



BY SALLY SCHMIDT

## Marketing and Women: There are Differences

Women lawyers can promote their careers more effectively by concentrating on the challenges they face, and working around them

For years, law firms have struggled with how to support women in their business development efforts, and whether it even makes sense to treat them differently. Many women lawyers complain, for example, that they don't share the same interests as their male clients and prospects, like sports. Yet this can also be true for some male lawyers, depending on their practices and their interests.

Taken as a whole, however, marketing *is* different for women lawyers. Women lawyers may need to be concerned about the perceptions created when asking male clients to socialize. Younger women lawyers often have fewer successful role models to emulate. Some male partners may try to protect women lawyers in ways that actually hinder their marketing success (e.g., not asking young mothers to go on extended trips for clients). Women lawyers may even face resistance from certain clients who prefer working with men. While the advice below may apply to any lawyer, it is especially pertinent for women.

At a top level, to be successful in generating business it is important to understand what kind of work you're seeking and how to obtain it. Every lawyer should ask herself:

- What kind of business do I want? With what kinds of clients am I most interested in working? How would I like my practice mix to shake out? Once you have identified your target or ideal clients, you need to ask the next question:
- Where does this business come from? Who are the people giving out the legal business in the area(s) I'm targeting? What are their positions? Every practice gets its work differently. Some practices and people are better off targeting the ultimate client for their services, such as real estate developers or patent coordinators. Others find more success directing their efforts toward intermediaries (referral sources), such as litigators for appellate work or turnaround professionals for bankruptcy business. That leads to question number three:
- Where do these decision-makers go? Whether you are targeting potential clients (e.g., family businesses, CFOs, in-house counsel of energy companies) or intermediaries for referrals (e.g., lawyers, accountants, counsellors), there will be one or more organizations where they gather. They may

be there for networking or for continuing education. These organizations will offer you the best opportunity to network and position yourself in front of the right people, whether you do this through speaking or committee activity. Similarly, you should think about the following questions:

- What do these people read? What publications or media exist for this market, industry or type of professional? These are the resources you should target for your articles and advertisements. You should also monitor them to stay abreast of trends, movement and issues affecting your targets.

Taking the time to define your targets and the best forums or media for reaching them will make your marketing efforts much more effective and efficient. For example, many women become involved in women's organizations. If the involvement is for professional development or to support an organization, that's one thing, but if it's being done for "marketing" purposes, then it's important to determine whether the women involved in the group control the right kind of business.

Here are some observations that will improve any woman's marketing and business development efforts:

- Don't leave room for misinterpretation. It is an unfortunate fact that some men may take an invitation to go out for drinks in the wrong way. One woman lawyer complained recently about a client who seemed to be interested in her more as a woman than as a lawyer. I asked her to explain the situation and she said she had gone to the bar alone for a drink late in the evening after a meeting and he came in and sat by her. Right or not, this could be misinterpreted. If these kinds of situations happen to you, bring a male colleague or schedule a working lunch instead.
- Let people know what you do and how well you do it. You're not just a "lawyer"; you need to give your contacts more information about how you help your clients. Perhaps even more than men, women need to build the perception of their expertise, so try to find opportunities to talk about your accomplishments. When someone asks how things are going, say, "Great! I just finished up a very complex sale of a practice for a physician group and it was so interesting." You need to

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promote your services internally as well as externally.

- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Friends and acquaintances, clients or colleagues can all be of assistance to you. Give them specific requests, such as "I know you serve on a board with Jim Smith from ABC Enterprises. I spend most of my time working with companies in that industry, and I'd love a chance to meet him sometime. Would you be willing to set up a lunch to introduce us?"
- Have an objective for every contact. Don't waste your time or your opportunities. If you're having lunch with an accountant, what do you hope to accomplish by the end of the meal—learn about her business, tell her about your practice, explore referrals? Don't have contact without identifying the purpose in advance.
- Blend your interests and your activities. To the extent you can, find outside activities that support your practice. A construction lawyer can pitch in to build a house for Habitat for Humanity; a family lawyer can serve on the board of a women's shelter.
- Use your activities to build your skills. If you're weak in the area of finance, for example, volunteer for the finance committee of an organization. If it's selling you don't do well, sign up for the fundraising committee. Try to get active in your law firm in "hard" areas—such as finance or technology—as opposed to "soft" areas, like human resources.
- Find a mentor. There is a direct correlation between success and having a mentor. If one doesn't exist in your firm, find someone in another organization, like a woman partner in your practice in another city or a successful woman in another industry altogether, like accounting.
- Express your interests. If there's something you want, make sure people know. This could range from an opportunity to run for office, to a chance to accompany a partner on a trip to meet a client. Most people appreciate initiative.
- Evaluate your presence in meetings. This can range from your preparation to how to carry yourself and even your attire. If you want to be taken seriously, you need to look serious.
- Have a sense of humour. Despite your best efforts, there may be awkward situations or unintended consequences. If you can keep your poise and learn to laugh, you will get through them. ☺

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*Sally J. Schmidt is President of Schmidt Marketing, Inc. in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The company has consulted with more than 350 law firms on their marketing, client service and business development strategies. She can be reached at (651) 222-6102 or [sallyschmidt@schmidt-marketing.com](mailto:sallyschmidt@schmidt-marketing.com).*