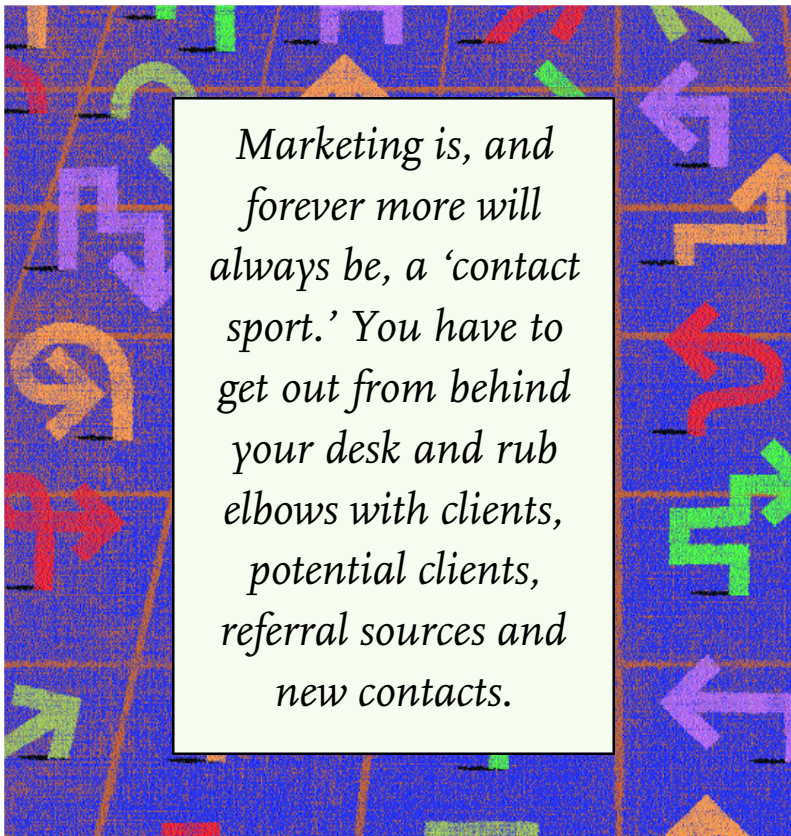
Are your clients subject to any kind of regulations? Are they trying to cut “risk” out of their operations? Offer to perform a “preventative legal audit” for them to help identify and then rectify possible legal concerns. While such audits have been done by firms for many years in the OSHA and environmental areas, forward-thinking firms such as Jacoby Donner, P.C. are now performing contract and risk audits for their construction clients.

5. SPEAK ON AN ‘OH-OH’ SUBJECT

If you like to do public speaking, speak to clients and potential clients on topics that may terrify them. Topics framed as “How to Avoid a) Legal Problems; b) Going to Jail; c) Losing Trade Secrets; d) Tremendous Litigation Costs; or e) Business Slow-Downs Due to a New Law” have, in my experience, always been huge draws. I call this the “oh-oh” speech. One of my clients has mastered this kind of talk. He speaks for no more than forty-five minutes to trade associations his clients are members of and does not give away the store. He highlights the relevant legal issue and what smart businesses (his clients) are doing to avoid trouble. Everyone listens because his talk saves companies money, embarrassment and terrible business problems. As a result, he gets business from his speeches—business he would not otherwise get if he had just given an ordinary talk on a new legal development. It also helps that he is a terrific speaker.

6. USE NEWSPAPERS TO FIND CLIENTS

Read local newspapers and industry publications and act on the information. As Deanna Ding, marketing director for the Milwaukee firm Davis & Kuelthau, s.c., related to me, “An associate in our firm read a story about a woman starting her own accounting firm in the local newspaper. The associate called the woman and asked to meet with her to see if there were any synergies where they could help each other. From this one meeting—born from a newspaper article—this accountant has become an



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incredible referral source bringing in multiple new clients.”

7. ASK FOR WORK

This is hard to do but should be done with all contacts, referral sources, clients, etc. You have to ask for the work—after a round of golf, a dinner, lunch or wherever. Do not assume they know you want their business. Let people know you want to be their lawyer.

8. DO A FREE CLIENT WORKSHOP

Offer to do a program for a client's top executives (or employees within a certain division) on-site for free. Make sure the topic is one that affects their bottom line in some way. Then, do the same talk for other clients, potential clients, referral sources and an industry association. Re-package the talk as an article and send reprints of the article out to clients.

9. MARKET YOURSELF TO OTHER LAWYERS

Take a lawyer from a non-competing firm to lunch once a month. Get to know his practice and describe yours to him. Ask to be referred work in your area.

10. TREAT REFERRAL SOURCES LIKE CLIENTS

Take referral sources out to lunch once a week. Make sure they understand how you can help their

clients. Ask for referrals.

11. HELP A REPORTER

If you want to be quoted as an “expert” in an area, get to know a reporter who covers your client’s industry. Give the reporter a story idea and any help he or she needs in getting information for the story. Help the reporter get his job done and he will quote you in his story and call you again.

12. CREATE A MONTHLY MARKETING PLAN

On one sheet of paper, write down three clients, three prospects and three referral sources you will call or meet with that month and the date by when you will do it. Make a new list each month. Follow up with each person you meet via letter or e-mail after the meeting.

13. CONSIDER EVERYONE A PROSPECT

Review the alumni directories and Web sites of your high school, college and law school. Consider every parent you meet at your child’s activities, every person you meet at a health club or dinner party a possible contact. Practice how you describe your practice. Introduce yourself in a way that sells you. Don’t say you are a “litigator.” Instead say you “help software companies prevent employees from taking trade secrets when they leave the company,” for example. Add everyone to your mailing list.

14. HANG OUT WHERE YOUR CLIENTS ARE

Join associations your clients are members of and make a real contribution to them. Write for the group’s newsletter, advertise in it and speak when you can. Be active on a committee and attend

meetings. If you don’t participate, nothing much will result.

15. IF YOU ADVERTISE IN THE YELLOW PAGES...

Consider breaking the mold and making your listing more effective. Check out the work being done by www.redjackal.com. They create emotion-packed templates for law firms that really grab Yellow Page readers. Consider which ad catches your eye: the typical look-alike listing created by the Yellow Pages or the powerful Red Jackal ad. As founder Ross Fishman, a respected law firm marketer, says, “Our clients are generating so much more revenue that one firm just bought the exclusive right to use our ads in their entire state.”

A FINAL TIP

One final marketing tip. Nothing beats great lawyering and outstanding personal attention. That goes without saying. The forty-lawyer Chicago employment firm Laner Muchin guarantees clients that every phone call will be returned within two hours. No exceptions. The firm says the program has generated new business from existing and new clients. Every Philadelphia lawyer can make the same promise to his or her clients.

So now a call to action. Go increase your business and deliver even more outstanding client service. I am rooting for you. ■

Stacy West Clark, Esq. has been consulting small to mid-sized Delaware Valley law firms on their marketing needs for more than twelve years. From 1986 to 1992, Clark served as the first director of client relations for Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. Her e-mail address is swcconsulting1@aol.com.