



## **Are Your Marketing Efforts Putting the Cart Before the Horse?**

**By: Allison C. Shields**

I've had several clients this summer with a desire to move full speed ahead on specific marketing initiatives – firm brochures, websites, letters to existing clients, etc. While I was happy to see the enthusiasm, the recognition that marketing was important, and the eagerness to move forward, I wanted each of these clients to take a step back before they became discouraged when their marketing initiatives didn't bring the return they expected.

So what's the problem? The problem is that these clients all were putting the cart before the horse. They were focusing on the 'product' that they wanted to put out, but they failed to do the proper preparation to make that product a success – and at times didn't understand why they needed to do so.

### **Focus on your target before you choose a method**

Almost every time I've heard lawyers discussing their efforts to grow or maintain their business and attract clients, the conversation focuses on tools and methods – lawyers want to know whether websites, yellow page ads, seminars, social networking or promotional items are 'good' ways to attract clients. But they lose sight of the fact that **the biggest factor that will affect the success of your efforts to attract high quality clients is how well you target the clients that you want.** And that means that specific tools - and specific messages - can work for one practice (or one lawyer or firm) and can fail miserably for another.

No marketing method will be successful if it doesn't target the right clients. The most beautifully designed brochure, the most informative website, the most eloquent letter won't be effective if it doesn't **target the right clients, clearly identify their needs and define how you can help.**

***And if your marketing piece never comes to the attention your target audience, it can't result in a response.***

One of my clients this summer had created a marketing piece that did a great job of explaining a particular practice area and why they were the 'go to' lawyers for those specific services. The piece cost a lot of money, but it had been virtually unused by the firm for years. Why? First, the piece was directed toward the wrong audience, and second, the firm hadn't done a good job of thinking through the ways that they intended to use or distribute the piece.

Because of the nature of the services being provided, the 'end user' of the described services always came to the firm through (and with) other lawyers, rather than the client contacting the firm directly. But the marketing piece was directed to the 'end user,' rather than to the lawyers that typically brought business to the firm. The law firm needed to market to the lawyers that brought this business to the firm, but they didn't think through their strategy before creating the piece and they had no system in place for getting it distributed.

## **Every marketing effort should fit into your overall marketing strategy**

A second firm was eager to do a mailing to former clients to review the work that had been done and perhaps to identify new opportunities. The firm had no marketing plan, and no idea how this letter would fit into any overall marketing strategy. They hadn't thought about the differences between the types of clients they'd worked with in the past and whether one letter could truly speak to the needs of each of those clients. And when I asked what follow up efforts they had planned, they were stunned – they intended to do a one time mailing expecting to get results – even though they hadn't contacted any of these clients with anything other than holiday cards and firm personnel announcements in some cases in decades!

A 'good' response to an individual mailing is 1%. With those statistics, the time, effort and expense of creating any kind of mailing or marketing piece doesn't make much sense if it isn't part of an overall system with follow up. Even clients that might want to respond will often get side-tracked or distracted. Chances are that your mailing won't be a priority for them, particularly if you haven't been in touch with any substantive information or offers for a significant period of time. **Follow up and consistent contact with clients and prospects is necessary to increase your response rate.**

## **Prepare, Prepare, Prepare**

**Before you choose (or reject) a particular marketing method or marketing initiative, ask questions like:**

- Who is the intended audience for this marketing piece?
- What is most important to that intended audience?
- Is the message one that will appeal to your intended audience?
- Is this method one that is likely to reach your intended target audience?
- Is the placement one that is likely to reach your intended target audience?
- How does this marketing initiative or 'product' fit within your overall marketing plan?
- How will you follow up?
- What is the purpose of the marketing piece or product you are considering?
- How will you use the 'product' once it has been created?
- Why is this relevant to your clients/target audience now?
- What kind of return are you anticipating from this initiative?
- How will you define 'success' or 'failure' of the initiative?

The process of gathering and compiling information about your target audience, their needs and the best ways to reach them doesn't happen overnight, but it's crucial to establishing a good foundation

for your business development efforts. That preparation is the horse – it's the fuel, the power behind whatever marketing initiatives that you decide to undertake. Don't make it an afterthought.



*Allison C. Shields, Esq., President of Legal Ease Consulting, Inc. is a former practicing attorney and law firm manager who helps small to mid sized law firms attract high value clients by creating customized marketing strategies and plans. Visit her blog at [www.LegalEaseConsulting.com](http://www.LegalEaseConsulting.com) or her website at [www.LawyerMeltdown.com](http://www.LawyerMeltdown.com). Contact her at: [Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com](mailto:Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com).*