

***IF YOU ALWAYS DO WHAT YOU'VE
ALWAYS DONE,
YOU'LL ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU'VE
ALWAYS GOT.
-RICHARD BANDLER***

The "business of law" is just as important to success as the "practice of law". Marketing has become increasingly necessary to find effective ways to distinguish one law firm from another.

In order to effectively market your firm you must do the following.

- *Create your image.*
- *Target your audience.*
- *Define and refine your message or theme.*
- *Be consistent in your approach.*
- *Select your mediums.*
- *Be creative.*

If you recognize that effective marketing requires a well-conceived plan, your efforts are more likely to be effective.

Create Your Image

You must decide who you are as a lawyer or firm before you can decide who you want to attract as clients.

Target Your Audience

There are generally two main groups to which to market your firm: the general public and other lawyers. The techniques to be used with each group vary greatly.

Marketing To The Public

The most important initial consideration is to define your target client group. That is not say that other groups should not be considered, but always play to your most receptive audience. Targeted marketing can allow you to most efficiently budget your time and resources, get your work done, and have some semblance of a personal life.

Define Your Message

Before beginning your efforts, you must have a message or theme. It cannot be overemphasized how important it is to think this through before starting any marketing efforts. You need to consider:

- a. Your image
- b. The clients you want to attract
- c. What kind of lawyer you want to be.

It is also important to state that once you settle on a message or theme, stick to it and be consistent. Marketing is not a sprint, it is a marathon. Do not expect instant gratification. You have to be in for the long haul.

Select Your Medium

In this day and age some type of public media advertising is mandatory to market your practice. Again, the advertising needs to be directed to your target client group.

- a. Print Advertising

We found that advertising in traditional publications such as the local business journal or metropolitan newspaper was not effective. Traditional conservative business people read these types of publications. Most of them have lawyers already. We have opted instead for small newspapers with limited circulation in minority communities.

- b. Radio-cheaper
- c. Television-expensive

Be Creative

- a. Firm Logo-stand out from the crowd
- b. Firm Brochures

Every firm should have a brochure. At a minimum the brochure should include the names, specialties, and background about the lawyers. It is equally important for the brochure to be of high quality because it is often the first thing that people see from the firm. A brochure gives the clients something tangible to take with them.

c. Firm Newsletter

The newsletter is a marketing tool that is used with great success to reach prior clients.

In newsletters, less is more. The goal is to keep your name in front of your prior clients and referral sources. No more than four times a year is optimal.

Referrals

The growth and development of a practice depend on getting and keeping clients. The goal of all firms is to attract new clients plus obtain new work from existing and former clients. There are a number of effective methods that a firm can use to successfully accomplish these goals, including participating in community, business, and legal activities. Within the firm itself, there are a variety of simple procedures that help increase and retain clientele.

One of the most effective ways to get new clients is by maximizing a firm's word-of-mouth referral from current or former clients, friends or family members. Strategies or practices that increase a firm's word-of-mouth referrals can be used alone or in combination with other advertising methods.

Word-of-mouth referrals are usually the most inexpensive and cost-effective means of generating new cases. Often, these type of referrals can result in better cases and superior clients. A client who has been referred by a friend or relative tends to trust the firm from the start; thus, he or she may be easier to handle and less inclined to change law firms.

a. Communication With Clients

Among the various methods for increasing referrals and keeping existing clients is the establishment of a good long-term relationship with all current, former, and potential clients. The strength of any practice depends in part on its relationship with its clients. A firm should seek to maintain a client's trust and loyalty over a long period of time. A client's satisfaction regarding the resolution of a particular legal matter alone is not enough. Every client needs to know that you will be there for them beyond any particular case. Again, think long term.

Communication between a firm and its current, former, and potential clients should include information about

the firm and what the firm has to offer that client or that client's family and friends. The first step in improving communication is to create a firm mailing list and update it regularly. If the firm stays in communication with clients, it is more likely to be seen as providing a long-term service. The client database must be updated for use with Christmas and birthday cards.

b. Effective Management of Potential Clients

One effective method of increasing referrals is learning how to effectively manage new case callers or potential clients. Although the firm may decide not to take a particular case, the caller may be an excellent source of future referrals. The manner in which each call is handled can be critical to obtaining the caller's trust, confidence and perhaps future business. Everyone who calls must be considered a client of the future.

Regardless of how weak a specific case appears to be, the attorney should keep in mind the potential for future business from the caller. An attorney can make a good first impression on a potential client by demonstrating concern and patience. Inquire into the facts and explain why the caller does not have a good case. Take the time to answer any questions. If you do not handle certain matters, refer the caller either to a state bar referral service or another attorney.

Often a client assumes a firm only practices the type of law involved in his or her own particular legal matter. Therefore, when interviewing a potential client, take the opportunity to inform the caller what types of cases your firm handles. Inform all callers and clients about your practice so they can refer cases to you. Most importantly, encourage clients to refer their family and friends to you, and send thank you letters for every referral you receive.

Include the names and addresses of all your rejected new callers on your mailing list. Offer your newsletter to all callers and clients. With the increasing competition among attorneys, the on-going contact with a rejected caller may also serve to differentiate your firm from other firms.

Mailings geared to generate word-of-mouth referrals are distinguishable from direct-mail marketing. The latter

mailing method requires mailing information to a list of people with whom there has been no prior contact, whereas word-of-mouth mailings are merely following up on new callers or keeping your former and current clients informed about the firm. These mailings are cost-effective and inexpensive.

Your Involvement in the Community

Potential clients are everywhere. A lawyer's attention and commitment to the community can make that lawyer more visible and accessible to new clients. To attract new clients, a lawyer needs to become involved in community activities, business activities, and activities within the legal community. The particular activities chosen depend in large part on the individual lawyer.

Activities in the legal community should include becoming an active member in both the local bar associations and the national associations pertaining to the lawyer's particular area of practice. Furthermore, serving on various committees or groups puts one in touch with other attorneys who are potential referral sources. In addition, an attorney can establish a reputation as an expert in a particular field of law by writing articles or being a seminar speaker on a specialized topic.

Participation in community activities not only provides a valuable community service, but also results in potential referrals. Activities can range from serving on the board of the United Way to doing volunteer work for various charitable fundraising activities.

Joining various groups can put you in contact with people in the community who can be a potential source of referrals. If you do join an organization or serve on a board, work hard on committees and on the board to build a good reputation as a worker.

Mastering these rainmaking skills takes time, patience, and creativity. Obviously, there is no definite rainmaking technique that works for everyone. Do not feel constrained to employ the traditional modes of communication or networking. The success of rainmaking techniques varies depending on the individual and type of practice.

Design a Web Page

Are you promoting your law firm on the internet? Is your Web presence meaningful? For it to be so, you must set goals and

design a strategy to meet them. For most small law firms, the goal is to attract new clients. The internet can be one of the most effective ways to tell your firm's story and meet that goal.

Millions of people use the Internet every day to gather information. Most of them do not have a direct relationship with an attorney. When legal problems arise, they aren't sure where to begin looking for one. These people may not find traditional lawyer advertisements appealing, or they may want more information before picking up the telephone. You can reach them through your Web site.

a. Directory Web Sites

Promoting your firm on the internet begins with your own Web site. Think of your site as your virtual marketing office. This is your opportunity to explain who you are, what you are about, and why you may be the right attorney for a Web surfer who needs legal help.

Some firms rely solely on attorney-directory Web sites. This is a mistake. These directories are an excellent component of promoting your firm on the Web, but they should not be the basis of your internet presence. When you list your firm in a directory, you have to rely on the site to promote the directory. When potential clients do find it, your firm competes with many others for attention.

This is not to say directory listings are not important because they are. But you should also promote your firm with its own Web site and include your Web address on your letterhead, business cards, and other communications. Having your own Web site also lets you control how it looks and how you promote it in search-engine submissions. You can do these things only by maintaining your Web site.

b. Building a Web Site

What is a Web site? It is basically a document on your computer that is written in a universal code called Hypertext Markup Language, or HTML. This code enables Web browsers, such as Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer, to display the contents of the document. HTML also enables you to use navigation buttons and pull-down menus to help visitors navigate your site.

There are many companies that can help you design and build your site as well as host it. A hosting company will provide space on its Web server where your Web site will reside. Before you hire one, decide what you want your site to be. Do you want to present just basic information, or do you want the site to be interactive and constantly changing? Put yourself in the shoes of potential clients and think about what they might find helpful and appealing.

Features common to attorney Web sites include attorney bios, firm bios, news, and contact information. The latter should include a way for people to reach you after hours. Include a pager number or a dedicated after-hours e-mail address tied to a cell phone that can receive e-mail. This way, you will not miss a new client.

c. E-mail Newsletter

Another useful feature is an e-mail newsletter list. Your clients and prospective clients can sign up for a newsletter that you publish and distribute regularly via e-mail. Even a quarterly newsletter helps keep you connected to your network of clients. Your newsletter should contain items you would consider placing in a "news" section on your Web site. E-mail newsletters cost virtually nothing to write and send out and are a powerful marketing tool for your firm.

d. The Name Of Your Web Site

Many fantastic sites are rarely seen because they are difficult to find. You must lead prospective clients to your site with proactive efforts, not the least of which is publishing it on a Web server. Your Web-design company will be able to provide this service or direct you to a company that does.

Part of the promotion process is selecting a "domain name." This is your unique Internet address, also called a uniform resource locator, or URL. A URL allows people to quickly and easily find a particular Web site among millions. What domain name you choose depends on your marketing strategies.

A domain name will not affect your search-engine placement, unless your domain name consists of a keyword. Search engine ranking is where your Web site address appears when certain search terms are entered. It is also possible to achieve high rankings in search engine results with a domain name that is a random series of characters.

A domain name is important if you want to market your Web site using additional means such as business cards, or print, radio or television advertising. In that case, a memorable name helps.

Many lawyers use the firm's initials followed by "law" or "attorneys." Avoid abbreviations, hyphens, and other elements that could make the name difficult to remember or to say aloud. If you find yourself explaining punctuation or abbreviations, you are not taking full advantage of the internet's efficiencies.

Establishing your own main domain name will allow you to promote your firm more effectively through search engines and in your other marketing efforts. Make it easy for these efforts to lead people to your Web site, where you enjoy their undivided attention.

One quick note about extension: You will be able to choose from several options, including "com" and "net." Go with "com." For now, this is the standard for business sites, and may be for many years to come. In fact, many business browsers assume "com," so if a Web user leaves off the extension when typing a URL in the address blank the browser goes to the site with the "com" extension. More important, people assume that a domain name ends with "com."

Register your domain name under as many extensions as you can, because if you take the same name as a competitor in your city, except that yours ends with "net," your marketing efforts will probably send plenty of business to your competitor.

e. Driving Clients To Your Site

Once you have a great Web site on a Web server and a good domain name, it's time to let people know about your site. First, make sure that your letterhead, advertisements, and business cards list your Web address.

Next, submit your Web site to internet search engines and directory listings. Search engines use "robots" (or "bots") that search the Web for content. When a robot finds your site, it searches for keywords and text and categories the site has in its database. No two search engines use the same indexing software, so it can be a challenge to design your site to rank high in multiple search engines. A skilled Web designer will know how to do this. You can also list your site with attorney directories that provide listing sorted by state, city and area of practice. Many are free, and others are inexpensive. Some attorney directories offer primary placement for an additional fee, as well as hyper-links to your Web site.

When it comes time to submit your Web site to search engines, hire a professional and avoid the free submission Web sites. While it is true that their submission service is free, you may be doing more harm than good. Search engines have software that will blacklist certain Web sites that have particular characteristics such as misused keywords.

Some businesses have begun using "doorway" sites for Web promotion. They set up several sites with different Web addresses, all of which lead to the company's primary site. Each site is designed to rank high with a particular search engine.

The goal is for at least one of the doorway sites to rank high in a search, no matter which search engine a Web surfer uses. When the user clicks on the doorway site, he or she is automatically forwarded to the company's primary Web site.

Here's something that isn't new: communication. The internet is essentially an avenue for communication. People expect to find information about nearly anything on the internet. They're looking for you right now. You should be there to say "hello."

Trading Cases

Referral relationships can be rewarding professionally, personally, and financially. Nevertheless, attorneys often fail to develop satisfying referral relationships because we are too caught up in the day-to-day work of our practices to focus on tasks that may have more long-term importance.

The most common mistake attorneys make is assuming that other lawyers will not refer cases. Lawyers may refer cases because their practices are too busy or because a case is not in an area of law in which they are well versed. Or a case may be too large or too small, too complex or too expensive for a practitioner to accept.

You don't need to practice with the largest, most high-profile firm in your area to receive referrals. Referring attorneys just want to know before they hand over a case that the attorney receiving the referral will represent the client competently and fully, and-most important-that the client will be satisfied.

Always recognize those who refer cases to you and trust you to handle them well in a way you deem appropriate given the relationship. At a minimum, express your appreciation with a call or a thank-you note, whether or not you decide to take the case. Referring attorneys will appreciate your returning files for cases you do not accept.

Using Your Staff

Your staff can be a great source of clients for your firm. If your practice is consumer-based, everyone is a potential client. Before people draw up a will, get a divorce or buy a home, they ask around among their friends for suggestions. By word of mouth, staff can generate a number of referrals for you just as satisfied customers do. Make sure that your staff know that you would like to get referrals from them. Too often, the staff thinks that the attorney is too busy to take on new business. Make sure that your staff has the straight story about your availability. You never know who might be asking.

a. Networking

Is it worth your while to throw a client or referral party? It's a chance to thank those who have sent you business in the past and remind them that you are still out there. Your staff can help you organize it and send out the invitations.

When you host a party don't forget to introduce your staff. Many of your clients may have spent years just talking on the telephone without ever meeting your

staff face to face. Making that personal connection will cement the relationship.

b. Share Your Marketing Efforts

Does your staff know your marketing goals and plans? They can not help you unless they know what you want to accomplish. Ask them for their help.

Make sure to inform your staff of marketing programs you may be working on. Some offices are small enough that this can be done informally. This tactic can include them in the marketing efforts and also so that they would be able to give a telephone caller the proper information about an upcoming event.

c. Gather Intelligence

What if you could find out even more about your clients - their hobbies, the names of their kids, or their birthday? Maybe you can't, but your staff certainly can.

Staff are in a position to find out much more about the client than attorneys are. If your staff members have good relationships with your clients, they are in the perfect position to find out things like the activities of your clients' children or any promotions your clients might have received.

d. The First Impression

Does your staff greet clients by name? Are they friendly? Your staff is the first point of contact to clients. Understanding that role and providing knowledgeable support and service to clients is paramount. That means your staff needs to be both friendly and professional.

Neatness counts. You need to look good as an attorney, but your staff needs to look good, too. Clients make decisions about you and your firm based on how the staff behaves. Make sure that you have taken time to discuss what you expect with your staff. They can not talk to clients the same way that they talk to their kids or their friends. It is important to institute office manners and office English.

Having the receptionist or secretary greet you by name, take your coat and offer you a drink is something that

clients respond to. They like to be treated as VIPs. Does your staff make this effort with every single client? If they do, the clients will keep coming back for more.

e. Where Are You?

Does your secretary know where you are at all times? Can you be reached in case there is a client emergency?

The staff has to know where the attorneys are at all times. When a client calls, your staff needs to be able to contact you or at least know when you will be back in the office. Clients want to know when their calls are likely to be returned.

f. Answering General Questions

Can your staff answer the usual day-to-day questions that boil down to "What's happening with my case?"

About half the calls an attorney gets in a day are clients asking general questions about their matters. They want to know one of three things: Where does their matter stand? What's next? Or what has been done? It is not always necessary for them to talk to the attorney about these things. If you can cut the calls you have to return in half, it is worth it to let your staff answer the general questions.