

## LAW FIRM MARKETING & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

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### Networking: An Approach To Personal Marketing

*Develop a strategy to promote yourself  
and trigger interest in others.*

BY CAROL SCHIRO GREENWALD

**N**ETWORKING typically refers to planned meetings with people you know or want to get to know. As you begin to learn more about these people, relationships mature and trust develops. Over time, many of these people will become friends, colleagues, referral resources and clients.

Everyone belongs to several kinds of networks:

- Personal: those related to family, friends, religion, hobbies, personal development, etc.;
- Work-based: those related to colleagues that help you work more efficiently and effectively;
- Strategic: those who help develop business by uncovering and capitalizing on opportunities that help you and the firm.

Strategic networks can overlap both the personal and work-based networks or be developed separately just for the promotion of business interests. This article discusses ways to promote yourself strategically within your work and personal networks, and how to find and use specific strategic networks.

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#### Creating a Foundation

In order to use networks to promote your skills and develop client relationships, a person needs to decide what it is he wants to promote. To say, "I am a lawyer" is usually too vague. Usually, when someone says, "I am a lawyer" the other person says "Oh" or "That's nice." But if the person says, "I am a lawyer who works with people having matrimonial problems," it is easier to begin a conversation. Then, the other person could discuss a friend's divorce or ask if it is a hard kind of law to practice, or any number of comments that give you a chance to expand on your area of law and your approach to it.

How does an attorney figure out what specifics to discuss? The answer is found through a combination of self-assessment, some research and some pre-networking prep.

Self-assessment means thinking about the kind of law you prefer to practice and the kind of clients you want to find. To begin, write descriptions of:

- the aspects of your practice that you like best, such as counseling or litigating;
- the subject matter you like best, such as matrimonial law or closely held business law;
- the kind of client you like best, such as a business owner with clear ideas as to his goals;
- the kind of matter that is most profitable

for you; and

- two or three personal goals that you want to achieve within the next six months or a year.

For example, a person who likes the counseling part of the matrimonial law practice most might define a "best" client as someone involved in a complex divorce where business, children and personal issues are intertwined and there is a need to explain, negotiate and resolve tough issues. However, cases that end up in litigation might be the most profitable. Realistic goals might include a focus on complex divorce cases, three new clients who fit the counseling "best client" profile, and a new referral relationship with another attorney who likes to litigate but would rather not focus on counseling.

Research involves using online resources or talking to clients and colleagues to identify the best places to find the kind of work and kind of clients you want. The idea is to figure out ahead of time—before strategic networking begins—where these people are, why they use lawyers like you and how they decide whom to hire.

If your clientele is made up of business owners you will want to understand the industry in which they work, its trends, problems, and methods for hiring lawyers. If you work with individuals you will want to know how to reach them and what their issues and needs are. Once you know

something about the kind of client you want to find, you can narrow the search for appropriate networking venues. You will also want to take a look around to see who competes with you for this kind of work.

For example, continuing with the preferred matrimonial client, the locale could be social clubs and family-owned businesses. Associations they belong to might include nonprofit groups, small business forums, Chambers of Commerce, PTAs, golf clubs. Their needs might include both the emotional goal to be taken care of during a difficult time, and the economic need for financial security. Competitors will be found within the legal profession, as well as among accountants, financial planners, stock brokers and insurance agents.

## Why People Buy Legal Services

People buy solutions to problems that are too big, too complicated, too delicate, or too hard to fix by themselves. This requires the successful service professional to explain what they do in terms of what the client or prospect wants. To do this you need to:

- see the problem from the client's point of view;
- see yourself in the role of problem solver and explain how that can work to the person's benefit;
- understand the other person's industry/personal position well enough to discuss the issues in the language that the person will relate to and understand.

By communicating in this way, you begin the process of developing the trust that underlies successful client relationships because the other person will feel that you understand her situation and have the skills necessary to fix it.

## To Turn Features Into Benefits

Features refer to the details and procedures related to the practice of law—briefs written, motions filed, etc. Benefits refer to the purpose of these features from the client's point of view. To make it easier to translate “what you do” into “what you do it for” again, plan ahead. Identify the benefit that corresponds to your practice of law.

To do this, divide a piece of paper into two columns. In the left-hand column write specific features of your service—both the legal and client service parts. In the right-hand column write the corresponding benefit to a client. Use this list of

benefits to create an introductory statement [your “elevator speech”] that encourages the listener to ask more questions.

## Networking Encounters

Now you are ready to communicate what you do so that your listeners see the relevance to what they need or want. You are ready to use your knowledge and experience to help someone else meet his goals.

- **Strategic personal networking:** Often it seems hard to transition from family and community talk to work-related talk. One way to do this is to think about a recent legal matter you've handled that relates to the business or personal problems of your family and friends. Ask how “problem x” is coming along, and then tell the appropriate story from your work. This will help your personal network understand how your knowledge and skills can help them.

- **Strategic work-related networking:** Often attorneys wonder why it is so hard to cross-sell services. Typically, the reason is that their colleagues don't know enough about the specifics of what they do to identify opportunities or explain their expertise. Think about those with whom you work who could refer “best clients” to you, and then network with them. Discuss what you do in terms of both features and benefits. Ask a colleague for examples of opportunities where your practices could lead to cross-selling and help him prepare to cross-sell you.

- **Strategic business-development networking:** Having researched where your “best” clients can be found, find organizations or networking groups they belong to and join. Become a member of the group by attending meetings regularly, joining committees, and meeting individual members of the group for one-on-one breakfasts, lunches, etc. Before going to a meeting, think back to your goals and set a goal for the event such as learning more about specific people, learning more about the topic, meeting a new person, etc. Do enough research to enable you to discuss relevant issues with those who will be there.

Four rules to make encounters easier:

- Before the meeting, research topics of interest to the group, look up information on people you want to get to know who may be there, invite others interested in the topic to join you;
- Act like a host—arrive early, put others

at ease, stay until the end;

- Begin conversations with strangers by discussing the event: Why did you come to this meeting? Is Speaker X a good speaker? Are you a member of this group?

Networking is a process that moves an individual along a continuum from “just met” through “getting to know you” to “working together.” Thus, the follow-up becomes as important as the preparation and the encounter. After the meeting, annotate every business card as to the date and place you met each person and key points of conversation. When you return to the office, input the information into your contact management system. Decide when and how to follow up.

## Guidelines for Success

Business development for attorneys is based on developing trust relationships with people who have the kinds of problems that the attorney and firm can solve. Marketing is the process of finding out who these people are and where they may be found. Successful personal networking requires that a person:

- Set short-term realistic goals that are subsets of the larger goals.
- Develop and stick to a strategy.
- Focus on the targets that make sense in terms of the strategy.
- Do something every day.
- Take the long view because the process is cumulative.
- Find some fun.

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