

[Fifty Shades of Grey: Client Development Lessons](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on January 14th, 2013

I know. You saw the title and thought: “This guy has really gone off the deep end this time.” Believe me, I understand your skepticism. But, bear with me, the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy owes its success to “word of mouth” and most lawyers will tell you they get new clients because of “word of mouth,” so I think there is something to be learned.



Why is the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy so popular? I haven't read it, but I get why it is popular. Clearly sex sells, but that is not helpful to getting client development ideas for lawyers and law firms.

When I began my research I found American Express Open Forum article: [6 Business Lessons From 50 Shades of Grey](#). Here are the lessons:

1. **You don't have to reinvent the wheel.** There is nothing really new in the Grey trilogy. It simply borrows from other writing and TV shows like Twilight. As lawyers you are constantly rebuilding on something that has always been done. Your job is to differentiate what you do or how you provide the service.
2. **It doesn't have to be perfect.** I haven't read 50 Shades, but everything I have read about it suggests the writing is not memorable. I am not suggesting you be careless or commit malpractice, but I am suggesting that you get your thoughts out there. Seth Godin recently posted: [What are you waiting for?](#) He asks: “I'm genuinely, rhetorically curious. What, exactly, are you insisting will happen before you start shipping your art?”

3. **Choose the most effective sales channel.** I read that people are more likely to read erotica on ebooks because those around them do not know what they are reading. What format(s) are most likely to be used by your clients?
4. **Spread the word.** Use social media, but also use good old fashioned “word of mouth” to spread your ideas.
5. **Be ready to build on your initial offering.** Repurpose the content you are creating.
6. **Keep your eye on popular culture.** For your purpose I would say keep your eye on industry culture.

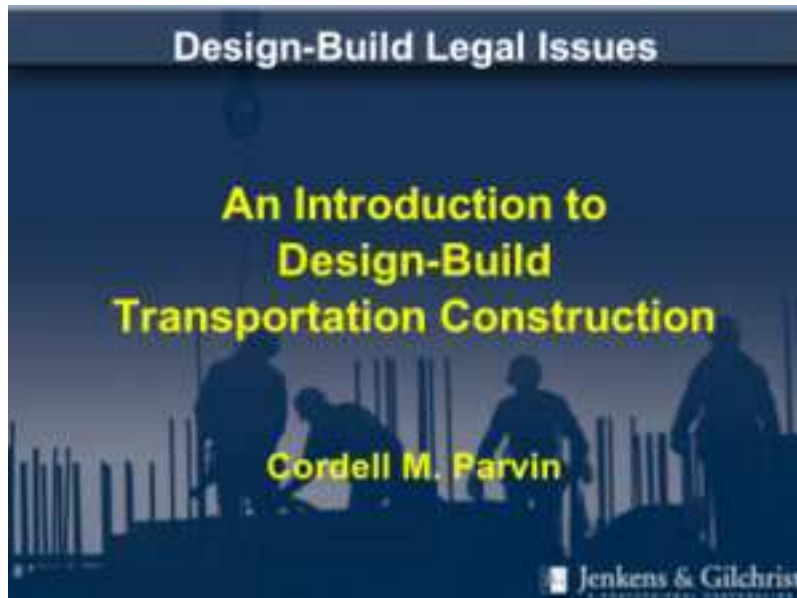
I read Grey Area: [How ‘Fifty Shades’ Dominated the Market](#) and found that the unprecedented success of the book in the United States was all based on word of mouth. I also learned that:

The crucial difference may have less to do with talent, content, or luck than with a peculiarity of Leonard’s early readership: her work originated as fan fiction, a genre that operates outside the bounds of literary commerce, in online networks of enthusiasts of popular books and movies, brought together by a desire to write and read stories inspired by those works. Leonard’s excursion in the genre provided her with a captive audience of thousands of positively disposed readers, creating a market for her books before they ever carried price tags.

In 2011, she contracted with a small Australian press to publish it as the Fifty Shades trilogy, in ebook and print-on-demand paperback formats.

How can you create a situation where your knowledge, expertise and content will spread by word of mouth? Speaking to an industry association is the equivalent of originating your work as “fan fiction.”

I did this many times. For example when the FHWA began to authorize design-build, I spoke at conferences. Then I created a guide for contractors. Through the presentations and the guide my goal was to create word of mouth marketing so I would get hired to work with contractors on large, complex design-build projects. I was successful.



Would this approach work for you?

Cordell M. Parvin built a national construction practice during his 35 years practicing law. At Jenkens & Gilchrist, Mr. Parvin was the Construction Law Practice Group Leader and was also responsible for the firm's attorney development practice. While there he taught client development and created a coaching program for junior partners. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development and planning and client development. He is the co-author of *Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout* and other books for lawyers. To learn more visit his Web site, www.cordellparvin.com or contact him at cparvin@cordellparvin.com.