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LEGAL MARKETING

How to Get Started When You Only Have a Few Clients

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Special to the Legal

Lately, I have been meeting with lots of lawyers who fall into two categories. First, those that have come out of senior legal positions within the government and therefore have no clients, and second, midlevel partners who have toiled for firm clients and have very little origination on their own. What do they have in common? They both want more clients but have no clear plan as to how to find them.

Here are some of the things I have been suggesting they do:

- Identify what makes you special and then go out and market it. For both the government lawyer and the partner in private practice, this means reviewing one's "case history" to identify what issues, laws or causes you triumphed in the past five years and positioning yourself as the expert in them. This means



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owning the real estate of thought leadership for them by writing, "webinarring" (yes, a new word I just coined), heading up CLE programs, blogging, tweeting and more—all so as to be viewed as an authority in the area.

- What makes you special should be a legal issue that clients have to buy. Here is my handy list of what is sellable today. Market yourself as an expert in any of these areas and you will get work because companies need and want to buy these things:

- Higher revenues.
- Reduced costs (including taxes).
- Reduced legal expenses.
- Avoidance of litigation.

- Never being the subject of a government investigation.
- Avoidance of corporate criminal liability.
- A loss in market share.
- Protection of intellectual property.
- Retention of great employees.
- Having a great public and trusted face.
- Avoidance of negative publicity.
- Being a great corporate neighbor and citizen.
- Data privacy and security.
- Reduction of risk.
- Hang out where people are who need to buy your area of expertise. This means get to know and spend time with referral sources who don't know how to do what you do, but have clients and contacts who may need your help. It also means joining (and becoming very active in) associations where buyers of your services congregate.
- Once you have identified what companies have to buy and you have positioned yourself as

the expert in the area, pick some targets. Start off with three companies or individuals and learn everything you can about their business and professional world. Then, ask your circle of contacts (colleagues, family, friends) if they know anyone in the target company and yes, you can check in with your LinkedIn contacts to see if they know anyone. Find out what corporate events or industry gatherings the target goes to and try to attend and/or host/speak at the event.

- Now what? Before you go to the event or meeting with the target, here is a really big tip: Find something you have in common with the person you want to meet. Do your research. True story: A major rainmaker in the city was meeting with clients from a large Midwestern city who he did not know. The morning of the meeting, he purposefully read the local paper where the company was based and saw that the city's pro-basketball coach was being replaced. He also read the other happenings in the city and, once with the target, was able to engage him, break the ice and show his interest in all things local to the target. It worked. The target was happy to discuss the coach's plight and the lawyer was able to then steer the conversation to whether the target would enjoy meeting one of his partners who happened to be an expert on

patent infringement—a subject the lawyer knew was huge to the target because of the preparation he had done.

Before you go to an event or meeting with the target, find something you have in common with the person you want to meet.

- Whether right out of government or in the middle of your career, all of us have contacts—contacts from law school, neighborhoods, friends, businesses you frequent and more. Make a fulsome mailing list. Have a way to quickly communicate with wide swaths of people from your past and present. For some, that is Twitter or blogging. For others, it is email blasts, and for others, it is making five phone calls a day to get in touch with people. While you will focus on three targets to get started, your goal should be to stay in touch with many more in an easy way over the course of a year.

- Get your game face on. You have to be highly competitive to make this work. You have to want to win and get dirt and grime on your face. You have to be willing to get rejected because you will be—but you have to pick yourself

up and keep going because, as it is often famously said, this is a marathon and not a sprint. If you have three targets and you get a new matter from one, you have won. Stay hungry and go after more.

- Don't shoot yourself in the foot. I have said this many times and I truly believe that if you are launching yourself and hoping to develop a book of business—examine how you appear to others. You have to dress up. Don't slip into dress-casual. You have to wear business suits. You have to look like a world-class lawyer. It matters. You have to shake hands hard and securely. You have to look people in the eye and you have to be an active conversant who asks others questions and really listens to their answers. The more you ask and then listen, the more likely it will be that you will identify possible areas to connect with the person.

The moral of this story is that building a base takes work and time and more work. So pick issues you love to think about and targets you would adore working for and it will almost seem like fun. Good things will happen. •