

Law Firm Marketing Tip: The Power of Positioning Yourself as a Specialist

One of the biggest law firm marketing mistakes attorneys make is to position themselves as generalists rather than specialists. Let me explain. Due to today's hypercompetitive environment and the increased level of sophistication among consumers, lawyers can no longer afford to be seen as a general practitioner, the "jack of all trades," because they will also be perceived as the master of none.

Being perceived as a specialist in your local area for a specific practice area or niche is critical to the financial well being of your law firm. Please understand when I use the term "specialist" or "expert" I know these are protected titles and you must achieve a certain designation or certification to use them. So I am not talking about being an expert or specialist in the legal or technical sense. I am talking about in the marketing sense having your prospects, clients and referral sources see you as the go to expert in your niche.

One of the problems with being a generalist is that it makes it even more difficult to get more and better referrals. Here's why: when another trusted advisor sends you a referral it's their reputation on the line. They don't want to risk the relationship with their client if they are not sure you can solve the situation. More and more being a generalist is perceived as having a good general knowledge, but unable to handle more complex (and potentially more lucrative) legal situations. If you say well I can do anything from IP to PI, then trusted advisors not going to send you any referrals because they figure there's no way someone can be that good in every single area.

In addition, if a trust advisor already has an estate planning attorney they send clients to and another they send business litigation cases to, if you position yourself with them as a generalist in business law who can handle both transactional work and litigation (even though you have only handled 2 lawsuits in the last 3 years and never been in front of jury) you will likely lose any referrals from that professional because he may be concerned about damaging his relationship with his other referral source.

Here are several ways you can start to position yourself and your law firm as a specialist.

1. Specialize by industry. Pick two or three specific industries, like banking, construction, high end real estate, etc.
2. Specialize by size of revenue. You can focus your practice on high net worth individuals (at least \$1 Million in net assets). You can target businesses with \$5 Million to \$50 Million in revenues.
3. Specialize by geography. Instead of focusing on California, target Los Angeles county, or Orange County, or Manhattan Beach. Most professionals limit their practice to a geographical location and you will get more referrals from local professionals than those 50 or 100 miles away.

4. Specialize by services you offer. Perhaps you want to focus your law firm's services on complex litigation, celebrity or high profile divorces, white collar crimes, or Spanish speaking clients.
5. Specialize by combining all four. The most powerful way to specialize your law practice is when you combine all four; specialize by industry, size of revenue, geography, and by the specific services that you offer.

The perception of specialization takes time to develop and I am certainly not suggesting you handle any case outside of your area of competency. I also want to clarify two common myths about being a specialist:

Myth 1. If I specialize my law firm other people outside of my focus area will not come to me. False! In fact, studies have shown when you are perceived as an expert in one area, people naturally attribute other areas of expertise to you. In clinical psychology this is known as the halo effect.

Myth 2. If I specialize my law firm I cannot service other clients outside of that area. If a client or referral comes to you and they have a problem within your area of competency, certainly you can serve them.

Law firm marketing is a process of generating more and better clients. Positioning yourself as a leading expert or specialist in your niche is a powerful tool. You can do this on your website, with a blog, by sending out press releases, by refocusing your brochure, and by educating your referral sources. With your limited time where are you going to focus your time, energy, and money? Are you going to use a shattered approach or a laser focused approach? Top Rainmakers understand the most effective use of their limited time is to center in on a specific niche and dominate that niche. Find two ways you can start to position your law firm as a leading expert in your local area in the next 30 days.