

Ten Tips for Launching Your New Law Firm

While there are many tasks to accomplish when launching a new law firm, the marketing and business development projects can be especially daunting. Bottom line: just remember two concepts. #1: Successful marketing and business development for law firms is more about consistency and frequency of effort than creative brilliance. So keep going: hold weekly marketing meetings and sustain a client newsletter or blog effort. #2: Perfection is the enemy of progress. Don't postpone launching your website because it lacks important detail. Get it up now, and then work on refinements later.

The following tips provide an additional perspective on what to do (or not do) as you begin your new venture:



1. **Get clear on your key messages.** What will your firm offer that others don't? Are you highly specialized in an industry or practice area? Do you have a flexible or creative approach to rates and fees? Have you taken close, personalized client service as your mantra? Distill these key messages into two or three sentences. Commit the sentences to memory and distribute them to every lawyer and staffer in your firm. Repeat these sentences on your website. Armed with these messages, you can resist the impulse to make up a clever tag line describing your new firm. Clarity on how you're different is essential. A catchy phrase is not, and in fact, may be distracting.
2. **Keep the firm name as short as possible.** If your name includes three or more partners, clients and referral sources will instinctively begin to use just the first two names. If you're already using a firm name with three or more partners, it's not too late. You can leave your official business name ("Smith, Jones, Peters and Miller LLP") in place and use a shortened version for signage, website logo etc. ("Smith Jones"). Also keep the domain name brief -- www.sjlaw is more effective than www.smithjoneslaw. While you want clients to learn and remember the firm name, don't make them type more than ten letters into a web address
3. **Get professional help in designing the firm identity.** We've all become increasingly visually sophisticated. If your logo, typeface, or other materials are amateur in look and feel, there can be a subtle but deadly erosion of credibility with clients. Once you have a firm identity designed, use it consistently and extensively. A savvy designer can create a family of templates using the new identity. This can be a cost effective solution to those memos, client updates, announcements, and proposals that you'll be preparing over and over again.
4. **Build your media image.** As a new firm, you need sustained, relevant media coverage to help tell your story. Make sure you're promoting every speaking engagement, firm award or other items of interest to relevant media sources. Consider trade association

publications, industry-specific magazines, local or regional business journals and online sources like Law 360. Keep in mind that any article quoting the firm or an individual partner can be re-used as a follow up piece for contacting clients. These items should also be linked to your website – this fresh content will draw visitors to your site and increase the prominence of the firm in search results

5. **Update directories and ranking services** like Chambers, Legal 500, and Best Lawyers with your new contact details quickly. These entities update their website content frequently—you want to ensure that clients and referral sources who find you online don't call your old firm by mistake. If your new firm is positioned as a boutique with a national practice, consider purchasing a firm profile on these sites. As a new firm, this can be a very useful place to tell your story. Also remember to update your LinkedIn profile, telephone directories and Martindale entry if appropriate.
6. **Get your new website launched quickly and professionally.** There are many creative and talented web designers to choose from. Unfortunately, just as many lack management skills. Ask web designers for recent client references that can attest to their project execution skills. Can they manage a site for an on-time and on-budget delivery? Check these references yourself. Ideally, your web designer should have prior experience working with other law firms. As a start-up, you don't have time to train them on the nuances of the legal industry.
7. **Don't let your web designer write the content for your web site.** Get a strong business writer to prepare a single integrated draft of all bios, practice descriptions, and client examples, based on content received from individual lawyers. Using a single outside writer will help ensure your new firm presents itself in a consistent and unified way. Make sure this writer understands the firm's unique attributes and competitive advantages and ask for writing samples up-front.
8. **Start weekly 30 minute marketing meetings** with all professionals in your firm to review specific business leads and general marketing activities. Holding the meeting every week will keep your team focused on growth and connected with each other. In the beginning, ask an assistant to track commitments in a short memo format. As you gain momentum, the memo detail can be captured in a spreadsheet, and eventually, a sales database. Don't cancel these meetings or hold them less frequently as you get busier.
9. **Frequent, relevant contact with clients, contacts, and referral sources is essential.** Many studies estimate it takes 8 to 10 contacts between a lawyer and a prospective client before the lawyer is retained. The client has to remember you and your credentials when a business issue prompts the need for your services. Since repetition and consistency of outreach are important, initiate contact at least once a month. Provide something of substance and value that shows you're thinking about their

business. Two paragraphs every two or three weeks is better than a long analytic article every other month. Many firms achieve this through client alerts sent by email. The software to manage these client e-newsletters and alerts has become both affordable and simple to use.

10. **Consider Blogs.** Once you've got a mechanism in place to produce timely and substantive content for clients, consider moving this material to a blog format. There are many benefits of blog software. Your firm will gain greater prominence in Google and other search engines. Prospects can find your blog on the web and ask to be notified when you update the content of the blog, increasing your footprint. Finally, blogs provide a means of announcing softer firm information, or news that might not warrant a direct email to clients.

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LIFTOFF LAW llc provides turnkey business development and marketing support to BigLaw spin-offs, new boutiques, virtual law firms, and traditional firms engaged in new initiatives. For more information, contact Wendy Horn at whorn@LIFTOFF-LAW.com or by telephone at +1.612.770.6046. Visit us on the web at www.LIFTOFF-LAW.com