

Marketing

The Solution to Inertia? Think Small

SALLY J. SCHMIDT | When I think of the marketing challenges that lawyers face, I believe the biggest one is inertia. There are many reasons it's often hard to get started in marketing, but perhaps the two toughest relate to (1) a lack of know-how and (2) a seeming inability to find the time.

Some lawyers feel they just don't know how or where to start in marketing. Maybe they don't have many—or the right—contacts yet. Other lawyers may know what they should be doing but just don't do it, while still others have great ideas but never execute them. Obviously, a big part of the problem is that marketing time isn't billable time, so it suffers when compared to the revenue-producing files piled on the lawyer's desk. Plus, it can interfere with other priorities, from family to hobbies, so it simply keeps shifting down the to-do list.

Just thinking about “marketing” can be overwhelming. So my recommendation is to *think small*. In other words, instead of creating a grand marketing plan, take one baby step at a time. One effective activity can lead to a good contact, an interesting response or even a new opportunity.



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Six Strategies to Get Started

Here is a checklist of six “big-picture” marketing strategies with some examples of the many small steps that you can take—immediately—to kick-start your marketing efforts. If you select and implement just one activity from among the following ideas, you'll be on your way to more effective marketing.

1. Getting Feedback from Clients

- Take a client to lunch and ask for feedback on your individual performance or the performance of your firm.
- Upon the conclusion of the next significant matter you handle, set your calendar to call the client one month after the bill is paid. Use the phone call to conduct a “post-mortem” on the matter.
- Send a written survey to your 10 best clients to find out how you're doing.

2. Building Your Visibility

- Identify one seminar or seminar sponsor that deals with issues related to your practice, and call to see

how you can become a presenter at a relevant program.

- Identify one publication or Web site related to your practice and contact the editor. Volunteer to write an article, to provide background information or to otherwise be a resource.
 - Send an e-mail alert on a hot topic related to your practice to people who would be interested in the subject. Send three alerts over the course of the year.
 - Sit down for one hour and update your resume or biography to more accurately reflect the kind of work you do *and* whom you've done it for recently. Insert your relevant outside activities as well.
- #### 3. Networking
- Find one organization that you'd like to get involved in, and make a commitment to go to every one of its meetings for a year.
 - Write down three past or potential referral sources, and call each of them twice a year to discuss mutual business opportunities over lunch or dinner.
 - Send an e-mail to five former law school classmates, asking them what they're up to and updating them on your practice and other activities.
 - Ask one person—a client, a referral source or a friend—to introduce you to one other person who might be good for you to know. Then do the same for your contact.

- Commit to being more prepared for the next networking function you attend. Determine in advance whom you want to talk to or sit with, and think of some conversation starters.
- Volunteer to play host to the next meeting of an organization, holding the meeting in your offices.

4. Enhancing Client Relations

- Call one client each month just to say hello.
- Select three of your best clients and write a specific plan for each, outlining how you will keep the client happy and loyal—by entertaining, presenting substantive programs, expanding into new areas, working on site or the like.
- Change your outgoing voice-mail message daily so that your clients know your schedule.
- Give your home phone and cell phone numbers to your best clients.
- Start returning phone calls within three hours. Ask your secretary or assistant to help you with callbacks as needed.
- Visit one client you've never met in person or whose business you've never toured.

5. Conducting Market Research

- Ask 10 of your clients to come to a focus group luncheon, to give you input on a new idea you're considering.
- Write down five firms or lawyers whose practices you admire, and visit their Web sites to see how they market themselves—in what organizations they're involved, where they give speeches, how they describe their practices and so forth.

- Identify three companies or individuals you would like to work for, and conduct some background research to identify their needs. Visit Web sites, review recent media coverage, search their names and industries on Google, and look through related resources.

6. Revving Up Your Business Development

- Write down three potential targets for new business, and set one action step you will take with each in the next quarter.
- Commit to sending a handwritten thank-you note every time someone refers business to you.
- Ask a prospective client or referral source to accompany you to a professional meeting or seminar.
- Organize a get-together with one

client or referring organization, to discuss your capabilities and how you can improve the relationship.

- Put together a list of recent representative transactions, cases or matters you've handled, so you can use it when you pitch business.
- Calendar two hours each week to call people, write e-mails or send personal notes.

Think Like a Long-Distance Runner

There are many small activities that will move your marketing efforts forward and help you start producing results. As you consider the possibilities, select activities that you enjoy and work them, one by one, into your daily practice. Marketing can't be seen as "extracurricular." Instead, see your efforts as an investment in your future success. Marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. **LP**

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