



How Solos and Small Firms Can Succeed in Business

Last month I had the opportunity to attend the 2010 [ABA](#) Annual Meeting in [San Francisco](#). The two programs I enjoyed the most were [Ethical Traps in Cyberspace](#) and Solo Day: The Practice of Law. Using hypothetical law practices as a backdrop, the Solo Day speakers covered everything from office setup, software, and staffing to financial management, ethics, and virtual practice. The handout is an embarrassment of riches, with over 40 sample forms and letters. (Have I enticed you sufficiently to attend next year?)

It was fun live-tweeting this program, but I certainly didn't capture all that the speakers had to say. And since nearly every lawyer I meet asks about marketing, I thought: why not share some tips from Solo Day? So, without further adieu, but with almost all the credit going to panelist [Tamara Freeze](#), here is how solos and small firms *can* succeed in business (if they are willing to try):

Step 1 – Build Your Reputation

- It doesn't help your cause to be known as "the lawyer who will represent anybody." (Would you want to hire that guy or gal?) If you want to build your reputation, just say no to door law. Develop one or two areas of expertise. Specializing will make your marketing more focused, save your sanity, and spare avoidable legal malpractice claims.
- Make sure your marketing materials send a clear message. What you do and who you serve should be readily apparent.
- Build an aggressive Web presence. If you don't know how, get help.

Step 2 – Become a Schmooser

I've written about the [art of schmoozing](#) in a previous post, but it's worth revisiting. Here is what [Tamara](#) had to say:

- On the average, it takes four to seven contacts to bring in a new client.
- You will spend eleven times more to generate a dollar from a new client than an existing client.
- Have faith that doing a good job will snowball into future referrals and more work.
- Friends and family are your sales agents.
- Network, network, network! (You can read how [here](#).)

Step 3 – Set Your Fees

- Clients will pay for value. Do *not* under price your services. Get paid what you are worth.
- Stay flexible. Be willing to offer flat and hybrid fees.
- Paying your bill should be easy and convenient for the client. Ask yourself:
 - What billing cycle works best for this client? (Immediate, weekly, monthly, quarterly?)
 - Does the client prefer paper or electronic statements?
 - Am I giving the client the level of billing detail he or she wants?

- How does the client wish to pay? Check, cash, credit card, other form of electronic payment?
- What incentives can I offer to encourage quick payment for services performed?

[Read more about how to get paid and maximize revenue here.](#)

Step 4 – Avoid these Traps

- It's your choice whether to offer a free initial consultation. Many lawyers do, but don't work for free.
- [Learn how to properly screen](#) clients. Working in areas of practice you don't know or on matters that are too complex for your current level of expertise is equivalent to courting a ticking time bomb. If the client isn't for you, [listen](#), politely decline representation, and refer the client to an appropriate source. (Re-read step one.)
- If a client relationship goes sour (and they sometimes do), [end your representation](#).
- Quality trumps quantity every time. A few good clients are always better than a truckload of mediocre ones.

Step 5 – Create Your Action Plan

- Make 15 new contacts each month.
- Send reminder or follow-up e-mails to 5 existing contacts every week.
- Keep contacts updated on your case results, practice development, and speaking engagements.
- Generate as many links into your Web site as possible using free online marketing profiles ([LinkedIn](#) and [Justia](#) are two examples.)
- Personalized greeting and thank you cards equal money well spent. Use them!
- Show genuine interest in your clients. Follow-up. Go where they go. Invite them to an event.

Want to learn more about marketing? The [ABA](#) has bountiful publications and materials on the subject, all of which can be purchased at discount through the [Professional Liability Fund](#). Visit our [Web site](#), and select ABA Products.

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Originally published at <http://oregonlawpracticemanagement.wordpress.com/2010/09/27/how-to-succeed-in-business/> on September 27, 2010.