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MANAGEMENT

Keeping Your Firm 'Top-of-Mind'

Getting and staying in front of existing and prospective clients will pay best dividends

By Kimberly Alford Rice

The first quarter has flown by, though “overwhelm” has yet to set in for most lawyers, and it is typically this time of year I find my clients eagerly embrace a few practical steps that they may take to yield high impact results in growing and strengthening their client base. Effective execution when combined with consistency and persistence can make the difference between a thriving practice and hanging on by a thread. No one-shot wonders here.

As we have stated many times before, there is *no* single action which wins the day for growing a healthy practice, for helping firms to reach “top-of-mind” status among its key audiences (exist-

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ing clients, referral sources and prospects), though there are a few more “high impact” business development initiatives than others. That is what I’m focusing on in this article.

Reach Out Regularly

With the countless number of ways to connect today (e-mail, social media, texting, snail mail, Skype, video conferencing, webcasting, etc.), it has never been easier to get and stay in touch with others. Some individuals still pick up a landline telephone and place an actual phone call. Find out how your targeted audiences prefer to be communicated with and leverage the available technology to develop a regular means of staying in touch. This could take the form of a monthly e-blast to a different segment of your clients on an issue of particular relevance to them. Or, it could be a program notice for an in-house “lunch n’ learn” on a timely topic which may adversely affect your clients’ business, if left unaddressed. Whatever the means, schedule it into your calendar to make sure it happens consistently.

There are plenty of expert local resources available (just ask us) to assist you in developing a system for staying in touch with a growing number of clients and contacts. Developing and executing a system will make all the difference in the world for supporting your goals and rendering tangible results in growing a practice. Don’t leave your communication with targeted audiences to chance or continue a scattershot approach. As so

many have seen, it simply does not work to make a lasting impression or to develop a top-of-mind awareness in front of those you wish to connect with.

Face-to-Face Interaction

It’s tough, if not downright impossible, to build and grow a healthy practice without proactively meeting and cultivating relationships with individuals who are in a position to retain your services. There are a plethora of passive marketing tactics (such as advertising, article publishing, strategic web development) which can be very effective when combined with active marketing tactics (speaking engagements, networking events, organizational involvement), recognizing again that there is no one activity which is the magic bullet.

As the number of networking opportunities has increased, we advise clients to be very strategic and selective in committing to which events they will attend and in which professional organizations they will become involved. The absolute best events to attend are those at which your “profile” clients will be present. In short, you want to “go where the clients are.”

For example, if your area of practice is in management-side labor and employment law, the folks who typically make legal hiring decisions may be a vice president of human resources, human resources director, CFO, or even a business owner, depending on the size of an organization. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to attend and become involved in the same organizations in which those folks are involved. One such organization is the Society for Human Resource

Managers (SHRM). It is there that you will find individuals struggling with a myriad of employment law issues for which you can lend your expertise.

Leverage Technology

It bears repeating that it has never been easier to get and stay in front of key audiences than it is today, given all the technological tools (read: economical) available.

Assuming your firm has a website (and if you don't, that is a whole other conversation), I encourage clients to upload fresh content frequently. This may take the form of a short article (no more than 750-1,000 words), blog posts (no more than 300 words), or even a link to an article you published in a print or online publication.

Study after study shows us that there is tremendous room for growth with online marketing initiatives. It is commonplace that upon meeting a prospect, a possible professional services advisor, etc., we all check out their online bio, whether that is on their website, an attorney directory (like Martindale or AVVO) or even LinkedIn. If you frequently upload new content to your website, you will boost your online credibility, which can increase your reten-

tion rate.

As 2012 unfolds, while the economy putters along and clients become even more selective in their legal services hiring decisions, I challenge you to initiate at least three new high-impact business-development activities to get and stay in front of your most prized clients and wannabes, to make this year a success for you and your practice.

Focus, Focus, Focus

With so many things vying for our attention in the course of a workday, the best way to ensure execution and follow-through in your business-development initiatives is to write down the names of your "A" target list, the type of activity and outreach you will commit to and by what date. All the better if you have an "accountability partner," who may be a colleague, mentor or coach. Many of our coaching clients find real value in this aspect of our work together in getting and staying on track in making measurable strides in growing a healthy practice. We partner with clients to help them honor their commitments and discuss obstacles or sticking spots to move through.

Proactive outreach can be as simple as an e-mail invite for coffee to get better acquainted with someone you recently met at an industry trade show. No major time commitment but rather a focused time to learn more about this person and his/her business and challenges. High-impact, targeted, face-to-face business-development meetings such as these are some of the best "marketing" you can do to grow your base.

Committing to meet and follow up with five people a month may be a reasonable and attainable goal for your practice. The most important aspect to business development planning is to actually follow through on your commitments. Sure, life gets in the way, but as an entrepreneur in your own business, you must figure out ways to effectively manage your time to consistently and persistently get face-to-face with your clients, to strengthen your relationships and prospects/referral sources to cultivate and nurture those relationships. This is where the serious rainmakers separate themselves from the wannabes who answer the question *How's business?* with excuses.

Which are you? ■