

## Make Your Mark With Marketing

By Sharon Berman

In today's marketplace, having a book of business can make all the difference - between making the cut and losing one's job. Associates who never thought much about building their own book of business in the past are now realizing they need to set themselves apart from the crowd or face the possibility of joining their fungible peers on the unemployment line.

A book of business is the foundation for differentiating yourself in the eyes of firm management. But the age-old question that has stymied even seasoned attorneys is where to begin marketing your services. Resolving to take action is the first step, but what are the following steps that will get you where you want to go?

First, you need a plan to guide you through the application of the core principles of marketing. These principles apply to everyone - associates and partners established in firms who want to differentiate themselves, as well as those who didn't make the cut and have vowed to do things differently in their next position.

Start by answering some basic questions. First, what exactly are you going to market? Before you leap into action, ask your firm management for some direction because your marketing initiative must support and contribute to the firm's overall game plan. You may find that the partners want you to market their core services or practice area. Or, their strategy may be to expand and develop a burgeoning practice area, in which case they may encourage you to help them focus on this area.

Your next step is to identify your own



strengths and interests so you can leverage them. If there are specific practice areas or specialties within a practice area that intrigue you, see how you can align these interests with the firm's direction. If that's not possible now, keep your eyes open for opportunities as the firm evolves.

Before you decide on your tactics, however, you need to establish the parameters of your target market. For instance, will you be marketing directly to "end-users," such as company presidents or consumers, or will you be marketing to referral sources such as CPAs or other professionals? Research where your targets can be found and how you can reach them. For example, do they participate in specific online groups? Where and when are their conferences? What are they reading or listening to? What professional groups do they belong to?

Once you know where to find your targets, your next challenge is how to approach them. Here you may need help from colleagues and friends. Most likely, you already know people who can make an introduction. Younger attorneys tend to discount the value of their contact databases, such as ACT! or Outlook, because they might not be filled with names of senior executives and

CEOs. But these contacts are actually the core of your marketing program. In the blink of an eye - a few years from now - a pal from law school might be in a position to dole out exactly the kind of business you want.

Add to your database all the people with whom you want to communicate from a business perspective. This will include current and former colleagues, law school alumni, bar association colleagues and other people you know in the business world. It's crucial that your database is up to date and well organized. Consistent communication with your markets is a key factor in successful marketing, and you can't be consistent without a shipshape database. Organize your contacts into categories and code them as A's, B's and C's in terms of priority. For example, A's are the people who warrant monthly contact, while a quarterly "touch" might be sufficient for the C's. Keep expanding this core database as you identify prospective clients and referral sources.

If you've ever taken a marketing class, it's likely you have heard the term "marketing mix." It refers to the fact that effective marketing consists of a mix of tactics, such as direct mail, e-mail, networking, speaking, writing, Web site, social networking, advertising, etc. Relying on just one tactic is like

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**Sharon Berman** is principal of Berbay Corp., a marketing consulting firm specializing in working with law firms. She can be reached at [berman@berbay.com](mailto:berman@berbay.com).

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putting all the proverbial eggs in one basket. Unfortunately, there is no magic formula for the perfect blend; it just comes down to an educated guess that is refined by experience. Further, because your mix may change over time depending on the marketplace and your objectives, the marketing mix has to be monitored and measured.

Explore a range of tactics and decide what fits your personality and firm culture. Then, choose two or three tactics to which you can commit to with consistency. Start blogging, get involved in a strategically selected organization with the goal of working up to a leadership position or develop a means to communicate consistently with your database (e.g., forwarding your firm's client alert or newsletter with a personal note). Quantify your goals as much as possible and assign a timeframe to them. For example, specify that you are going to send a news alert to your markets once each quarter, or join one committee by the end of August.

Don't set yourself up for failure by aiming too high. Market to your level of experience. As a second-year associate, for example, you should not expect to bring in the same kind of business as a senior associate or partner. You may, however, be able to create opportunities for senior attorneys to be introduced to people they might not otherwise meet, whether potential clients or referral sources.

Marketing success is notoriously difficult to measure, but it's important to capture as much data as you can so you know what is working and what is not. From the start,

develop the habit of tracking the results of your marketing activity. An example would be the number of responses you get to an e-mail blast - not just new clients you landed, but people contacting you in response to your communication. The brass ring is a lead generated - someone who would like to talk with you further about using your services - but there are preliminary steps, like reminding people of who you are and what you do.

While it's difficult to cut through the clutter when marketing a professional service, consistency and persistence usually win out over a blockbuster approach. Keep answering those questions on LinkedIn or distributing that article you published because someday someone will need your services - and on that day, they will finally "get" the message you delivered 20 times before. Marketing is a numbers game, whether in the size of your market or the number of times you "touch" prospects. Keep those numbers up!

The core principles of marketing - your plan, your organized database, your measurement of results, your consistency and persistence - remain the same in any economy, but in a way it's easier to stand out from the crowd during difficult times because so many others hunker down and stop marketing. Regardless of where you are in your associate career, now is the time to begin building a book of business or, if you already have one, to reinforce your business development activities. Your career depends on it. ■

### 10 Steps To Jumpstart Your Own Book of Business

1. **Take Action-** Hammer down on your own business development plan to differentiate yourself in the eyes of management, which can be the difference between being invaluable or becoming disposable in the workplace.
2. **Devise a Plan-** Before jumping on to the marketing bandwagon, decide what you are going to market. Communicate with management so your marketing initiative supports the firm's overall objective.
3. **Identify Your Strengths-** Decide what practice areas or specialties interest you the most, then see how you can align these interests with the firm's direction.
4. **Narrow Your Target Markets-** Decide if you will market directly to "end-users," such as company presidents or consumers, or target referral sources such as CPAs or other professionals.
5. **Approach Targets-** Research where your target markets can be found and formulate a plan for how you will approach them. Often, you will already know colleagues or friends who can help with introductions.
6. **Compile Your Database-** Don't underestimate the value of your databases, such as ACT! or Outlook. Organize clients, colleagues and other business contacts into categories and code them according to frequency of desired contact.
7. **Diversify Your Tactics-** Be sure you are reaching out to all significant marketing outlets including direct mail, e-mail, speaking, writing, website, social networking, etc. Choose two or three tactics you can commit to.
8. **Market to Your Level of Experience-** Don't expect to bring in the same kind of business as a senior associate or partner if you have only been at the firm one year. But know that you may be able to introduce them to people they might not otherwise meet.
9. **Track Results-** It is important to capture as much data as possible so you know what's working and what's not.
10. **Be Consistent-** Develop a means to communicate consistently with your database. Marketing is a numbers game, whether in the size of your market or the number of times you "touch" prospects. Keep those numbers up!

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For more information on law firm and attorney marketing, contact Berbay Corp:

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