

# The Tectonic Shifts in Law Firm Marketing

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Following is an edited interview from The Law Firm Marketing Podcast conducted by Dan Toombs that appears on <http://www.lawfirmmarketingpodcast.com>.

## Topics covered:

- Individual marketing **strategies**, based on the four sources of new business for lawyers.
- The **three things** to put on a law firm website that will attract business clients.
- Where to **find content** to update your law firm website and blog.
- Finding clients with **social media**. Depending on whether you use LinkedIn, Facebook or a blog, you can attract consumer clients, businesses or a combination of both.
- How to make the most of **Twitter**.
- The **M-Dot revolution** and focusing on mobile marketing.
- How lawyers can **differentiate themselves**. Hint: it's not by reciting your credentials and legal skills.
- How I trained 20 lawyers at [Chuhak & Tecson](#), a 65-lawyer Chicago law firm, to **generate \$1.7 million** in new incremental revenue in only nine months.
- How Tully Rinckey, a 30-lawyer Albany, NY, firm created a **YouTube channel with 160+ videos** that is so effective, the lawyers don't need to conduct business development. The lawyers are furnished potential clients to meet, and I trained them on how to close them into paying clients.

There has been a tectonic shift in law firm marketing. When I began legal marketing in the 1990s, the leading marketing techniques were brochures, event planning and paper newsletters. Marketing was very much in vogue but now it's completely changed. The emphasis now is on business development. Attorneys are coming to the marketers and saying, "I want you to give me leads. Direct me into industries where there are businesses where I can meet people."

It has become even more competitive now. One of the things I do to earn my livelihood is to train lawyers on how to start a business conversation and how to close new business. I have yet to find an attorney who went to law school so they could become a salesman. They generally went to law school so they would never had to sell. However there's no way you can have a law practice without clients. It used to be you'd do a good job and the clients would give you more work. Those days are gone. In the 1990s it became competitive in the

legal profession and that's when marketing started. Today it's so over-to-top competitive that the only way to get a new client is to take the business away from another firm.

**This change has forced the attorneys to learn the social interactive skills that are required to go out of the office, meet people and start business conversations.** The good news is that attorneys are smart people and quick on the uptake. Once I explain to them that business development is just a set of learnable techniques, like learning the elements of a tort, many lawyers become skilled at it.

### Individual marketing strategies

**For attorneys, new business comes primarily from four sources.** I recommend that attorneys start with four pages of blank paper when they start to compose an individual marketing plan.

**Page one** is a list of your 10 best clients and a description of how you can meet them in person. Clients come first, because the easiest way get new work is to open a new file from a current client. But it is essential that you visit your clients, learn their business and discover what problems they have that you can solve with legal services.

**Page two** is your referral network. Many lawyers allow referrals to be random. I recommend that you need to be intentional about it and build a referral network with premeditation. The idea is that you are looking for someone who is a mirror image of yourself, so if you are a litigator, you are looking for a lawyer who does transactions. Next you enter into an express agreement with them, in which they agree to send litigation to you, and you'll send back transactions.

**Page three** is joining business organizations. To generate new business you have to meet people. It makes the most sense to join a trade or business association that is built around a particular industry. Ideally, you should aim to be the only lawyer in a room that is full of executives with whom you can have conversations.

**Page four** is using the Internet to market. Lawyers have all kinds of options ranging from websites, to blogs, to social networks to discussion groups. The Internet is so effective, I think I generate 80% of new projects I get from people who found me on the Internet.

### Where should firms start on the Internet

It's never too late to start on the Internet. I recommend that you start by tuning up your website so that it contains all the marketing elements that business clients look for.

#### **Business clients are looking for three things:**

1. Are you familiar with their industry? If you have industry expertise you should describe it online.
2. They want to see some representative clients. They shop just like you do. They want to know if you have any other clients like them.

3. Case histories. Potential clients want to see representative results, cases you've settled and contracts you've closed. Lawyers need to demonstrate their expertise to potential clients.

It's absolutely essential nowadays to have a complete, thorough profile on **LinkedIn**. After that, lawyers should join an industry group on LinkedIn that has local meetings. That way you can meet people online, and follow up by meeting them in person.

### **How to Find Content**

If you want to come up on the first page of Google, which is the only page that counts, you have to update the home page and inner pages of your website regularly. If you have a blog, you need to post two or three times a week. I've operated a blog since 2004 and I have no trouble finding content. I focus on a single industry: the legal profession. I have set up a series of Google alerts so that when I open my email in the morning, Google supplies me with a whole bunch of ideas I can use. I also subscribe to a variety of electronic newsletters. I follow what they are talking about and translate it into business development ideas.

There are other ways to generate content. Firms typically believe only one person has to write all the content. I was talking about blogging with a group of six lawyers in Las Vegas on a conference call recently. They were taken back by the thought of having to update a blog twice a week. I told them, "what if one of you took the first Tuesday, and someone else took the first Thursday, and someone else took the second Tuesday and so forth." Each lawyer would have to write only one blog post every two weeks. Upon hearing this, they all felt that a blog was perfectly doable and it completely changed their view about the difficulty producing a blog.

Once you identify an editorial focus of a blog, I know a lot of freelance writers who can find legal issues and write the first draft of a blog post for a lawyer. The attorneys make a few small edits and publish it online. It's very easy to find an inexpensive freelance writer who has a legal background and who will create material for you. It saves you all the trouble of finding the information.

### **Finding clients on Social media**

Social media works, but it depends on which social medium you use. There is some good research out there that shows if you are a lawyer looking for **business clients**, you should develop a presence and join groups on LinkedIn. There are 1.5 million lawyers worldwide that have profiles on LinkedIn, and they are looking to connect with corporate clients.

On the other hand, many lawyers are looking for **consumer clients** to do everything from real estate transactions, to wills, to personal injury work. The place you will find them on Facebook. Facebook has 700 million accounts, and includes every other person in the US. I estimated there are 200,000 law firms -- generally small firms, general practitioners and plaintiff personal injury firms -- that have pages on Facebook. Facebook can be a great source of consumer clients.

The ultimate source of business of all kinds is a **blog**. Various studies show that the least expensive cost of acquiring a new client is producing a blog and developing a following. That's why I emphasize blogs as a marketing initiative.

I have a somewhat controversial view on **Twitter**. Twitter is a lot of fun, but it's also an echo chamber and it can be a lot of noise. In my experience Twitter is *not* a good place for *attorneys* to find clients. It's a wonderful resource to listen and do research. But in terms of actually generating new business, I've only found anecdotal evidence that it's a source of new clients for lawyers.

## The Future

The M-Dot revolution is happening right now, which is mobile marketing. More business people access the web, email and social media using smart phones. The reason they call it M-dot is that the mobile friendly sites begin with the letter "m" – the URL will often be "m.firmname.com" Going forward, that's where marketers are going to have to focus their efforts. People are not going to be looking at the web on a monitor that's 17 inches across; it's going to be on a smart phone screen that's 2½ inches wide. Going forward, marketers will to have to focus their efforts on mobile marketing

Besides that, the future for law practice will depend very much on how well lawyers can present themselves as business advisors. Clients take it as a given that lawyers are good at giving legal advice. But what clients really want is a lawyer who can increase their revenue or stop a loss. That means law firms need to become much more efficient. Lawyers are already being required by corporate clients to submit budgets for litigation. More clients are asking for flat fees. They want law firms to scope out all the contingencies, and say that "we'll do all the work including litigation, and this is our flat fee." This is an enormous shift. Up to now firms would say, "If you have a legal problem we'll take care of it, and every time we lift a finger we'll start the meter running..." You would never pay a painter by the hour. Instead you would say, "I want the room painted. How much?" Clients are approaching attorneys with that frame of mind.

## How to differentiate yourself

The way that lawyers will differentiate themselves going forward is by their **business solutions**, not by their credentials and legal skills. As far as clients are concerned, they have no way to tell whether a lawyer was an "A" student in law school or a "C" student. They look at you and presume you are qualified, just like the million other lawyers out there. The way that lawyers will differentiate themselves is by the quality of their legal solution. The client will present a problem – and it will typically be presented as a business problem, it's rarely going to be presented as a legal matter – and lawyers will have to say here's our business answer, and we can accomplish that with legal services.

I was talking to a lawyer who just got out of law school and he was upset that he couldn't market himself because he had no experience. I told him, "That's not what the clients are

looking for. Of course they want to know that you can do the work. But they're more interested in whether you understand their business and whether you can come up with a business-oriented solution."

### **Training 20 lawyers to generate \$1.7 million**

There were [newspaper articles](#) about this my work for Chuhak & Tecson in Chicago. They had a whole class of junior partners who wanted to become equity partners. But the price of admission was that they had to have a book of business. I trained 20 attorneys in business development, along the lines I've discussed. I made the point that the way you sell legal services is not by pitching. Nobody wants to hear a lawyer talk about where they went to school and all the jurisdictions they're admitted in. What they needed to do was to *interview* people and to ask questions about what business issues their clients faced. When they heard a problem they could solve with legal services, all they had to say was "I can help you." Working with 20 attorneys for 9 months, they were able to generate \$1.7 million in incremental new dollars. Many of those junior partners are now happy equity partners. Business development is the ticket to partnership, job security and a happy practice.

### **Video is a powerful tool**

One of my favorite law firms is a 30-lawyer litigation boutique in Albany, New York, where I trained everyone in the entire firm. Tully Rinckey has thoroughly embraced social media, in particular YouTube. You may not think of YouTube as a social medium but it is, it's like Facebook or LinkedIn. In fact, YouTube is the #3 most visited website on the Internet. According to Pew Internet research the number one reason that people go on the internet is to view a video. I've encouraged a number of lawyers to create video channels. If you look up the Tully law firm at <http://www.youtube.com/user/tullylegal>, you'll find that they have an extremely well fleshed out video channel that is composed of vignettes of the lawyers offering general legal advice.

The firm made friends with the local television producer and as a result they're quoted on TV constantly. The Chief Marketing Officers gets the news clips and puts them online on their channel. As a result there are lots of videos of them being interviewed as experts. *It's so effective that the lawyers don't really have to do any selling.* All they needed training on was how to close a client when they were in a consultation with them, how do to turn a potentially interested person into a client. The YouTube channel is so effective that the firm didn't need to do any outbound marketing.

I'm working on building my own video channel at <http://www.youtube.com/user/LarryBodineMarketing>. The light bulb went off in my mind when I thought of this situation: suppose you had to repair a screen door and you had two choices. One choice was to read a manual, unfold it and read steps 1 through 50 and it would show you how to fix the door. Or another person could talk to you for three minutes and tell you how to do it – obviously that's what you'd prefer. That's what YouTube is all about.

If you have video on your website, you're much more likely to appear on page one of a Google search result. Because of course, Google owns YouTube and it favors sites with video. The lawyers I talk to say they can tell when a client has viewed one of their videos because the client is already done shopping, they want the lawyer they saw in the video.

In my view this is a really exciting time to be involved in business development. Business development is a conversation. Up to now it's always taken place in person. However, there's a whole new component where the conversation is taking place online. The better that law firms become at mobile marketing and the better that lawyers become with marketing themselves on LinkedIn and Facebook are going to be the keys to success in the future.

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