

Play to Win

Writing Your Way to New Business

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#) | Apr.27.17 | [Business Development](#), [Content Marketing](#), [Daily Dispatch](#), [Play to Win](#)



The other day, I was talking with a coaching client (let's call him Lawyer A) about some new business he had just received. A lawyer at another firm (Lawyer B) called Lawyer A after reading an article about a substantive issue on Lawyer A's web bio. Turns out, Lawyer B's firm is the defendant in a suit involving the issue covered in the article and the firm's lawyers were planning to represent themselves. After talking with Lawyer A, however, Lawyer B decided to hire the author instead, based on his substantive expertise.

There was a time not that long ago when I counseled lawyers not to spend too much time writing and publishing articles. Back then, they were largely passive, short-lived marketing efforts. Today, however, as clients conduct their own internet research to find legal counsel, having substantive content available for prospective clients to find is invaluable — if you do it right.

There are entire books about writing effectively. But when writing for marketing purposes, here are some key points to keep in mind.

Three Steps Before You Write

Before putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, you should do the following:

- **Identify your audience.** Some lawyers will write an article and then shop it around, looking for an audience. But that's backward — how can you write well if you don't know for whom you are writing? Start by identifying the types of readers to whom you are hoping to appeal (e.g., chief operating officers, human resource managers, in-house litigation counsel).
- **Establish your objective.** Why are you writing the article? To convey information? To gain visibility in a new area? To generate inquiries? Knowing your objective will help you determine the kind of information to include and the appropriate forum for your writing efforts.
- **Determine your medium.** This goes hand-in-hand with the audience, obviously. Perhaps you plan to self-publish, by sending a firm alert, putting something on the firm's website or contributing to the firm's blog. However, if you are aiming for publication in an industry magazine or professional newsletter, you should inquire about the editorial guidelines (e.g., length, style), investigate the editorial calendars and approach the publication with your idea.

These three steps will help you avoid spending time on a fruitless exercise.

Tips for Writing a Compelling Piece

Once you have determined your audience, objectives and medium, you're ready to write. Here are a few thoughts to help you make the most of your article.

- **Collaboration.** Consider whether having a co-author (e.g., a client, referral source, potential client or industry expert) will add more perspective to the article, or help you build a relationship.
- **Audience.** While you have already identified your audience generally, pick one or two people you know who fit that description and write your article as if you are writing specifically for them. You may even poll a few people in this space for their thoughts or quotes.
- **Substance.** Understand that you need to give away information. The days of "teasing" with material are over. In this age of free content, readers expect you to convey enough information for them to make a decision or take action.
- **Writing tips.** Capture attention quickly; start with a case study, quote or story. Have a strong, clear and understandable title. Write clearly and concisely, in language people understand (no legalese).
- **Conclusion.** End with a summary and some practical advice — three things the reader should do, for example.
- **Review.** Ask someone you trust to review the article. This could be a member of your firm's marketing department or perhaps someone who fits your audience profile.
- **Bio.** Make sure to edit your short author bio so it is relevant to the topic and the audience.

Reality Check

While I started this post with a business development success story, most writing efforts don't produce business. That doesn't mean they aren't worthwhile, however. First, they can position you as a subject-matter expert on whatever topic you've chosen. Second, writing can often lead to other opportunities. Because of your demonstrated knowledge of the subject, you may get asked to give a presentation, edit a chapter of a book or contribute to a blog.

So be aware of opportunities to share information. They will cross your desk every day.

Sally J. Schmidt is President of [Schmidt Marketing, Inc.](#), which offers marketing services to law firms. Sally was a founder and the first President of the Legal Marketing Association. She is a Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management and was one of the first inductees into the LMA's Hall of Fame. She is the author of "[Marketing the Law Firm: Business Development Techniques](#)" and "[Business Development for Lawyers: Strategies for Getting and Keeping Clients](#)." Sally writes Attorney at Work's "Play to Win" column. Follow her on Twitter [@SallySchmidt](#).