

Play to Win

[**Thought Leadership for Lawyers: Hit the Mark**](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/thought-leadership-for-lawyers/)

By [Sally J. Schmidt](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/author/sally-j-schmidt/) | May.20.13 | [Business Development](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/business-development/), [Daily Dispatch](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/articles/), [Legal Marketing](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/legal-marketing-2/), [Play to Win](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/play-to-win/)



Thought leadership. It’s a new term for an old concept—writing and speaking to enhance your visibility and build a public perception of your expertise. Lawyers have used thought leadership as a marketing strategy since the very early days of law firm marketing, although the forums have evolved from articles and speeches to blogs, podcasts and webinars.

I find that lawyers often identify wonderful opportunities to position themselves in a particular substantive area, or before a key audience. Unfortunately, the result often misses the mark. To be a thought leader, your message must be heard, and to be heard, you must connect with your audience.

**WIIFM: How to Communicate with Your Target Audience**

There’s an old marketing acronym, WIIFM: What’s In It For Me? That’s what the recipients of your messages are thinking. You need to put yourself in the shoes of a busy general counsel or human resources manager or patent coordinator—whoever is your audience. What do they want to know? It’s simple.

1. Why is this information important to me?
2. What should I do about it?

The best way to help you see the audience’s perspective is to engage them in your process. Say, for example, you have been asked to write an article for dentists on selling a dental practice. You could:

* Call a few dentists who have sold their practices and ask for their thoughts on the process. What surprised them? What lessons did they learn? What advice do they have for others?
* Call your own dentist and ask what he or she would want to know when the time comes to sell.
* Call the editor of the publication and ask what the readers will be most interested in.

Based on the feedback, you could prepare your article (in layman’s terms) and title it something like, “Five things you should know before selling your dental practice.” Then (you’re not done yet), send a draft to the people you interviewed to get their feedback.

**Caveats**

There are caveats to this approach. First, you can’t wait until the 11th hour to prepare your materials if you plan to solicit input. Second, you must be open to feedback and constructive criticism.

If you can get past those hurdles and employ this process, however, I guarantee you will be much more likely to hit the mark and connect with your audience.

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