

Five Ways to Become a Legal Thought Leader in 2010

Thought leadership is the ability to position yourself as an expert in your area of legal practice. Becoming a thought leader takes time, patience, and strategic planning. This article identifies five key steps you can take to become a legal thought leader respected by your peers and sought after by clients.

*By Margaret Grisdela, president of the national legal marketing agency Legal Expert Connections and author of the legal marketing book *Courting Your Clients*. You can reach her at 1-866-417-7025 or mg@legalexpertconnections.com.*

Many attorneys are finalizing and launching their 2010 legal marketing plans. As part of this process, take a few minutes to think of how you can strengthen your own role as a thought leader. By definition, a thought leader is a person who has specialized knowledge and expertise in a particular subject and promotes a forward-thinking approach to the topic through speaking, publishing, PR, and other outreach efforts.

Here are the most important actions you can take now to become better known as a thought leader.

1. Pick a Niche

Powerful law practices are built on the concept of specialization. Find a way to make your legal services stand out from the competition in a recognizable way that can be easily communicated to your audience.

Study industry challenges, demographics, legislative initiatives, and other potential expansion factors when selecting your niche. Look for a sizable growth opportunity with a high probability that it can sustain your practice over the next 5-10 years.

2. Align your Clients and Cases with your Area of Expertise

Your personal strengths and interests, successful cases, current clients, and highest quality prospects can all help to determine your best area of concentration.

3. Publish by-lined articles in legal journals and trade publications

A well written article on a timely topic sets you apart from the competition by strengthening your reputation as a legal subject matter expert. Corporate general counsel, among others, frequently contact attorneys based on published articles.

If you want to get published, the first step is to select your topic. You can gain rapid visibility by focusing on subjects that challenge the status quo, like newly adopted legislation or controversial industry trends.

Picking the topic is just the beginning, however. We recommend taking a strategic approach to topic development. For example, if your topic is healthcare legislation, you can easily break this into sub-components. Perhaps you could write one article each on health care litigation risks, state level compliance requirements, funding considerations, and fraud.

By having a range of topics to address, you create flexibility to reach out to different publications and/or industry segments for even greater visibility.

4. Speaking Often and Enthusiastically on your Topic

Many of the marketing techniques used in article marketing (as described above) can be applied to speaking engagements as well.

Major annual events book their speakers a minimum of 6 to 12 months in advance, so it is never too early to start your quest for speaking engagements. The sooner you get named as a speaker, the more publicity you can generate through advance promotion. Start today to identify the local, regional, or national events where you would like a seat on the podium. Reach out to the Program Chair or other session planners to suggest one of your topics for inclusion.

5. Position Yourself as an Expert with the Media

When news is breaking fast on a topic of interest to you, an experienced PR professional can position you as a good source for a quote or background discussion on the topic. Establishing a pattern of press coverage in industry publications and other news sources will reinforce your role as a thought leader.

In summary, establishing your position as a thought leader will help you to naturally attract qualified prospects, so you can spend more time on client fulfillment and less time on prospecting.

Steve Ballmer, Microsoft CEO, on Thought Leadership ...

I've come to believe that to be a great leader, you have to combine **thought leadership**, business leadership and great people management. I think most people tend to focus more on one of those three. I used to think it was all about thought leadership. Some people think it's all about your ability to manage people. But the truth is, great leaders have to have a mix of those things.

-- *New York Times*, May 16, 2009

Call Legal Expert Connections to Discuss your Thought Leader Marketing Plan

Legal Expert Connections is a national legal marketing agency concentrating in business development for attorneys and experts. Margaret Grisdela, president, is the author of *Courting Your Clients: The Essential Guide to Legal Marketing*. Thought leader marketing services (article placement, speaking engagements, and PR) are available on a pay-for-performance basis (see www.payforperformancepr.com). Other services include Internet marketing, strategic planning, and "Rainmaking in 90 Days" programs. The firm's web sites include www.legalexpertconnections.com and the law marketing blog www.rainmakingclub.com.

Contact Margaret Grisdela at 866-417-7025 or mg@legalexpertconnections.com.