

How Will YOU Make 2012 a Game Changer?

By Kimberly Alford Rice

Kimberly Alford Rice is Principal of KLA Marketing Associates (www.klamarketing.net), a business development advisory firm focusing on legal services. As a legal marketing authority, Kimberly helps law firms and lawyers develop practical business development and marketing strategies which lead directly to new clients and increased revenues. Additionally, Kimberly provides career management services to lawyers in transition. She may be reached at 609.458.0415 or via email at kimberly@klamarketing.net. To learn more, visit www.klamarketing.net.



Appearing in January 2012 The Barrister

About this time every year, I receive a flurry of calls and emails from clients and contacts who are indecisive and unclear what they can do to make the new year successful for their practice. I hear a variety of comments along the lines of “I’ve tried this marketing tactic and that marketing tactic and it just doesn’t work...” Sound familiar?

So, I would pose, how will you make 2012 a different kind of year? Better?

While lawyers may know “what” they need to do to promote themselves and their services, I have found over many years that 1. they don’t always understand the “how” to promote themselves and their services; 2. more times than not, they approach “marketing” like quail hunting – in a scattershot manner; and 3. for whatever reason, time management issues usually, they are unable/unwilling to consistently follow through.

To get started on strong footing and to make 2012 a different kind of year for you and your practice, allow me to challenge your marketing mindset.

TIMES HAVE CHANGED

For decades, professional services providers such as lawyers, accountants and others have been reluctant marketers. They thrived in a cozy world where networks of personal relationships and word-of-mouth referrals brought them enough new clients to grow a profitable business. Those days are all but gone and lawyers who bury their heads and do not embrace the “new normal” do so at their own peril.

For many services buyers, personal relationships are still the driver of purchase decisions, but the cracks in that buying model are now apparent. In a recent study of client buying behavior, analysts found that more than half of professional services clients are receptive to switching service providers. *More than half – ouch!* Sports and theatre tickets, trips to the golf course and other such perks are losing some of their appeal as ways to strengthen relationships.

To compete for and win profitable work, lawyers must rethink familiar marketing practices, and focus their marketing strategies on the issues that *really* matter to clients.

Begin to shift your marketing mindset by challenging four common myths.

Myth 1: Great Work Wins the Day

There is a long-held belief by many that producing exceptional work product and results is an effective marketing strategy and enough to build a healthy practice. Seems reasonable, but sadly is not the case in an uber-competitive marketplace and in these economic times.

It is true that superior delivery is essential for long-term success but assuming that word of your great performance will travel through your clients' organizations and to that of others without proactive and sustained effort on your part is wishful thinking and not a wise business move.

To create awareness and build a strong reputation, lawyers must significantly ramp up client-level communication and integrate the details of the clients' successes you have helped them achieve into a well-crafted marketing plan.

Myth 2: "Following the Leader" is a Sound Strategy

Many law firms follow a safe and predictable strategy – a series of "safe" marketing tactics based on what "other" law firms and lawyers are doing.

The result in "me-too" marketing is that 1. it does very little to differentiate one law firm from its competitors and 2. it often does not work because all law firm targets are not the same. The result: attorney frustration and business reduction. Lose-lose.

Better to lead your marketing communication in a more client-focused manner, such as your detailed understanding of a client's problem followed by how you helped others in a similar situation. See what a difference this approach can make.

Myth 3: Online Marketing Does Not Bring in New Clients

As uncomfortable as it can be for some lawyers to accept how technology is pervasively creeping into the practice of law, one area which cannot be ignored or resisted is how legal services consumers are identifying and retaining counsel in today's highly connected world.

Even with a referral in hand, most, if not all, prospective clients head straight to your website before they reach out to you. Often, visiting your website is a prospective client's first encounter with you in a business relationship. So, are they impressed and more likely to pick up the phone to retain you or does your website send the unfortunate message that you are not ready for "prime time"?

With a virtual handshake, your website has the power to create a positive first impression that can mean the difference between receiving a follow-up call and losing an opportunity.

Your website should be a critical part of your strategy to initiate and sustain relationships with clients, instead of just a promotional tool. Nothing substitutes for the power of personal interaction with clients, but your website can and should re-enforce your commitment to clients.

Myth 4: A Strong Referral Network is Key

Building a strong referral network is critical to developing a healthy practice but it is no magic bullet in and of itself. The gospel truth is **there is NO magic bullet**, no single tactic, activity or promotional tool unto itself that will help you build a healthy practice. This is the number one myth that too many lawyers believe!

To proactively build and sustain a healthy practice over the course of your career, you must develop sound strategies which reach specific audiences (existing clients, sound referral sources, and qualified prospects) in a meaningful way over a sustained period of time. There are many, many economical ways to do that but they do not include any one-shot wonders (like placing one ad in a charity fund raiser program book), building a website and never adding fresh content to it, or even attending a scattershot array of networking events without appropriately following up in a timely manner.

No Myth

Marketing legal services is evolving, with many new ways to attract and retain clients. Some marketing strategies have lost their magic while others are emerging as winners.

One marketing truth won't change. Clients will continue to purchase legal services from trustworthy and competent people who can demonstrate, beyond a reasonable doubt, that they can produce the results they promise. Demonstrate that to the market and you'll have clients lined up to work with you.