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You Want to Be Successful? Create a Personal Brand

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Special to the Legal

Have you seen the Broadway show *Gypsy*? Remember the song the strippers sang titled, “You Gotta Have a Gimmick”? Believe me — they were onto something.

With thousands of great lawyers in this area, how does one stand out in the crowd? Let’s face it: You and all your colleagues in the bar can start to look alike. You received the same training in speaking, researching and advocating in law school. So what will differentiate you from the competition? The answer is a personal brand.

So what is a brand? A brand is:

- How you are thought of;
- What you are known for; and
- How you are different from others.

Your brand enables clients and referral sources to quickly remember what you do when they need an expert. Happily, your brand is something you control, and in the words of strategy consultant Dorie Clark, it is “the ultimate career insurance.” By having a brand, you will quite simply be more successful.

So how do you arrive at your personal brand? According to



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first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC (www.stacyclarkmarketing.com).

Harvard Business Review blogger Ron Ashkenas, “to crystallize your personal brand, ask yourself what you want to be known for — what differentiates you from everyone else who might have a similar background or set of experiences? In other words, what skills, abilities, knowledge and attitudes do you have (or are developing) that will make people want to work with ... you?”

One of the easiest ways to market your brand is to have a niche for your practice. As many have written, “there are riches in the niches,” and I totally agree. Having a niche does not limit your practice; rather, it allows you to focus your marketing time and dollars to specifically reach who you want

to represent. Once they are your clients, you can tell them about all of your practice areas.

What kinds of niches are there? There are niches for geography (“I am Mayberry’s lawyer”); practice areas (“I am a public corruption lawyer”); industries (“I am a highway construction lawyer”); demographics (“I am an elder care lawyer”); and even for unusual scenes (“I represent celebrities who get in fights in the wee hours of the night”). More to come on that one.

So how do you create your niche? You get credentialed and go deep. You own the area by doing the following:

- Write on it for legal periodicals and for publications read specifically by your target audience — and do this regularly.
- Speak on it at CLEs and at events and gatherings attended by your target audience — and do this regularly.
- Go deep in an organization within your niche and over time assume a leadership position in it.
- Make sure your bio on your firm’s website and LinkedIn contains all of the above information and a recitation of your success for clients in the niche area.
- Consider setting up a micro-site. Ron Klasko is one of the

country's top immigration lawyers and he and his firm offer clients a full range of immigration services. However, some time back, he created a microsite that focuses just on the EB-5 visa program. That site is now viewed as a "must-read" for those interested in this government visa program for foreign investors. It, combined with Klasko's extensive writings, lectures and leadership in relevant organizations, have nailed his brand as a pre-eminent EB-5 lawyer. For more on the site, see www.eb5immigration.com.

- Be active in other forms of social media. Blog. Start a group for your niche audience on LinkedIn and provide content. Start discussions on relevant existing groups where you can provide thought leadership.

Other lawyers have been successful in creating personal brands that separate them from the pack without creating a niche practice per se. Take Fran Griesing. She left Big Law and opened her own highly successful law firm several years ago. But even before she made the move to start her own firm, she was doing something really important to position herself as a leading member of the legal and business community. She created something that did not exist before. She invited top women business owners and leaders for breakfast at her office. And they came on a regular basis. The breakfasts went a long way toward sealing Griesing's brand as (1) someone who was a power broker — in touch and friendly with top professionals and (2) a lawyer who went out of her way to help women in the city succeed. Her business, I understand, is huge.

Lisa Kabnick, a partner at Reed Smith, created a brand as someone who is a top financial services lawyer and also a committed and tireless patron of the arts. She has served or currently serves as a board or trustee member of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Kimmel Center and the Pennsylvania Ballet — working with leaders from all different sectors. Her multi-year, high-level board work has, in my mind, sealed her reputation as an incredibly hard-working, enthusiastic and responsive volunteer — traits that carry over into how she approaches her representation of clients.

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Don't forget that your brand should have two audiences: clients, referral sources and the world at large — and the other lawyers in your firm. They need to know about any of the above activities so they can sell you to their clients.

When building your brand, consider these "branding tools":

- Your 30-second elevator speech. Weave your brand into it. Instead of saying "I am a litigator," describe your niche: "I represent celebrities who get into trouble at nightclubs in the wee hours of the night." Keep reading on this one.

- A fulsome bio. As stated above, make sure your online bio fully depicts your brand and has content to that effect.

- Your meticulous personal appearance, your firm handshake and fresh breath. Sorry, but this really does make a difference. Not to tend to any of these areas can render your brand DOA.

- A mentor. Follow him or her around to see how he or she maintains his or her brand.

- Your secretary. Make sure your secretary knows what kind of clients you are going after so he or she can be an ambassador of your brand outside the office.

- Engage in some kind of self-promotion. A recent *New York Times* article profiled New York lawyer Salvatore Strazzullo. While his website looks traditional — painting the picture of a well-rounded general practice firm — the lengthy article described his full-blown practice of representing wealthy celebrities when they get in trouble in nightclubs in the city and make headlines. That is some great promotion of a brand. I will never forget what he does.

So here is the moral of our story: Create a brand for yourself that excites you. Own it and your professional life will be simpler, more fun and profitable. •