



How to Develop a Law Firm Strategy that Will Make You a Rainmaker

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It happened again.

Just last week I received a semi-panicked phone call from a bright, hardworking attorney who had just finished up a highly profitable matter. As he spent the first several minutes of the phone conversation describing the success of this recently completed engagement, I kept thinking that it seemed as though he was trying to justify something.

Then it happened.

About nine minutes into the conversation, he said: “And now that I’ve wrapped up this case, I have nothing on the horizon.” (Long pause.) “Nothing, Dave.”

At this point, if I were a therapist, a member of the clergy, or even a psychic, I could have said something comforting. That’s what this guy was looking for. He wanted someone to tell him that it would be all right. He was like a fisherman in a sailboat looking at a sky full of heavy, black storm clouds. He wanted to believe that the wind would take him to safety. But he knew, just from scanning the horizon, that he was in trouble. Big trouble. Rough seas lay ahead.

Since I believe that facing harsh reality now can lead to better decisions in the future, I stayed quiet and let this otherwise smart attorney continue:

“I know I should have done some marketing to keep my client pipeline full. I know that I should not have blown off those networking meetings. I should have accepted that speaking gig at the industry convention. But I’m sure that finishing my Web site redesign will help with lead generation in the future. Right? I just need something to help me get some new clients right now. Is there anyplace I can place an ad? Is there a group I can join? Do you have any ideas?”

Clearly, this guy was concerned. Maybe even a little scared.

Of course, I did have some ideas. But unfortunately they were not the kind that would serve him well right now. This gentleman had come to me thinking that he had a marketing problem when in reality he had a problem with his business strategy.

Many solo and small practice attorneys think that simply hanging a shingle, setting up an informational Web site, and ordering a dedicated telephone line is all they need to do to attract new clients. They believe that new business will just “find them.” Some of them believe this out of naïveté, and others believe this because that’s the way it worked when they were at a large firm. They think that they can sit at a desk, answer the phone, and land a new client.

When reality hits them (and it always does), they look for answers. Some spend money on a big ad in the yellow pages. Others throw more money at a Web designer for a new Web site. A few try some other kind of really expensive advertising. Still others resort to less ethical tactics.

The key to attracting new business is to plan your practice in a way that makes it easy for business to come to you. You want to be the “best” and in many cases the “only” logical choice for your potential client. To occupy that position in his/her mind, you must do three things:

First: You must choose a narrow niche and specialize in solving legal problems within that universe. This positions you as the undisputed expert in your field.

Next: You should identify the most appropriate client for your services—someone who wants and needs what you have to offer.

Finally: You need to aim all of your marketing directly at that client.

You have to own a niche and command a premium for working with people who desperately need your services. This is a strategic issue. Your practice must be designed this way. You are striving for market dominance. You need to carefully develop and diligently maintain a practice that is synonymous with solving the most painful problems your clients face. The client must instantly equate you with the solution to this issue. When the client thinks of your firm, he must instantly think of you and the solution to a specific problem. Here are some examples of that kind of positioning:

- Joe the Tax Attorney is the only guy who can settle my issue with the IRS.
- Tina the Divorce Attorney is the best person to help me get custody of my kids.
- Peter the Intellectual Property Attorney is the best person to help me maintain control of my work—even though I didn’t file the copyright documents correctly.
- I slipped on a wet floor in a restaurant, and now Rebecca the Personal Injury Attorney is the only person who can help me secure my financial future since I can no longer work.

As you can imagine, it requires significant effort to get these messages into the minds of your prospective clients. Many attorneys, like my friend on the phone, believe that this effort begins when you have no clients and are desperate. In reality, that is the worst time to begin setting up your firm for success. The development and evolution of your business strategy occurs over time. It is an ongoing process and not a one-time program. You need to integrate these activities into your regular routine. Here's how:

1). Select an appropriate niche for your practice and focus on it exclusively.

Every attorney can be a “general counsel.” There is little competitive advantage in being able to handle common issues really well. Someone will always be better—or at least claim to be better. That's why you need to have a specialty. Having deep expertise (skill, knowledge, and experience) in a specific area will help you claim mastery of the law on issues related to that field.

This can be accomplished by becoming famous in your niche. Write articles and submit them to industry trade publications. Speak at industry conventions. Hold educational seminars on the most difficult and complex issues in your field and invite several influential people in the industry to attend.

There are a number of ways to establish yourself as a specialist in a niche. If you leverage your expertise appropriately, you will not only be in high demand, you can also claim a premium for your services.

2). Match your messaging to your targeted client base.

Imagine trying to raise donations for the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee by calling a list of members of the Democratic Party. That would be difficult. While not as difficult, it would still be challenging to call on voters who registered as Independents. Yet a list of registered Republicans would be far more productive for someone seeking donations for a Republican Congressional Candidate. And calling Republicans who had donated large sums of money in previous years would probably prove to be the most fruitful way to solicit funds for this cause.

You should market your legal services using the same principles. Rainmakers always match the message to the market. Imagine, for a moment, that you make your living selling ballet shoes. Just ballet shoes—nothing else. How would you target your client base? Should you waste your time giving a presentation to an entire grammar school assembly? Or would you be better off setting up a booth outside a dance recital—and tacking up flyers near the sign-up sheet for ballet lessons?

Aim all of your communications weapons directly at your targeted client and you will be able to bring in new clients rapidly.

3). Develop systems that continuously present your message to your target market.

Frequency of interaction helps build trust. Research has shown that, in most cases, it takes a minimum of seven separate interactions with a prospect before she will consider doing business with you. You can't be everywhere. You need to develop systems that deliver your marketing message to your target market over and over again.

Use technology to your advantage. Leverage your Web site and e-mail to help educate your clients on your areas of expertise. Send out a newsletter that serves as a resource to help your clients solve some of their thorniest issues. Give interviews on local media outlets, record them, and send the recordings to clients and prospective clients. Conduct seminars that provide valuable information to large groups of people. Effective business development is about reaching the right people at the right time, and it is far more effective to reach them en masse than one at a time.

Many attorneys feel that this is too much work. They struggle with the idea that they can't work on client cases and also spend time managing an effective business development process. Again, this is a false perception. The bulk of the work comes in setting up the systems and developing the strategy. Once that is done, a steady flow of clients is a well-earned reward.

My friend on the telephone just came to that realization. Starting his shift in business strategy now will lead to more clients, with less effort down the road. What will it take to motivate you to begin to develop an effective strategy for your business?

David V. Lorenzo is an expert at helping attorneys make more money with less effort. If you'd like to receive his free business strategy checklist, visit the Free Tools area at <http://RainmakerLawyer.com>, or call Dave toll-free at 1-888-692-5531.