

Say “No” to Cold Calling in Law Firm Marketing

By Larry Bodine, a business development advisor based in Tucson and Chicago. For the last 19 years, he has helped law firms nationwide attract new clients and generate new business by using strategy, business development training and individual attorney coaching. See www.LarryBodine.com. He can be reached at 630.942.0977 and Lbodine@LawMarketing.com.



There are many reasons why lawyers should not make “cold calls” in business development.

1. Lawyers just hate to make cold calls.
2. The recipient of a cold call just hates to get the call.
3. Cold calls don’t work.

Not only that, but lawyers who make cold calls will find themselves violating ethics rules against solicitation and ethics rules against contacting people with whom they have no pre-existing relationship. A fast way to get hauled before the lawyer disciplinary agency is to start hitting on strangers who are prospective clients.

“Cold calling as a marketing tool is not one of my favorite techniques. I am dead set against it when it comes to personal services marketing, especially for lawyers. It also raises serious ethical issues with most bar associations that have the prohibition patterned after the ABA Model Rule 7.3 (Direct Contact With Prospective Clients),” said Tom Kane, a lawyer and veteran law firm marketing consultant in Sarasota, FL.

By definition a “cold” call is a solicitation of someone you don’t know. This approach flies in the face of truly effective business development, which is to start with people you already know and build relationships with them. All new business comes through relationships.

Lawyers are very sensitive to criticism. Most of the have great fears about getting hung up on the phone or having a door slamming in their face. Cold calls invite these hostile responses.

“There’s probably no aspect of selling worse than cold calling. Anyone who has been in professional sales can tell you horror stories about rude, abusive, and even hostile responses to initial sales pitches. Cold calling is a major pain. Cold calling is demoralizing. Cold calling is the worst aspect of selling. Life in sales would be wonderful without the hassle of cold calling,” said Andrew Shedden of Broadfield Communications Ltd in Ontario.

Why cold calling doesn’t work

Cold calling doesn’t work because chances are nil that you’ll even reach your target. There are many ways to block a cold call, including voicemail, caller ID and protective secretaries.

Cold calling is a bad business development technique because you start out by pitching and selling. No one likes to be sold to. Remember the last time you were at a car dealership? Didn't you hate the pressure of the salesman to buy a particular car and pressed you to take a test drive? If you make cold calls you've turned yourself into the hated car salesman with a pink tie trying to sell you a pink Volkswagen.



As I've taught for years, good business development is an interview. You as a lawyer should be talking with someone you already know, and conduct an interview about their "pain." Pain is a pressing need that a client wants to resolve immediately. For individuals, pain is facing foreclosure, having a child who got a DUI or the breakup of a marriage. For businesses, pain is anything that is costing the company money or is preventing them from making more money. If you as a lawyer can help them with legal services, all you need to say is "I can help you with that" to close the sale.

Get an introduction

Forget cold calling and start marketing by attraction, such as:

- Requesting your partners, clients and contacts to introduce you to a colleague who needs help.
- Making a presentation to an audience full of prospective clients.
- Writing articles in publications that your clients and potential clients read.
- Joining and organization of clients and striking up conversations with fellow members. The conversation should consist of the lawyer speaking 10% of the time by asking questions, and the other person talking 90% of the time about their business or individual problems.

The very best marketing tactic is listening. If the other person is talking, *you are selling*. Let the prospective client spell out their legal needs and simply pay attention to what they are saying.

The very worst marketing tactic is talking about yourself, your credentials, your practice group and how great your firm is. Nobody is interested in hearing this. They especially don't want to hear it from a stranger who is a lawyer making a pitch.

Position all of your marketing activities to have people call you

"Rather than initially promoting your services to your target client, offer them free high quality information written to help solve the problems that keep them awake at night," Shedden said. "Once they have identified themselves and you've sent them the information many of these prospects will call you. If they don't call you a simple follow up call in which you answer any of their questions will quickly be answered. "

"Make a firm commitment today to become an information marketer rather than a product and service pusher. You'll be pleasantly surprised at how quickly you'll begin to attract new prospects," he said.

For more on this topic, call:

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