

Stephen Fairley  
The Rainmaker Institute  
<http://www.TheRainmakerInstitute.com>

## Law Firm Marketing Case Study: Using Networking to Build a Referral-based Practice By Stephen Fairley

Law firm marketing for most attorneys is about achieving a referral-based practice, where most new clients come as a direct result of referrals from friends, colleagues, clients, and other trusted advisors.

Too many attorneys confused formal with informal networking. Formal networking is attending a formalized group, like a chamber of commerce event, Young Entrepreneur's Organization, participating at a trade show, or joining a leads group (like Business Networking International). Informal networking is meeting with friends, colleagues, or potential referral sources over lunch or after work.

At The Rainmaker Institute we have helped over 6,000 attorneys at small and solo law firms market and grow their law business. We have found that networking works exceptionally well for a select group of attorneys and not at all for most attorneys.

There are a couple reasons why networking is generally not an effective law firm marketing tool:

- **Attorneys often attend the wrong kind of group**—one filled with their peers not their prospects.
- **Many attorneys don't know how to network properly** and so it becomes a game to see how many business cards they can pass out in two hours.
- **There is no plan for following up in a timely manner.** You have about 48 hours to follow up with a "hot lead" or they will likely forget about you.

In Bob Berg's fantastic book, *Endless Referrals*, he makes the case that formal networking events are best used for connecting with potential referral sources, not to meet qualified prospects. I couldn't agree more. Berg teaches the number one networking question a professional can ask is "How would I know if the person I'm speaking with would be a great referral for you?" This helps other people to view you as a giver, not just a taker.

Instead of just attending a networking event, ask the organizer if you can speak at the group or host a series of meetings for it. I recently did a law firm marketing plan for a small business lawyer. She joined a local networking group for established small business owners, attended the meetings regularly for a few months and then was elected to the membership committee.

I say elected, but truthfully she was recruited because no one else wanted to deal with the group's newbie's. Everyone wanted to be close to the "power brokers" and long-term members of the group. When she asked me how to best use this opportunity, we developed a creative way to utilize a local networking group for small business owners. Every month she would get a list of new members and then call them up and invite them out to lunch.

When on the phone she would say something like, "Hello I'm Susan calling from the XYZ networking group. I see you just joined and I wanted to extend a welcome to you. I would like

to take you out to lunch to learn more about your business and see how we can get you quickly connected into the group. I know a lot of the members and would like to be a resource to you.”

Virtually all of them took her up on the offer. During lunch it always came out that she was an attorney who concentrated on helping small business owners grow their business, protect their assets, and plan for the future.

Within a year, she grew her revenues from \$200,000 to over \$1 million in gross revenues; mostly due to her meetings with these new members and referrals from other people in the group.

**Here are some key points to remember when using networking to market your law practice:**

- Research the groups to determine if your ideal prospects attend
- Ask to speak to the group
- Ask to write a column or article for the group’s newsletter
- Seek out a position of influence where you can meet new members
- Follow up with face to face meetings
- Be consistent with your law firm marketing efforts