



Five Ways Solo Attorneys Can Survive and Thrive in a Recession

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The economy is the one subject that seems to have an impact on everyone. It can even have an effect on solo attorneys and small law firms. How can this be? People still need legal assistance even in a difficult economy, right? Contracts still need to be written. Businesses still have problems. Why would things ever slow down for a small law firm?

Yes, it is true that the law moves forward in good times and in bad times. The challenge for solo attorneys and small law firms comes in being referred quality clients during a recession. Referrals may dry up in an economic downturn because many small business owners are not seeing as many clients as they have in the past. Since they don't see as many people, they may not hear of as many issues that could be relevant matters for your firm. Indirectly, the downturn in business for your referral partners may result in a lack of referrals to your firm.

Here are five cost-effective ways to combat the economic slowdown and keep it from affecting your solo law firm:

The Difference Is Still Important

As times get tougher, many people will "dabble" in your area of expertise. Make your prospective clients aware that this is happening. Remind your client that you do not handle issues in your specialty on a part-time basis. If you are a criminal defense attorney, explain to them that you are not a real estate attorney who takes a few criminal defense cases each year to "fill out his calendar".

The reason people chose you in a good economy is more important in a down economy. There is more competition out there. Focus on your unique value proposition and hammer it home.

You must be able to articulate clearly why you are the best choice for this client in this situation. Now, more than ever, your unique value proposition is critically important. Make sure you highlight it as often as possible.

Help Clients Understand the Consequences of Bargain Shopping

The client receives no bargain from parachute manufacturers, heart surgeons, or legal practitioners. Paying less often means not getting the best work. Your prospective clients must understand this, and you are the best person who can bring it to their attention.

Help prospective clients focus on their own PERSONAL economy. What consequences are they likely to face if this work is botched? What is their exposure? If this situation is not handled, how much will they suffer? Do they want to face this possibility armed with the best possible representation? Or do they want to take a big, big chance with someone else?

Work Your Contact Lists

Every lunch you eat by yourself is costing you money. You need to stay in front of the people who know you so that they remember to refer clients to you. While many people may not come into daily contact with friends/relatives who need your services, they may be two or three connections removed from someone in this situation. In other words, they might hear of someone who needs legal assistance and they can offer to connect them with you (a friend of a friend). This happens more often than you realize.

The best way to get these referrals is to sit down with people and get to know them. Breakfast or lunch (and often dinner) provide the perfect opportunity to breathe new life into a potential referral relationship.

Here's how this could work:

Invite a long-time friend to lunch. Find out how you can help him/her by providing some referrals to his/her business. They will almost always want to reciprocate if possible. The more you give to them, the more they will want to help you.

Keep Your Name in Front of Everyone You Know Every Month

Monthly greeting cards are a terrific opportunity to keep your name in front of people. Every month has a holiday that will serve as an excuse for mailing your entire contact list. The more creative and memorable your message, the more likely your contacts will be to refer you.

If this seems goofy (after all, who gets a greeting card from an attorney?), remember that being different is the point. For example, one side of your card can say something like: "All of us at XYZ Law Firm wish you a safe and happy Halloween. Thanks for thinking of us." On the opposite side it could say: "We help people who are being chased by real goblins, monsters, and other scary creatures waiting to attack your business (or your bank account)." Below this message, you print your contact information.

The key is not to be overtly solicitous. You want to remind people what you do and thank them for thinking of you.

Greeting cards are cheap, and they work.

Media Exposure Can Make a Difference

Getting your name and face in the local media can make a difference in landing new clients. You may not get clients from actually appearing on television or being quoted in an article, but media outreach can help enhance your credibility.

Prospective clients often view media exposure as a surrogate for expertise. Giving a few interviews or commenting on a few out-of-town cases for a local reporter will help keep your name in front of clients and it will position you as an expert.

There is no reason your law firm should suffer in an economic downturn. People still need assistance handling legal matters. The challenge comes when your referral sources have reduced their business contacts because the economy has slowed down. The key to survival and success lies in expanding your reach. Develop these good habits now and you will see results in both the short and long term.

David V. Lorenzo is an expert at helping attorneys make more money with less effort. If you'd like to receive his free guide to marketing in a recession, visit the Free Tools area at <http://RainmakerLawyer.com>, or call Dave toll-free at 1-888-692-5531.