

play to win

Six Business Development Strategies for Lawyers

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

Aug 25, 2020

Many of the usual lawyer business development tactics are off the table, but there are always things you can do to stay in the game.



Last month, I wrote about [fundamental lawyer marketing strategies](#) that can work in a time of social distancing. If you think marketing is hard during a pandemic, business development has an extra layer of difficulty. Most lawyers generate business by building relationships, usually through personal contact. Unfortunately, many opportunities for contact — from entertaining to visiting to attending conferences — are currently off the table or vastly changed.

Yet clients are still hiring lawyers. While the edge right now goes to the incumbent, there remain things you can do to put yourself in a position to generate new business. Here are six strategies to consider in this challenging time.

1. Cross-Sell

Any conversation about lawyer business development should start with existing relationships: Are there opportunities to do more work for the clients or referral sources you already have? Start by preparing a “gap analysis” for a specific client, reflecting past representation (both substantive and geographic) as well as areas where you have not represented the client. Then put together a client team that includes people who can cover the services and jurisdictions that are blank on the chart. For example, if the client doesn’t use your firm for HR matters, brainstorm with an employment law colleague on ways that person can be introduced to the client (e.g., a gratis Zoom call on RIFs).

2. Be Visible

As the saying goes, “Out of sight, out of mind.” If you want to be on the short list for new files or referrals, you will need to be top of mind. Send out substantive information and helpful tools to prospects on a regular basis. If you do this more than your competition, you will have an edge. People are more likely to contact someone they haven’t worked with before if their current lawyers are not providing the same useful content.

3. Make Proactive Pitches

Many companies are using the pandemic as an opportunity to reassess their legal needs and relationships (read: budgets). This could be a great time to see if you can throw your name in the hat. Ask for an opportunity to submit a proposal or make a virtual pitch for new business. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

4. Expand Institutional Relationships

When lawyers were traveling, attending conferences or entertaining contacts, it usually meant that attention was focused on one or a small number of people from the targeted entity. Since most contact is virtual now, you can involve more people. For example, offer to [provide a webinar](#) for a company’s entire legal department or host a virtual roundtable for all the workout officers at a bank you’d like to represent. You can expand your network even when working from home.

5. Respond Immediately to Inquiries

The passage of time is magnified in an environment where people are sheltering in place and working from home. If you receive a request for proposal or invitation to pitch, or even a simple inquiry about an issue, a prompt response may be the thing that puts you at the top of the list for the business.

6. Set Up Conversations

Finally, do your best to connect people and have conversations. Plan a virtual meeting with some contacts from a specific industry; share intel on what you’re hearing or what you’re seeing in their space and invite them to talk to one another. Pull some referral sources into a Zoom happy hour to talk about how their practices have been affected by the coronavirus and where they see opportunities. Maybe now is even the time to start thinking about socially distant get-togethers with select targets. Everyone is craving some safe socialization.

Stay Vigilant With Business Development Efforts

I know it’s hard to imagine that you can implement lawyer business development when you’re feeling somewhat isolated and your usual practices are constrained. But there are still ways to develop relationships and new business despite the restrictions on activities. Be persistent, be helpful, and stay vigilant with your efforts.