



BUILD YOUR REPUTATION AND GROW YOUR PRACTICE

HOW STRATEGIC MARKETING CAN ASSIST YOUR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

BY SARAH THORNTON AND KELLY B. STOUT, ESQ.

Tips From A Compulsive Marketer

Whether you've been practicing six months or 16 years, new clients are something you should always have on the radar. As a public relations and marketing professional, I can provide some insight on how to make marketing and business development a regular part of your practice. Don't worry; it is not as painful as it might sound!

I happen to love marketing and believe in its power to build a business, so I'm a little biased in this area. At the recent ABA Spring Conference in Las Vegas, I spoke to a group about this very topic, along with attorneys Dennis L. Kennedy, John R. Bailey and Professor Jeffrey Stempel from UNLV's Boyd School of Law. The most common question asked was, "Where do I begin?"

Winston Churchill once said: "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." This is particularly applicable to attorneys starting new firms.

Starting a practice is not the end of your road to success, it's the beginning. You will have a lifetime of trials and triumphs related to business ownership, and in order to keep your forward momentum, clients are required. To start

developing your professional and firm brand, there are a few things you should consider:

1. Website
2. Online presence including attorney rating sites and social media outlets
3. Public relations – sharing the good news about your firm
4. Sharing your knowledge
5. Getting involved in the community

What should my Website Say?¹

There is no question that marketing for attorneys and law firms is, in large part, done online. We may use print, radio and television advertising to remind our target audience that we are here, but when potential clients want specifics, more than 90 percent will turn to the internet. When prospects start their online searches you want them to be able to find you quickly. Once they do, your website should reflect your practice, philosophy and key selling points. Make sure to mention your practice areas, include online bios and photos and give visitors an easy way to get in touch with you. If you are hesitant about putting a personal e-mail or phone number on your site, consider including an online contact form.

Social Media

When discussing the panelists' numerous awards at the ABA conference, one participant posed the question: "If everyone is a Super Lawyer, is it really worthwhile to pursue?" In my opinion, yes. Everyone is definitely not a Super Lawyer, especially not those who have been practicing for 10 years or fewer. And, Super Lawyers, in particular, has an excellent website and online marketing program. All for the price of ... free. What do you have to lose? There are a handful of attorney-rating sites that allow you to nominate yourself, or have a colleague nominate you, free of charge. You can choose to upgrade your profile once you are selected, in order to take advantage of the search engine optimization opportunities.

Public Relations

Public relations is an important part of your firm's brand development because it directly relates to your reputation. When you are quoted in an article about your given field or a case in which you are involved, you are seen as an industry expert. When you are mentioned in a business or legal publication for an award or distinction, you are seen as a leader. And there is a good reason for that – you are. While they are not always (or even often, really) used in their entirety in print publications, press releases are a great way to summarize your firm or personal news. You can post them on your website or social media pages and submit them to online press release distribution sites, often without charge.

Sharing Your Knowledge

If you can find an audience that suits your expertise, I encourage you to make the time to share your knowledge with its members. If you have never spoken professionally, volunteer with the Clark County School District's PAYBAC program or Law Day activities; both will allow you to speak to students about your career. This is an easy way to develop speaking skills without the additional stress of worrying about embarrassing yourself in front of colleagues. Also, make sure to keep in contact with colleagues in your target audience so they know you are available when there are relevant speaking opportunities.

Another great way to share your knowledge is by writing articles. Like this one! Many Nevada business and legal publications, including *Nevada Lawyer*, publish editorial calendars every year. If there is a topic you are particularly interested in, you can pitch your idea to the editors or simply write and submit the article and hope they use it.

continued on page 23

**There's a
better way
to build or
expand your
client base.**

Join the Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS). A public service of the State Bar of Nevada, the LRIS provides free referrals to those who can afford an attorney but don't know who to call. When you enroll in the program, you gain access to the **25,000 referrals LRIS makes each year.**



LAWYER REFERRAL & INFORMATION SERVICE

Benefits include:

- Low \$50 a year dues
- Excellent return on investment
- Prospective clients are prescreened by LRIS staff
- All practice areas available

We advertise so you don't have to.

To fill out an application, visit www.nvbar.org today!
For more information call 702.382.2200 or toll free 1.800.254.2797

BUILD YOUR REPUTATION AND GROW YOUR PRACTICE

HOW STRATEGIC MARKETING CAN ASSIST YOUR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

continued from page 21

Making a Difference

One thing we've learned in marketing and public relations is that these tools of the trade can be used to demonstrate both your business and community leadership. But, if you aren't giving back to your community and profession, you won't have much to demonstrate. We're all busy, but if you want to build your business and career, community service is a key element. Find a professional or community organization you like and ask how you can help; it's good for the community and good for you. To find listings of nonprofit organizations in Nevada, do a quick search online and you'll find hundreds that could probably use your help.

Tricks from a Reluctant Networker

"Nevada has a small legal community and your only currency is your reputation." This was the refrain I heard repeatedly from my first day of law school. Accordingly, I studied, kept my nose clean and tried to avoid doing anything that would get me featured on the Wild, Wild, West Blog or Above the Law. Marketing? I had just discovered the color of my parachute and law school kept me pretty busy – I didn't have time to discover and develop my personal brand.

I asked some experienced attorneys how a new lawyer could best market herself and her firm. While suggestions varied, the common theme was that I should build relationships, so that when someone made a referral, my firm and I would come to mind. Clearly, networking was required.

This revelation gave me pause. In my mind, networking involved mixers where I would wander aimlessly and engage in awkward small talk with an endless stream of strangers. Needless to say, I was reluctant to throw myself into the fray.

However, I have learned that networking doesn't need to be a contact sport. Building relationships doesn't happen in an instant and quantity doesn't compensate for quality. I knew that an Eddie Haskell-like style wouldn't accomplish my goal and that it would take more than using the five questions I rehearsed before OCI. So I decided to take it slow, maintain existing relationships and become involved in activities I enjoyed, during which I would gradually form *genuine* relationships with new people.

Join Something

For my first foray into networking, I joined the New Lawyers Committee at the Clark County Bar. The structure of the meetings meant I didn't have to struggle to make conversation with the feared "strangers." Meetings have an agenda – a list of things to talk about: Instant networking.

Finding an organization that you're passionate about provides an easy way to connect with other members. I loved my law school clinic experience and when the Thomas and Mack Legal Clinic Community Advisory Board decided to add two alumni members, it seemed like a great fit for me. The time commitment is small, so I was confident that I would be able to handle it. The last thing I wanted was to be over extended; failing to meet my new responsibilities wouldn't help me market my firm or myself.

Joining an organization is another way to branch out into the larger community (i.e. meet non-lawyers). However, be careful not to give legal advice to its members unless you intend to represent the organization – that can cause problems.

continued on page 25

BUILD YOUR REPUTATION AND GROW YOUR PRACTICE

HOW STRATEGIC MARKETING CAN ASSIST YOUR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

continued from page 23

Volunteer for an Event

If time is an issue, volunteer for an event. Volunteering has introduced me to new people, and having a job to do quells my anxiety about the dreaded “small talk.” Working a registration table gives me a reason to talk to everyone who comes in the door. Judging a law school competition means being paired with another attorney. While I’ve never come away with a new best friend, I do have shared experiences with several new people.

Become an Expert

A newly minted lawyer can be an expert, even if only in a narrow area. Recently, there was a vacancy on a CLE panel discussing the proposed revisions to the HIPAA Privacy Rule. I was asked to fill in because I practice in healthcare administration. Although I wasn’t an expert on the proposed revisions, I was familiar with HIPAA and, with some research, parsed its effect on a couple of narrow sub-topics. My presentation handouts included my firm’s logo and this may lead to future speaking engagements. If the law is a second career, you may already be an expert on another subject. The point where your expertise intersects with the law could become a topic for an article or a CLE course.

Even if you’re uncomfortable speaking as a legal expert, you surely have expertise. I have spoken to students at my law school about topics such as interviewing and studying for the bar. While no one ever refers a case that calls for expertise in these areas, giving these presentations allowed me to practice public speaking and increase my firm’s exposure. Likewise, speaking to the broader community, on topics that are not law related, gives you a chance to demonstrate lawyerly attributes (like confidence and thorough preparation), and you will inevitably have a chance to hand out business cards and give your 10-second “elevator speech” about what you practice.

Maintain Relationships

Building relationships takes time, but nurturing the ones you already have is easy and fun; you’re just spending time with friends. One of my classmates (and my networking idol) formed a “book club” as a means of keeping in touch. Although we rarely discuss the book (the only rule is that no one has to read the book), we meet monthly and have a great time. As time has passed, we’ve brought in new friends and it feels suspiciously like networking.

Similarly, I’ve remained friends with one of my law school professors. From time to time, she calls me when she knows someone who needs a lawyer. Most of

the time, the case isn’t a good fit with my firm and I refer her to someone else. However, last time she called I took the case because it involved administrative law, one of my practice areas. Lo and behold! Relationships generating business! It seems that this networking thing can work. ■



SARAH THORNTON is a communications specialist and the president of Sarah Thornton Public Relations. She has worked with the legal industry throughout her career and serves on the Clark County Bar Association’s Community Service Committee. Contact Thornton at sarah@sarahthorntonpr.com.



KELLY B. STOUT is an attorney with Bailey Kennedy in Las Vegas. Stout practices primarily in commercial litigation, professional ethics, healthcare law and appellate advocacy. She can be reached via e-mail at KStout@BaileyKennedy.com or by phone at 702-562-8820.

- 1 Before making any communication about legal services, be sure to consult the Nevada Rules of Professional Conduct, particularly Rules 7.1 through 7.