

Building a business from the ground floor...

By Donald K. Broad, Attorney at Law

October 2011



So you've decided you want to be your own boss and reap the benefits of your own work. You have a business plan, a product or service, and you're ready to "hit the ground running." Now what do you do? How do you get that business up and clicking on all cylinders?

While there is any number of ways to accomplish these tasks, I have found 4 steps that have helped me. The success of this "system" is not limited to just law practices, but any business.

1. Build a network

One of the business "buzz words" has always been "networking." However, the task of building a network has radically changed in the past few years.

Face-to-face networking It used to be that you built your business network by joining local groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or a local service organization like Rotary or Kiwanis. These open networking groups allow multiple business types in their group, which allows you to meet and interact with many people.

Another type of networking group is a closed group that only allows one person per business or profession in each chapter. An excellent example of a closed group like this is BNI International. While you generally do not meet as many people in this type of group, the purpose of the group is to generate actual referrals to each others' businesses and marketing your business through "word of mouth."

Personally, I decided to join my local Chamber of Commerce, the Fishers Chamber of Commerce -- <http://www.fisherschamber.com/> -- as well as a local BNI chapter -- http://www.picsweb.com/bni_indianapolis/index.htm. Both groups have generated business for me.

Online social networking While these types of face-to-face networking groups are still important, it is not the only tool you should be using. The growth of social networking on the internet is staggering. I used to take the position that Facebook and/or Twitter have nothing to do with my business. However, I have been persuaded otherwise by the success of others in using these tools.

I have since changed my position regarding both Facebook and Twitter have created a business presence on both.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Donald-K-Broad-Attorney-at-Law/284564808229054>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/#!/DKBroad>

I also utilize LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/donald-k-broad-attorney-at-law/25/706/5a7>.

The best way to view these online social networks from a business standpoint is as a networking tool. The better you learn to use them, the better they will work for you. Make use of all that is available to build your network.

2. Find a mentor

No matter what business you are in, it is always a great idea to find somebody who does what you do and learn from them. Your mentor should be somebody who you know and respect, but also a person that is well-known and respected in the business community. Meet with them, have lunch or breakfast with them, and get to know them. More importantly, ask them questions.

I personally think it is best if your mentor knows that you view them as a mentor, although that is not necessarily required. Experience shows that your mentor will be both honored and flattered by the fact that you view them in this manner. As a result, they will be more likely to give you helpful hints and advice than they might have otherwise.

Meet with your mentor regularly. You will not only be adding an important cog to your network, but also helping grow your business knowledge. Ask them what some of the mistakes are that they made early in their business so that you can avoid repeating them. Ask them what has worked best for them in terms of building their business. Ask them if they have any advice for you as you start out. But just be sure to ask, ask, ask...

3. Build an online presence

If you are building your network, you should already be building an online presence through social networks. However, you should strongly consider a website. It can be as simple as a “sign” website that does nothing by give the name and contact information for your business. It can be as complicated as a multi-page website with the ability to schedule appointments, purchase products, and/or inform potential consumers or clients of your various products or services.

The simpler websites can be constructed on your own with little cost and time invested. I built my business’s website -- <http://medi8-dkb.com/index.html> -- using Intuit’s web-building service.

Another option would be to hire a web-builder to design, publish, and maintain your website for you. There are many options from which to choose in this regard. One company that I recommend to others is <http://www.picsweb.com/>. They can not only design your website, but also help you market it to create traffic to visit your site.

4. Build and protect your reputation

Once you have an ever-growing network, both face-to-face and online, and you have an online presence where people can find you and buy your product or make use of your professional services, you need to build your reputation AND protect it.

One of the quickest and easiest ways to build a positive reputation is to ask your happy clients and customers to write a quick review for you online. I use the recommendations tool on LinkedIn, but you can also use Google reviews as well as other services.

However, the most important step is to keep your clients and customers happy so they are willing to write positive reviews. This is the quickest and easiest way to protect your reputation. One negative review can cause all kinds of damage to your business reputation.

Of course, you can never please every client all the time. However, simple steps to keep your clients happy will go a long way to helping you in this regard. In addition, you generally know who your happiest customers are, so be sure to ask them for a recommendation.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that it takes a great deal of work and effort to build a network and maintain it and your reputation within that network. However, the dividends that it yields for your business will be immense.