

Participating in trade shows can be a great way to increase exposure for your firm and the services you provide. But to get the most from the experience, make sure you create a plan ahead of time so you are well prepared.

As you may already know, you can't just show up at the trade show and expect clients to come rolling in. These events take a great deal of planning if they are going to provide the return on investment you want. Here are a few ideas to consider:

Prepare: Are you exhibiting at the show? If so, you'll need a booth, collateral materials, unique giveaways and personnel to staff the booth. Every item you take should be well-branded with your firm logo and colors to reinforce your brand. Your booth graphics should be professionally designed, branded and bold enough to draw attention. And the more unique you can be, the more likely you'll attract more attendees into your booth. Maybe you want to create a video that loops on a TV or computer in your booth that visitors can watch if all your staff are talking to others, or have some sort of questionnaire they can fill out on an iPad. Are you a show sponsor? Then you may need to create items to put in the attendee packets/bags, an ad for the show booklet and a company description for show materials. And don't forget your travel arrangements and a box of materials like pens, notepads, paperclips, business cards and a way to collect visitors cards too. There's a lot of planning that goes into these events, so make sure you have all your bases covered.

Promote: Don't forget to promote the event and your participation as much as you can. Include information in your newsletter, send an email blast to your clients who may be interested in attending and a press release to your local paper and online blogs. Mention it in your blog posts and give reasons why your readers may want to attend. If you're speaking or interviewed beforehand, mention it at the end, and have information on the event available to anyone who wants it, both in print form and on your Website.

Present: I've talked about how powerful a speaking engagement can be for you and your firm, and these types of events are a wonderful opportunity for you to speak if you can. But you have to start very early to get a slot. Find out when the event committee sends out their request for presentations and make sure you are on the list when they do. Prepare a very well-written and thorough response and get it in well before the deadline. If allowed, include testimonials from previous presentations you've given as well. Additionally, whether you speak or not, consider hosting a cocktail party for attendees in a suite at the hotel. This will give you a chance to get to know attendees more than you can on the trade show floor. And it can also be a chance for you to speak briefly about what your firm does before a smaller, more intimate group.

This is just scratching the surface, but it will help you prepare for your next trade show opportunity. What have you found that works well? What additional preparations do you typically make?

And by the way, **I'll be sponsoring, attending, presenting and exhibiting at the upcoming Legal Marketing Association Annual Conference on April 4-6 in Orlando.**
I hope to see you there!