



Professionals Taking Advantage of Creative Marketing Opportunities

By: Joe Geisman

As noted in my recent post entitled *Personal Branding: When the Professional is the Product*, any provider of professional services who is interested in attracting and retaining clients must differentiate herself and take control of the process through which perceptions are formed. Possessing the requisite knowledge and expertise is not enough. In today's business environment, a professional must regularly engage and interact with her target audience and further influence how she is perceived by that audience.

There are of course many different initiatives through which a professional or her firm can influence perceptions and develop a distinctive brand identity. For example, a law firm in New York recently participated in the International Restaurant & Foodservice Show of New York. The firm staffed a booth at this restaurant industry trade show, hosted a seminar on immigration issues in the restaurant business, and partnered with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office for a discussion on how restaurants can avoid sexual harassment charges. The firm paid about \$10,000 to participate, excluding related expenses associated with travel and lost billable time.

Whether this particular opportunity will ultimately lead to additional business for this firm is difficult to predict and is dependent on many variables, including follow-up with the contacts that were made, whether those contacts have legal issues that they need outside counsel to address, whether those contacts address legal issues proactively or reactively, and numerous other factors. But through the firm's investment and participation in such an "out of the box" business development opportunity, it undoubtedly improved its chances of attracting business from the industry that was targeted. At a minimum, the initiative provided the professionals at the firm with a unique opportunity to meet business owners and operators in a targeted industry, ask questions about the issues that businesses in that industry find important, demonstrate their expertise in handling such issues, and affirm their commitment to supporting businesses in that industry.

In an era where information is shared in real time and delivered 24 hours a day, business relationships are cultivated both in person and online, and attributes like thought leadership have become increasingly important, professionals and their firms must take advantage of non-traditional business development opportunities in order to remain competitive and attract new business. They must determine what industries and clients they want to target and commit resources to identifying, developing, executing and managing "out of the box" marketing and business development initiatives. These initiatives should be designed to not only generate relevant leads in a given industry, but also to engage prospective clients, increase the visibility of the professionals and their firms, and influence how the professionals and firms are perceived by the targeted industries.