

Play to Win

Expertise Marketing: The Value of Credentials

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#) | Sep.24.15 | [Business Development](#), [Daily Dispatch](#), [Law Practice](#), [Legal Marketing](#)



Recently, I was talking with a lawyer who had been referred a very nice piece of business right in her practice sweet spot. She said to me, “I don’t even know how they heard of me.” Putting aside the suggestion that she ask to find out, it got me thinking about how important credentials are in attracting legal work.

Sure, we all talk about the importance of relationships in business development, including building our networks and cultivating contacts. But the fact is that the world is changing and, with it, the ways that clients select counsel. Clients have new ways of finding information and like to do their own research.

Why Your Credentials Matter

Consider these findings from studies, which I have referenced in the past:

1. Business-to-business customers complete nearly 60 percent of a typical purchasing decision before even having a conversation with a supplier (read “law firm”) (Corporate Executive Board Study).
2. More than 80 percent of buyers of professional services review a firm website before engaging, more than 63 percent research it using a search engine such as Google, and almost 60 percent look it up on social media (Hinge Research Institute Study).

In addition, these points support the importance of credentials:

- “Perception of expertise” shows up repeatedly as a top selection factor for clients. Expertise-based activities make clients feel good about their choice of counsel. As one client said, “There is something very comforting about seeing your lawyer present at a dais.”
- Some practices can be developed through expertise-based marketing.
- Credentials result in other opportunities. For example, if you write an article, you may be asked to speak about or edit a chapter on the topic.

- Credentials are important if you aspire to be honored, like being invited to join the “college” of your practice, or listed in directories or rankings like Chambers.
- Credentials belong to you and, as a result, are portable. Whatever may happen in the future, your credentials remain on your resume.

Credential-Building Activities

There are myriad opportunities to build your credentials, including:

- Writing:
 - Articles
 - White papers
 - Firm newsletters and alerts
 - Website and blog postings
 - Chapters and books
 - Letters to the editor
 - Direct-mail letters
- Speaking:
 - Client seminars
 - Industry association meetings
 - Internal meetings
 - Bar or other professional group meetings
 - Webinars
 - Podcasts
- Being a leader of or active participant in an organization:
 - Industry groups
 - Bar or lawyer associations
 - Other professional associations
 - Civic and charitable groups
 - Business groups
 - Alumni associations

Selecting the appropriate activities requires consideration of the audience, your practice, your competition, your interests, the nature of the topic and the potential forums.

Expertise marketing can build your visibility and differentiate you, establish you as a leader in a market or practice area, start conversations and even generate leads. It’s hard to know exactly where your activities will take you but, for these reasons, it makes sense to start down the path.

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