

play to win

## Be the Firm's Go-To Lawyer

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

*To be the go-to lawyer in your niche and ensure a steady internal stream of work, treat your referrers like clients.*

A very successful partner once told me that when she was a young associate, a partner sent out a message seeking assistance on a coverage matter for his client, the insured. No one in the firm had that expertise so she volunteered to help. She subsequently became the go-to person in the firm whenever there were questions about coverage. She later capitalized on this experience by writing, speaking and getting leadership positions in the field. Eventually, she led a large department of coverage lawyers.

When I suggest that some lawyers focus more of their marketing efforts internally, I sometimes get pushback: "How does working on someone else's client help me grow my own book of business?" I love this partner's story because it illustrates how internal marketing efforts can help you develop a practice. First, you will build your portfolio, which is how you attract business; your experience is your selling point. Second, you will get valuable exposure to people who may hire you or refer others to you in the future, such as an attorney on the other side, an expert, a client contact who leaves to join another company, a banker or an accountant.

### Finding Your Go-To Niche

People hire lawyers for their expertise, so your niche should be something clients find valuable and for which they seek counsel. Ideally, it also will be personally enjoyable. Depending on your firm and its clientele, examples could include things like:

- Government contractors
- Wage and hour issues in the gig economy
- Creative exit strategies for sellers of businesses
- A brief writer for appeals
- Community banks
- Daubert motions
- Bar admissions in states where the firm has clients but no office

To ensure you build an internal stream of matters, you will need to provide great service to the firm's clients, of course. But you also need to treat your [referring colleagues](#) like clients, identifying their expectations upfront, keeping them apprised of the status of the matter, being responsive, and following up when the project is completed.

### Ideas for Marketing Your Expertise

For your internal expertise to become a practice-building opportunity, you need to make efforts to market it. Here are some ideas that will help you become the go-to lawyer:

- **Keep track of your experience.** Maintain a list of relevant information that you ultimately can use to sell yourself, such as number of matters in the area, number of clients in the industry, outcomes or results, sizes of deals or the like.

- **Get the word out inside the firm.** Offer to speak to other practice groups. Send internal “alerts” to update your colleagues on related developments. Ask if you can present a training program for the firm’s professional development program.
- **Market outside the firm.** Speak to appropriate audiences through conferences, seminars or webinars. Write blog posts, articles or firm alerts. Contribute to chapters, books and white papers. Join and visibly participate in a relevant organization.
- **Position yourself as an authority in the area.** For example, track relevant trends in your substantive area or geographic location and publish the results; create a list of the “Top 10” matters in the area annually; conduct a proprietary survey to develop related information you can share in articles or presentations.
- **Revisit your online presence.** Revise your firm bio and LinkedIn profile to better reflect your expertise. Devote more “real estate” to the subject and include aggregate numbers and representative matters. Regularly post content online related to your niche.

If you are paying attention, there will be opportunities for you to become a subject-matter expert in your practice group, office, section or firm. When you see one, raise your hand, build your knowledge base and then make your expertise known.