

The New Rules of Marketing and PR For Lawyers

It shouldn't surprise you. In the age of the Internet, many rules about marketing and public relations have changed.

Before the Web, marketers had three basic choices: expensive advertising, editorial coverage in print and broadcast media, and face-to-face networking. Those options still exist, but organizations can now communicate directly to prospects, via the Internet.

That's good news for solos and small law firms. If you have a small practice and are not widely known, the Internet can help you reach a much broader audience. Do you have a basic Web site? Then you're already following one of the most important new rules.

The Importance of a Marketing/PR Plan

It all starts with a marketing/PR plan.

If you're like many lawyers, you've never had a written plan. *Your marketing efforts have been **tactically** driven rather than **strategically** driven. Nothing is in writing, but you have a "strategy in your head" that has worked well over time. If it's still working, that's fine. If you think you can do it better, read on.*

Your written plan can be one page. Make a list of 3-4 goals and how you will reach those goals. Do you need help with some ideas to reach prospects, or is this strictly a do-it-yourself job? Who will implement the plan? Your assistant? An associate? An outside marketing consultant? Or you?

A marketing plan for your law practice may include the following:

- Objectives and priorities
- Your competition and their strengths
- Your own competitive strengths (and weaknesses)
- The ideal customer profile and how to locate such customers
- A "unique selling proposition" (USP) for your practice
- Promotional strategies and tactics
- The ideal marketing budget
- How you will evaluate the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns
- An action list with timeframes and allocation of resources

Think of your marketing plan as a roadmap. If you get lost, look back on where you wanted to go and how you were going to get there. It's ok to take a different route on occasion, but always make sure you are heading in the right direction.

Strategic Marketing Approach

Ask yourself the tough questions:

1. How do you **really** differ from the competition?
2. What is your unique selling proposition (“better service” is not enough)?
3. What are your weaknesses? (Be honest.)
4. What can you do to overcome those weaknesses?
5. How do you get new clients? (Word of mouth? Recommendations? Web site? Social media sites or social media marketing through Linked In, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube?)
6. Who are your target audiences – both primary and secondary? Are there audiences you may be overlooking?
7. How do you – or can you – reach these audiences?
8. What marketing tactics do you use, and do they work?
9. Are there any marketing tactics you'd like to try (an event, more public speaking, writing articles, Google pay-per-click advertising)?
10. **Bottom line:** what is the main reason you want to improve your marketing? How much time and money are you willing to invest?

Marketing Makeover Strategies

Tactics to Consider

- **Visibility is the name of the game** and nothing can replace face-to-face meetings. Get more active in the bar associations and community organizations, offer to speak to a local group who could benefit from your services, and take prospects and referral sources to breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- **Know your key messages** and have a memorable, 30-second “elevator speech” about your practice area.
- **Establish a great Web site** with lots of useful content, and update it regularly to attract repeat visitors. SEO (search engine optimization) is critical, with the ultimate goal to keep you on the first page of Google, making you easier to be found. There's both an art and science to doing it well.
- **Consider a three- or four-panel brochure**, but instead of it being a puff piece, focus on providing tips to help people resolve a legal problem. Post it on your Web site for downloading, and print copies on-demand for distribution at networking events.

- **A monthly newsletter** is a great way to share news with your target audience while keeping you top-of-mind. An electronic newsletter, produced and distributed through an on-line resource like Constant Contact, costs almost nothing except your time.
- **Have a method in place to create and maintain a good database** of contacts with their email addresses. Take all those business cards you collect at events, and have your secretary store them in Outlook or whatever email software you use.
- **Get your name in print.** Tap into traditional media by sending out news releases about new hires, promotions, speaking engagements, awards received, appointments made, etc. Write an occasional response letter for publication in your local paper, commenting on a story. Write articles for the ISBA section newsletters or your local bar association newsletter. Post links to stories quoting you or articles with your byline on your Web site's newsroom. Include media mentions with links in the next edition of your newsletter.
- Traditional **advertising** can be expensive, but pay-per-click advertising offered by Google or Facebook may be worth a try. Check it out.
- **A blog**, as well as social media sites like Linked In, Facebook and Twitter, can position you as an authority, while keeping you top of mind. If you go this route, decide how much time a day you want to spend (one or two hours is ideal, but I've heard of people allotting just 20 minutes per day). Want to learn more about using social media tools? Take one of the many **free webinars** offered on-line, or simply learn through the "Help" links on the social media sites.

Press Releases: The New Rules

Here's a fact: if you want to be perceived as a leader, it helps to be visible, and one way to do that is to have news coming out – news that you distribute in the form of a news release.

Here's some information that may help.

- If you are appearing at an event as a speaker, guest author, host, etc., write a press release about it. Don't forget to include all pertinent information about the event such as the time, date, admission, a Web site address, where to call for more information, etc.
- Use the **"inverted pyramid" format**: put the most important information in the first paragraph, followed by information of less importance.
- **Create a great, attention-grabbing headline and a sub-head.** Keep your headline under 22 words – if you want your release indexed in Google News.
- **Don't use hype**, clichés, or legal jargon.
- Content should focus on **the benefits to the audience** rather than emphasize the offer itself. Keep the word count between 125 and 400 to help ensure that Google News "accepts" the release.
- **Single spacing the content is fine.** Be sure to include a "contact" name and phone number/email address at the top or bottom of the release. Insert end marks (# # # or -30-).

- **Insert hyperlinks** into the press release to encourage visits to your Web site, one of its landing pages, or other useful information.
- Some experts say you should **issue the press release** on a weekday morning before 12 noon. Others say that with the 24/7 news cycle, Sunday afternoon can be best. Still, others say it doesn't matter. Test "release" times and decide what works best in your situation.

You wouldn't dream of meeting with a client without preparation. The same is true if you're sending out a press release. Be familiar with the publication – made all the easier in this age of the Internet. Daily papers usually have separate editors for different sections: national news, local news, features, sports, columnists, etc. Ideally, you'll send the release to the actual section editor.

If your release doesn't get used, it may have just been overlooked, ended up in a spam filter or was accidentally deleted. Call the editor and offer to resend it.

Controlling a Print Media Interview

Many lawyers are reluctant to talk to reporters for fear of being misquoted or having their remarks taken out of context. But taking advantage of media interviews will showcase your knowledge and can help you reach your marketing objectives. The key to success can be found in the Boy Scout motto: Be Prepared. With preparation, you can seize control of the interview and help ensure that the reporter gets it right.

- Put your key points in writing and refer to them when talking to the reporter.
- Respond to the reporter's question, briefly explain your answer, and give an example or illustration.
- Repeat your points in different ways. Sometimes reporters are waiting for you to make a comment that supports the slant of his or her story. Repeating your points will help prevent your remarks from being misinterpreted or taken out of context.
- Ask the reporter if your contact information can be included.
- Find out when the story will print, but don't expect the reporter to send you a copy. Either read the story on the media outlet's Web site or purchase a copy through their circulation department.
- Make sure the reporter knows you're available for any follow-up questions or to read your quotes back to you.

Does Your Web Site Need a Makeover?

New Rules for Great Web Sites

These days, your Web site is as important as your business card. A Web site legitimizes your existence as a law practice, as well as providing much of the information a prospective client needs about you, your practice area and your track record.

Let's assume for a minute that your Web site is past the "under construction" phase. But is it just half-way finished? Does it offer just the basics about your law practice, or does it have lots of useful content that would make your prospects come back frequently for more information? You're not sure? It may be time for you to revisit your own Web site!

The new rules for creating great Web sites may surprise you. For a while, flashy and glitzy graphics ruled. Today, the best Web sites are **content-rich**. You want a site that's loaded with useful information. A Web site with 100 pages is a lot easier to be found on Google than one with 20 pages.

Today's best Web sites are also **key-word rich**, again making it easier for you to be found on the Internet. A great Web site has a specific "**call to action**" that encourages conversion; that is, contacts that may lead to contracts. Many lawyers use this: "For a free consultation, call us today."

Finally, promote your Web site everywhere – on your business card, letterhead, in your advertising and on your social media sites like Linked In, Facebook and Twitter.

Other suggestions:

- **Spend resources on content rather than design.** In addition to the basic information about your firm, consider other options such as a blog, podcast, videos, photos and how-to information. Ask clients for testimonials, which you can videotape and post in a "Video Vault" tab. Put yourself on camera as well, talking about your philosophy and practice area.
- **Don't rely on a third party to control the information on your site.** Today, YOU need to be in control with a content-management system that makes it easy for you to publish information instantly. Right now, can you launch a landing page in 15 minutes? If not, it may be time for change.
- **Consider a blog as part of your Web site.** Key-word rich blogs are one of the best ways to increase your rankings on the search engines. Imagine for a moment that every time someone does a search on Google that your name is on the first page. Do you know the impact it would have on your law practice?!
- **Eliminate boring bios.** Use the biographical portion of your Web site as a way to tell your story in a more compelling way. A great way to connect with your audience is to share what led you to a career in law, why you selected the practice area you did, and the personal rewards of representing clients on legal matters.

10 More Tips to Marketing Success

- 1) **Learn from other lawyers' marketing successes.** Check out their Web sites for a snapshot of how they promote themselves. Google their names for additional ways they are getting both traditional and non-traditional media exposure.
- 2) **Make sure you know what is being said about you on the Internet.** Use "Google Alerts" for your firm name **and** given name. You can also use Google Alerts to stay current on topics that you want to write about in your newsletter, blog or use for speaking engagements.
- 3) **Your lawyer advertising language** should be speaking on the same intellectual level as your clients – both in terminology and in context.
- 4) **Do you still rely on Yellow Pages advertising?** When was the last time **you** used them to find a restaurant or plumber? Today, almost everyone uses the Internet for their searches.
- 5) Ask yourself **how your clients get their information**, and have a presence there.
- 6) **Just say yes** – to incorporating social media sites into your marketing. You don't have to be a master at it. Part of your success is determined by your visibility. Show up on Linked In, Facebook and Twitter, friend/follow and connect, and see what happens.
- 7) **While it's fine to offer a "free consultation" or "free case evaluation," consider an even more irresistible offer in your advertisement or on your Web site** – one that is different than your competition. A really great offer would be a free book, report, or a CD – something virtually irresistible.
- 8) **Continuously update your database** with names, addresses and email addresses (I said this before, but it bears repeating.).
- 9) **Start thinking about marketing in an entirely different way.** Shed the belief that you must market to everyone, meet with everyone, and accept every case that comes along. Get over the fear that, if you start rejecting prospective clients, you won't have any more clients.
- 10) **Make marketing fun.** Doing something outside your comfort zone – like marketing and PR – may be daunting at first, but it can be invigorating and rewarding when it leads to more business.

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