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Marketing Your Practice as a High-End Product

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Some of the world's most famous jewelry designers did not mark their products with their names. Tiffany did not invent the "Tiffany" setting, the ubiquitous prong-set diamond engagement ring. And how do you really know if the Art Deco piece you sprang for is actually Art Deco or a knock-off from Thailand? Even more importantly, how does this pertain to your marketing?

These factoids and questions about marketing and branding actually have a lot to do with your business development, a connection I contemplated as I sat through several days of lectures at an annual antique conference. Initially, it may not seem like there is a strong link between selling antiques and attorney marketing, but after some analysis, the parallels become clear.

"Give clients a luxury experience," were some words of wisdom and a worthwhile reminder offered by one successful antiques dealer. This doesn't mean you have to be selling high-end goods, and she was not. But her business did very well by looking at her clients from a 360-degree perspective. For example, she had a selection of inexpensive toys gift-wrapped and ready for clients who came in with children. Keeping the kids happy, giving clients the chance to browse, and showing them that you are thinking about an extension of them were part of this dealer's

plan to offer her clients a luxury experience. No matter what your positioning, consider how to give your clients a luxury experience.

Suzanne Belperron was a French jewelry designer, well known in the 30s and 40s, whose scarce work is experiencing a resurgence now as reflected in prices for her pieces. She did not sign her work, rightly believing that it was so different, no signature mark was needed. Whether it is the level of service we provide or the caliber of the finished product, a unique, readily recognizable style is something to aspire to; such an indelible impression lets clients know it is your work product even if it does not carry your name. When it comes to marketing your firm, this may come through via the sophistication, quality and creativity of your marketing program.

The Danish silversmith Georg Jensen, with a company still carrying the name today,



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branded his company's products with both the company name as well as the name of the studio silversmith. He was one of the first jewelry companies to do this and was very progressive in doing so. He boosted both his company's name and those of the designers, which must have contributed to loyalty on the part of his design team. The company still carries on that tradition today.

Jensen's double-branding also carries messages in today's law firms. He understood the long-term benefits of creating a win-win situation, i.e., letting everyone who deserves it get credit. As the company owner, Jensen could have branded everything solely with his name, but he understood that when everyone wins, the pie expands.

On the other hand, Tiffany gets the credit for inventing the prong-set engagement ring, while it was really invented by one of the >>>

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"findings" or component manufacturers who sold product to Tiffany. This does not mean there was anything untoward—this was just the practice then, as it is today, with many component manufacturers. However, it does underscore the valuable role of marketing for both jewelry and lawyers.

Antiques do not exist in a vacuum. They reflect a specific period's history and culture, which is what makes them so interesting to look at and learn about. When I attend these annual conferences, I learn how to identify objects, but also realize that I will never be an expert. What is driven home to me repeatedly is that I have to rely on people I trust who are the experts. The longer I'm involved in this area, the more I also realize how many dealers give you their opinions based on a very thin veneer of knowledge.

Therefore, you have to trust experts, and you have to discover who those knowledgeable experts are by listening to their talks or reading their articles and blogs. Through these vehicles, these individuals establish their credibility, knowledge, and trustworthiness as professionals to do business with.

This is exactly what your clients do when seeking a professional service. They do not want to know how to put the deal together themselves, but want to be comfortable that you know how. They know they can trust you because you have established your bona fides. Your biography speaks directly to their needs, they have seen your articles and they recognize that the media considers you an expert because you are quoted by the press. They have heard you speak and/or read your answers to questions on LinkedIn. Your website underscores your expertise.

A dealer's reputation among other dealers also points to those who rise to the top. Dealers are familiar with who really knows their stuff and who is just peddling merchandise. I may learn that I am not going to get a bargain with a particular vendor, but that I can trust their assessment.

This is akin to your getting referrals from other professionals and/or clients. Through such a process, the person referred is already predisposed to trust you.

However, this means that you have to stay in front of those potential referral sources. Antique dealers do this primarily because they see each other regularly at shows around the country. They also see each other's merchandise on some of the aggregate merchandise sites. You need to market so that you stay top-of-mind with those who can give you referrals. You can do this through email blasts, your networking, public relations, and social media. Your marketing does not have to be complex; it just has to be systematic and consistent.

Dealers must know the experts in their field because they buy from and sell to one another. Prior to a show's opening, there is usually a frenzy of activity with dealers doing business with each other, and shortly after, displaying the "new" merchandise in their booths. Dealers also source from each other and need to know whom to go to when a buyer is looking for a particular item. Similarly, it's important for you to have your own network to turn to for best practices, mistakes to avoid, and/or direction for whom else to call.

One art historian at the annual conference gave a presentation on decorative objects in Renaissance art and gathered a lot of her material through thorough examination of artwork from that period. The thru-line of her discussion was that careful observation leads to discovery. This is also true when it comes to building clientele. Careful observation helps us understand our clients better so we can be more responsive. It enables us to comprehend our markets better to be as on-target as possible in delivering messages and services.

And it helps us to know ourselves better so we can be more effective business developers. ■

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