

Play to Win

Setting Practice Priorities: A Three-Part Process

Invest, maintain or divest? Use these steps to focus your marketing.

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

An attorney and I had our first coaching meeting recently. Being a firm believer in differentiation and niche marketing, I was probing his practice, looking for opportunities. As an experienced environmental practitioner, he rattled off a dozen things he does and does well, from water, ground and air issues, to regulatory, advisory and litigation matters, to industry expertise like phosphate and agriculture.

It reminded me how difficult it can be for lawyers to identify areas of focus for marketing.

Clients Are Seeking “Experts”

In [a 2018 Hinge study](#) on what buyers of professional services value in the selection process, the top response (at 68 percent) was “Expertise and specialized skills.” Even if you are equally capable in a wide variety of areas, clients want to know you are particularly good at — and committed to — the particular service they are seeking. If myriad practices receive equal billing in your bio, articles or presentations, you will look like the proverbial jack-of-all-trades and master of none.

Establishing Marketing Priorities

How can you identify your priorities? I have outlined a process that may help.

1. Create a List

Start by identifying your areas of practice. If you do a lot of different things, you may want to limit your list to things that make up a certain percentage of your work. As an example, a labor and employment lawyer may list:

- Advice: Policy writing, handbook reviews, #MeToo training, non-compete contracts
- Litigation: Wage & hour litigation, non-compete disputes, discrimination claims, class actions
- Industries: Hospitality, technology, health care

2. Chart the Areas

Put each of the practices or industries in the appropriate quadrant on the chart below based on two primary factors:

1. **Attractiveness.** The factors that make it attractive depend on you, your personality and your priorities. Do you enjoy the work? Is there client demand and growth potential? Is it profitable? Does it support premium pricing? Is there a lack of competition? Are you able to delegate some of the work? Does it minimize (or maximize) travel? Create your criteria and apply them to each area.
2. **Market position.** This requires an honest evaluation of your market position for each area relative to the competition. This could include things like your reputation, your pricing/value, your market share and the quality of your work or results.

Attractiveness

		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Relative Market Position	HIGH	Maintain/Pursue premiums	Invest and grow/ Price aggressively	Invest, grow and defend
		7	8	9
	MEDIUM	Maintain or divest	Maintain	Improve and grow
		4	5	6
	LOW	Divest	Improve (if it can be done quickly) or divest	Improve to survive or service clients
		1	2	3

3. Analyze the Practices

Depending on where an area falls, you can consider whether to invest, maintain or divest. For example, if you have expertise that falls into quadrant 3, it means you are a weak player in an attractive market. Can you grow your practice or reputation? Conversely, if you have a service that falls into quadrant 7, you are well known in an area that you don't find attractive. Consider premium pricing to make it worth your while.

When you've finished your analysis, your priority practices should inform your marketing efforts. For example:

- Rewrite or rearrange your bio to allocate space and positioning based on future prospects.
- Seek out or redirect speaking and writing opportunities to focus on the most attractive practice areas.
- Create lists of target clients, prospects and referral sources who are sources of the best work.

One of my favorite quotes is:

If you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll keep on getting what you've always got.

In other words, if you want to see different results, you will need to take a different path. This process can help you identify the most attractive course to follow.