

Play to Win

Building Confidence in the Quality of Your Services

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

A lot of what lawyers do is produced and delivered behind the scenes, which makes it difficult for clients to judge the quality of your services. Here are things you can do to impress.

I use a couple of different banks. One is a monolithic financial institution with a branch office in my community. I have been trying for about two years now to get my (not-so) new address on my account. My husband and I have called, emailed and even stopped in the branch office — twice. Each time, we have been told the error would be corrected. I have to say, it makes me wonder: If they can't get my address right, what other mistakes are they making?

I was thinking about this recently in the context of legal services. How do prospects know how good or smart you are? How do they know they can entrust you with their important matters or that you're worth the money they'll have to pay? How do they know whether another lawyer could do it better?

Your Firm's Quality of Services — Present or Absent?

If you're like most lawyers, a lot of what you do is produced and delivered behind the scenes. You sit at your desk, prepare documents and email them to the appropriate parties. Unless clients have a chance to observe you in a trial or negotiation, it is difficult for them to judge the quality of your services.

In fact, service quality is often determined in its absence.

5 Factors for Evaluating the Quality of Services

Years ago, some research concluded that there are five primary factors people use to determine the quality of services:

1. **Reliability:** In other words, I can count on you. You did what you said you would do.
2. **Responsiveness:** How quickly you get back to me and whether I feel like a priority.
3. **Assurance:** I feel comfortable that you know what you're doing.
4. **Empathy:** You appear to take a sincere interest in my issues and matters.
5. **Tangibles:** The things I can see or that I get from you are of high quality.

There are myriad things you can do to influence clients' impressions of the quality of your services, some big, some small. Here are a few examples.

Reliability

The most important thing is to establish and manage the client's expectations. Set reasonable deadlines, provide regular status reports and communicate immediately when there are glitches or changes. Be on time for meetings and calls.

Responsiveness

Acknowledge emails ASAP. You don't necessarily have to do what's asked but you can clarify when you will. Return calls within a half a day or work with your assistant to manage clients' expectations for how soon you will get back to them. Understand clients' imperatives so you can make their jobs easier, such as providing updates before board meetings.

Assurance

There's a reason lawyers hang their diplomas in their offices: It is meant to assure the client they have the requisite credentials. Forward legal alerts or articles of interest to demonstrate your expertise. Send detailed and timely invoices that clearly indicate the work done on clients' behalf. Use client testimonials or references in your business development efforts.

Empathy

Take time to learn about clients. Inquire about the items you see in Zoom backgrounds. Acknowledge important events, like a vacation or the first day of school for little ones. Create systems or procedures to help, such as an annual reminder of a client's founding date. Visit their businesses. And give them 100% of your attention when you're together.

Tangibles

Because of the intangible nature of legal services, tangible things contribute to the perception of quality. Check and double-check everything. Be sure attachments are attached, names are spelled correctly, typos are caught, and so forth. Make certain your space projects the right image. A disorganized desk will leave clients thinking, "Are my files somewhere in that mess?"

Perception Is Reality

Perception can be more important than reality when it comes to the quality of services. You may be the best lawyer in your field but if you spell my name wrong, I'm not going to think so. In some ways, you are like my bank: I have no idea what you do behind those walls or what processes you use; it's the things you give, show or say to me that convince me of your quality.

Sally Schmidt, President of Schmidt Marketing, Inc., helps lawyers and law firms grow their practices. She was a founder and the first President of the Legal Marketing Association, is a Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management and was one of the first inductees to LMA's Hall of Fame. Known for her practical advice, she is the author of two books, "[Marketing the Law Firm: Business Development Techniques](#)" and "[Business Development for Lawyers: Strategies for Getting and Keeping Clients](#)." Follow her @SallySchmidt.