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Building a Practice: Warm Marketing Builds Relationships with Clients and Colleagues

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Marketing shouldn't be awkward activities forced on you every quarter. Marketing should be fun and rewarding. It offers a smorgasbord from which to choose activities to highlight yourself, your capabilities, and your service offerings. Each marketing activity should be comfortable for you and relevant to your target clients and referral sources.

Think of it as invitations you send out to others to share information and activities. Your choice of marketing activities should always show off your authentic self in the best possible light. People hire professionals they like, respect, and trust. Marketing provides activities through which you will develop those relationships.

This article offers an array of knowledge sharing/visibility activities for you to consider including in your marketing plan. Next month we will look at some lead generation/visibility activities.

Begin Here

Activities implement strategies designed to fulfill goals. Before deciding how to spend your marketing time and money, you need to develop one or two realistic short-term goals and one or two five-year goals. Before you craft goals, think about the kind of work you like to do and the kind of law you like/want to practice. Then consider the type of client base you want and identify the key characteristics of your preferred client.

These decisions will help you select knowledge-sharing and visibility marketing activities that resonate with your target clients and referral contacts. These are the people you want to know your WYDWYD: Why You Do What You Do—and how your skills can help them move forward.

Knowledge-Sharing/Visibility Marketing Activities

Lawyers sell their knowledge of a legal system that few laymen understand. B2C (business-to-consumer) lawyers—e.g., criminal, elder, matrimonial, family, health care, trusts and estates law—can provide information for large groups of nonlawyers regarding what the law can and cannot do, how courts work in real life as compared to the TV versions, and how to choose a lawyer who is right for them. You can also educate the public, clients, prospects, and colleagues about trends, happenings, and new laws.

Use this basic knowledge-sharing to answer listserv queries, participate in online or in-person group discussions, and have law-related conversations with non-clients. Consider it a foundation. Your targeted knowledge-sharing should focus on clients, past and present, and referral sources. These represent practice growth opportunity pools. Let's consider some activities that allow you to share your knowledge, expertise, approach to legal issues, and—yes—your personality to your most relevant audiences.

Articles

If you are looking for greater geographic or target group visibility, write a column in your local newspaper, print or online, or in a publication read by your audience. Ask a colleague if you can provide a guest post for their blog that goes to similar targets. Produce a podcast or short video, publicize it to your colleagues, clients, and friends, and put it on your website.

- *TIP:* To identify information sources of interest to your audience, ask them what they read and where they get credible information. Look at their LinkedIn "interests": people and companies they follow, groups they belong to.

- *TIP:* Research publishing opportunities in online and print publications. For example, if you practice in the health care industry, check out health care trade magazines and online blogs that target your target clients. Subscribe to some to stay abreast of the news your clients are reading. See if any provide opportunities for expert articles and consider submitting a pitch to them. Or discuss advertising opportunities with them.

- *TIP:* To pitch an idea, identify the reporters who cover your area of interest, read a selection of their articles to get a sense of their interests, and then write a short e-mail to explain your topic and offer to help the reporters find appropriate sources (including yourself, of course). To write an article, check for instruction on the publication's website and then send a short pitch e-mail summarizing the topic focus and why their audience would care. Wait a few days and then follow-up by phone.

To build a referrer base, consider writing articles of interest to professionals who also work with your target base. Referrers come from many places:

- Some work in your legal area for more expensive firms. If they know the quality of your work and trust you not to poach their clients, they will refer you when a case is too small for them or they are conflicted out.
- Some work in complementary fields. For example, if you are a mergers and acquisitions lawyer, you might seek referrers who work in accounting and financial industries because you share a target market. Elder law attorneys can look for referrers among gerontologists, geriatric placement consultants, senior housing specialists, senior center directors, etc.
- Some, such as religious leaders and community leaders, are influential forces in your target client's private life.

Create special communication vehicles for clients: alerts, newsletters, website segments, etc. Segment your client base, so only clients interested in a topic receive that material. Remember that you will be judged by your knowledge of your clients' interests and by the quality of your materials, so keep them succinct, relevant, and personable.

Meetings

If you like meeting people, you might want to research opportunities related to conferences, conventions, and trade shows that are important to your target audience. You could advertise in their meeting journal, sponsor an event segment, be part of the program, and of course, attend the event. In today's COVID-19 world the entry costs are considerably lowered because in-person events are now accessed remotely.

- *TIP:* Look in one of the many online reference lists for appropriate trade shows, conferences, and similar events. Select a few that target your target audience. Ask people in your network if they have attended any of the ones that interest you. Follow the directions for getting involved.

If your audience is community-based, offer to do a seminar at your local library or community center to teach potential clients how your expertise applies to their issues. This technique is useful for real estate, trust and estate, matrimonial, elder law, and medical malpractice lawyers. Or to build your referrer base, do an informational "spotlight" at your in-person (or virtual) networking group meetings.

Create roundtable discussion groups with key clients as a vehicle for you to both share knowledge and learn more about their interests and issues. Develop a private client-provider networking group with other professionals who share your target focus. Use these groups to provide knowledge, share information, and develop strong trust-based, informal relationships with both the clients and your referrers.

Regardless of the forum or written format, remember some content guidelines:

- It must be relevant to your audience. If it can deal with something new or timely, so much the better.
- It must showcase your perspective. Don't just regurgitate a regulation; explain why it is important for your audience to understand it. In our COVID-19 time, too much of what passes for information is just a reformatted version of the original document with no value add.
- It must be readable, meaning no legal jargon. Use active-tense verbs and check for grammatical or spelling errors. You will be judged by both the content and presentation, so don't let the latter overshadow the former.
- In marketing, we advise reusing each intellectual output three times, so turn an article into a guest blog, an informal talk, a podcast, a webinar, etc.

ROI

Whatever you do, please measure it, evaluate it, and tweak it next time. There are two basic kinds of measurements:

- Qualitative measures such as audience involvement and approval estimated by the audience reactions to your output, the number of questions evoked, and the quantity of follow-up queries from audience members.

- Quantitative measures such as the amount of time and money spent on an activity. Be sure to keep records of every penny spent to distribute your efforts, and of time invested in preparation for and attendance at activities.

Create an annual marketing budget tying time and money to the goals, strategies, and tactics in your marketing plan. Then every month review your marketing activities and associated costs to assess the value of the activity. Enhance and improve successful ones; rework or remove unsatisfactory ones.

Of course, some activities require time to show their worth, so give every initiative six months to a year to evolve and produce. Look for the feel-good frame of mind that comes from doing something in your comfort zone that helps others and expands your universe of client ambassadors and referral colleagues.

Next month we will look at the range of marketing tactics you can use to make yourself easier to find. The long list includes online, print, and in-person activities—everything from advertising to networking.

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