

LAW OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR™

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Every attorney needs a personal marketing plan

AND EVERY PLAN NEEDS FOUR ELEMENTS

A personal marketing plan is a necessity for an attorney's success.

The reason is the competition. It's moved beyond the point of being fierce, says Glyn Ellyn, IL, law firm marketing consultant **LARRY BODINE**.

"Lawyers have entered a period of over-the-top, predatory competition." In fact, surveys show that two out of three practices "actively try to lure clients away from other law firms."

As a result, clients are less and less often return clients, forcing attorneys to market themselves to new clients as well as the current ones.

Here Bodine outlines four essential marketing areas an attorney has to hit. They are attorney referrals, client referrals, trade and business associations, and the internet – including YouTube.

FIRST, THE ATTORNEYS

Start by building an attorney referral network.

Most attorneys go after referrals at random, Bodine says. Attorney A sends a matter to Attorney B and then does no more than hope B will return the favor.

"But the smarter approach is to be premeditated about it" and start creating "fortified referral arrangements with other lawyers."

Those aren't the competitors but attorneys who can benefit from the relationship. For example, a real estate attorney who doesn't do litigation work would do well with a litigation attorney who doesn't do real estate work.

Approach it with a call: *Are you free for lunch Thursday? I have a business proposition I want to run by you.*

Then start lunch by holding out the carrot of potential business, for example, *I get a lot of people who are in disputes, but I'm not a courtroom lawyer. Are these the kinds of clients you are looking for?*

The answer will most likely be a yes or even

"absolutely!" If so, ask for reciprocal referrals: *I know that as a trial lawyer, you don't do real estate work. Well that's what I do. I'd be grateful if you would refer your clients and prospects to me when they need real estate services. And since I don't do litigation work, when my clients or prospects need that, I'll refer them to you.*

Afterwards, be the first to send a referral. "That shows the lawyer is serious" about sharing the business.

NEXT, THE CLIENTS

Ask for more referrals from the clients.

Bodine recommends making personal visits to the 10 largest revenue generators. And be blunt about the *(please turn to page 3)*

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reason for the visit, he says, because no client will automatically refer the firm to other contacts.

Nonattorneys “don’t understand that it’s with recommendations that an attorney builds a business.” They understand that recommendations are necessary for their own businesses, but very few realize that the same applies to attorneys.

Explain in no uncertain terms that the firm would appreciate their recommendations, for example: *We frequently compete for new business. When we do, may we use you as a reference?*

If the client is pleased with the services, the answer will be yes.

Then explain what the reference giving will entail: *May we tell our prospective clients and also other attorneys that they can contact you for references about our firm?*

Again, a happy client will say yes.

Then ask for introductions: *What types of meetings or conferences in your industry do you attend?*

And follow that with: *The next time you go to that conference, may I go with you? I’d like to meet your colleagues and find out more about your industry.*

A conference is a network ready to be taken advantage of, and attending with a happy client is tantamount to getting a referral from that client.

A caution, however. Once at the conference or meeting, don’t put the sales pitch on anybody. Use the time instead to learn about the business and to find out what legal services the firm can offer.

Ask questions such as: *Can you tell me about your business? I’ve heard about X trend – how are you dealing with it? What’s the one product that generates the most revenue for you? What business problems do you have?*

Don’t talk about the firm’s credentials or the cases it’s won, he says. “Get the other people to do the talking.” That’s what builds connections.

ONWARD TO THE ASSOCIATIONS

There’s more marketing to be had from the business and trade associations that represent the work the attorney does.

Few attorneys approach trade associations, so it’s often possible to reach the ultimate goal, which is “to be the only lawyer in the room,” with everybody else in that room a potential client.

Go to their conferences and ask people to dinner afterwards, “and pick up the tab.”

Winning new clients “is a lot like dating,” he says. “There’s a courtship involved.” Don’t expect to get engaged on the first date. Get to know those people. Get their business cards. Ask about their companies and about the issues they are facing.

And, just as with a date, find out if that person is

interested in pursuing the relationship. A good way to do so is to talk about an issue and then ask *When would you like for me to follow up on this with you?*

If the answer is to call next Thursday, count on it “that something is red hot.” But if the answer is to follow up in six months, probably that prospect “wants the attorney to go away for a while.”

To get yet more mileage from the effort, go to the association president and say *I’m a new member and I’d like to become active in your organization. Is there anything I can do for you?*

Count on it that the president will have something that needs to be done, he says, “because it’s hard to find volunteers in an association.”

It gets better. Because the work is voluntary, the only way the president can reward the attorney is with an appointment to the board.

And once on the board, the attorney can chair a committee, put that on the resume, “and anybody in the industry thinks ‘Wow! This is a lawyer who really knows my business.’”

AND THENCE TO THE INTERNET

The fourth essential marketing tactic is to get known on the internet.

“New data says 85% of businesses and 82% of consumers go online when they’re looking for a lawyer,” Bodine says. That’s true even when they have a direct referral from a friend or business associate – they go online to check out the attorney’s credentials.

For best marketing, the attorney needs go beyond the website and establish a presence on a blog and on social media.

A blog is appealing to prospects because it covers whatever industry the attorney represents.

Social media works because the people who sign up for it are generally active on it. LinkedIn, for example, claims to have a network of more than 100 million members.

Facebook too is useful because it allows an attorney to make a lot of contacts, especially in consumer areas such as personal injury and wills.

Bodine also points to a little appreciated advantage of social media, which is that it’s helpful to people who are introverted. It allows them to make their contacts online, so when they meet those people, it’s not so intimidating.

ALWAYS FOCUS ON EDUCATION

A caution about online marketing, Bodine says, is that it’s not an opportunity to throw a commercial out into the public.

Focus it solely on education. Someone who is helpful is someone who will be followed on the internet. What’s more, “any attorney who is constantly giving

practical advice or current information is viewed as an expert in the field.” That person becomes the go-to attorney.

AND BECOME A STAR

Don’t ignore the marketing potential of YouTube, Bodine says. Create a video, put a posting about it on the blog, and then tweet about it.

Video marketing is good because it’s convincing. People who are introduced to attorneys via a video bond with them much faster than otherwise. In fact, many firms find that the prospects who come in ready to do business almost always have watched a video and so feel somewhat already acquainted.

Seeing a video, “people can connect instantly” with the attorney. “It’s pretty close to coming into the office,” he says. They find out what the attorney looks like and sounds like, and if the attorney has an appealing presence and offers something helpful, “that seals the deal.”

As to the keys of a good video, make it short – three minutes max – and lay out the “hook” or the main point within the first eight seconds, for example *My name is Attorney A. And today I’m going to talk about the real estate elements a first-time homebuyer needs to know.* ❖

It’s within those first eight seconds that the viewer decides to watch the video or close it. **By John Chase**

Another element of success: don’t use any of the three minutes to self-promote. Most videos businesses produce turn out to be commercials, but nobody is going to sit through that, much less recommend it to somebody else. What people want is information they can use.

And one more point: recognize personal weaknesses. People watching a video “decide right away” if the attorney is the one they want to hire, Bodine says. Thus, an attorney who isn’t a good speaker needs to hire a voice coach. Similarly, an attorney who has difficulty remembering a script needs to put cue cards behind the camera.

