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8 Steps to a Prosperous Small Firm Practice

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The year is young and possibilities abound to make 2012 your most prosperous year ever. Having worked with many law firms and hundreds of lawyers over two decades, we have witnessed some common threads of what makes a prosperous firm as compared to those who sputter along, often in despair of not reaching their professional (or worse, financial) goals.

There are many effective business development and marketing steps lawyers can take to have a successful practice, regardless of the size of your firm. Considering the fact that lawyers in smaller firms presumably have fewer resources to bring into play, below are a few solid ideas that will help.

The reality is that financing a marketing program does not need to be a deterrent in small law firm marketing provided that laser-focused strategic marketing planning is in place. You can bootstrap a law practice similar to the way an entrepreneur bootstraps any other start-up. The real key is bringing focus and clarity to your marketing goals followed by precision execution over and over again.

1. **Quality Work is the Cost of Admission, At All Times.** With all the competition biting at your heels, delivering the highest quality work product all the times is a non-negotiable requirement to build a formidable reputation and referrals from clients and other attorneys. Don't shy away from taking CLEs in complimentary areas of law to broaden your knowledge base to serve clients better.
2. **Focus on Your Natural Network.** Each of us has a network of people we know, like, and trust (to varying degrees). Leverage this network in all ways possible. Get and stay in touch with everyone -- your friends, relatives, business associates, and professional contacts --past and present. Let them know that what you are up to, how you provide value to your clients, and effectively articulate that you actively seek referrals.

Ideally, you want to strengthen the network you presently have and focus on aggressively expanding it to include a broad range of individuals who can ultimately refer business to you. It has never been easier (and more economical) than it is today to convert your network to an active

sales force for your practice with all the technological tools (e-blasts; social media updates; blogs, etc.) available to maintain contact with a mass email distribution list.

3. **Become the “Go-To” Resource for your Clients.** Educate clients to send any legal work your way whether or not you ultimately handle it for them. With your growing network, you are more than happy to make a referral but want to condition your contacts to think of you first. Turn your clients into fans by not charging for incidentals, short phone calls or quick emails.
4. **Get and Stay in Touch with Target Audiences.** It cannot be overstated the value of building “top-of-mind” awareness among your key target audiences - - existing clients, referral sources, and qualified prospects. There are many ways to accomplish this but one very effective way is to create an online e-communications program. Aligning with the axiom that it takes 7-10 “touches” per year to build top-of-mind awareness, sending out a regular, periodic e-blast on topics of interest to your constituents can be a very effective way to stay in front of them. This is an art, not a science and requires a strategic approach which can pay impressive dividends.
5. **Seize All Opportunities for Free Media.** Every day, there are news items appearing across all media platforms that fall into your area of expertise. Familiarize yourself with those reporters who write on topics about which you have (or are developing) an expertise and reach out to offer expert commentary on these topics. A news story without a quote is not a true news story. To go further, email a press release every month to the local editors and reporters who cover relevant stories. Given the present publishing industry, reporters have fewer resources than ever and are delighted to develop reliable news sources. Become one to them and watch how your reputation grows for **no** out-of-pocket expenditure.
6. **Write, Write, and Write Even More.** A very effective way to get in front of your target market is to pitch articles to publications (including blogs) that target your niche. Trade magazines are always looking for good content, and they include a byline with your name and contact information. Publishing has never been easier and opportunities more available given all the venues, particularly online. The key is to find the targeted publications that your clients and targets are reading, and be there consistently.

While this business development initiative may not produce immediate results (although it been known to), it will have a cumulative effect if prospective clients continue to see your name and information. One of the inherent values of publishing is the “re-purposing” value of investing your time once to write the article then placing it in a variety of media venues, using the published article as a marketing tool to send about to clients and other key influencers, and including the published article on your website.

7. **Speak Engagements.** There are hundreds of trade associations in every market niche. Many have local chapters while others sponsor an annual event. One of the highest impact initiatives you can take is to speak in front of an audience full of qualified prospects, those in need of your services. Compile an impressive press kit and send it along with a letter offering to speak at upcoming meetings and events. Increase the promotional value by including not only your current bio with headshot but article reprints which demonstrate your expertise in the respective area. It doesn't get much better than this to cultivate contacts with prospects.

8. **Follow Up, Execute, Repeat.** None of the high impact and economical marketing tactics outlined above will “work” to grow your practice if there is not consistent, persistent follow up and execution. As I repeatedly emphasize to clients, it is better to execute consistently on a few strategic initiatives than to over commit and fall short in the execution. Evaluate your time management skills, assess your delegation skills, and schedule “conferences” with yourself to ensure deadlines and commitments are met, just like you do with client work. In the long term, what is more important than investing in your own practice? Keep that in your sights and a prosperous 2012 will be yours.

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