

USING YOUR ROOTS TO GENERATE MORE CLIENTS

BY SHAN DAVIS, ESQ.

In September 2011, I made the decision to start my own law firm. I had been considering the idea for a few years, but the fear of not succeeding kept me from hanging out my own shingle. My biggest fear, and the fear that probably keeps most attorneys from opening their own firms, was that I would not generate enough work quickly enough to keep my doors open. Before starting Shan Davis & Associates, I read innumerable articles, blogs, publications and books about marketing, advertising and business. I think my favorite book on this subject is “Start Something That Matters,” by Blake Mycoskie, the founder of Tom’s Shoes. He explains how to start a business on a budget, how to market and brand your business and how to ensure that you do not overextend your new business with unnecessary lines of credit, spending and overhead.

When I started my solo practice, I had a handful of clients, and very little work. I was very nervous. My first task, of course, was to figure out how to generate clients. I started my marketing strategy by creating a company website with a blog, so I could publish articles and I was told this would move my firm website up in the Google rankings and make it more visible. I was hoping this web visibility would help my new firm generate enough business soon enough to keep the doors open.

Of course, like all people in business, I also purchased business cards that I could hand out at social functions and mixers. Next, I started looking for the best business networking group to join in order to meet other business people and hopefully get some referrals. In addition, I spoke with a friend who owns an advertising business about how I should go about marketing my new firm. Over a cup of lobster bisque and a salad at Gordon Biersch, he laid out what seemed to be the most complicated advertising plan I had ever heard. It included: outdoor marketing, targeted marketing via pamphlets, mailed flyers, direct e-mails, phone calls and social marketing via Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and search engine optimization. He assured me that after roughly six months of intensive advertising, I would begin to see results.



There were two important things my friend's plan did not take into account:

1. I was a start-up law firm with a very nominal advertising budget, and
2. I did not have six months to start generating clients.

I left the lunch meeting bewildered, and a bit frustrated. The looming question remained: how do I generate clients faster?

A few nights after my big marketing meeting, I decided to attend a social function sponsored by the Associated General Contractors (AGC). During the last few years I had participated as an associate attorney on the AGC's Government Affairs Committee, and had written a monthly legal column for their newspaper, *Construction Connection*. I thought it would be nice to spend the evening chatting with some people I knew, who might introduce me to their colleagues. My goal at this member mixer was to hand out at least 10 business cards, and talk to at least three potential clients. The most important conversation I had that night was with an employee of the Nevada State Contractors Board. We chatted for a while and exchanged business cards. Before the end of the night, this person invited me to write an article for the board's newsletter, *NSCB Horizons*.

As it turned out, this social function changed the future of my law firm, which was, at the time, barely more than a month old. Two days after my article was published in *NSCB Horizons*, I received a phone call from a potential client who

had a large payment dispute on a public works project. I met with the client a few days later, and was retained to represent the client in the payment dispute. After five months of time-consuming negotiations, my client was compensated through the general contractor's payment bond and was very happy with the results I achieved. From this one case, I have received numerous referrals, not only from my client, but also from the defendant. The lesson I learned from my first big case as a solo practitioner is: if you work hard and obtain good results, the fruits of your labor come in the form of more clients, looking for the same good results. To this day, my firm receives most of its cases from referrals from existing clients.

During my first year as a solo practitioner, I used various methods of marketing, such as joining professional business groups, paying for a media provider subscription, web marketing and even cold-calling. However, I have found that the most effective marketing tool is still meeting face-to-face and achieving good results for my clients. The second most effective marketing tool I have used is the presentation of a monthly seminar at a company called the Construction Notebook. Once a month, the Construction Notebook and Shan Davis & Associates offer a free lunch and then I present a short seminar on topics ranging from mechanic's liens to intellectual property and

continued on page 14

USING YOUR ROOTS TO GENERATE MORE CLIENTS

continued from page 13

trade secrets for contractors. Through these seminars, I have built many strong relationships with business owners, have significantly increased my contact list and received referrals from the attendees.

In spite of the vast technology at our fingertips, I have found that a virtual presence is of marginal value when new clients are seeking an attorney. Maybe five percent of my firm's business comes from those who have visited my firm's website. No matter how outdated we as a society might find word-of-mouth advertising, even in this age of Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Skype and the internet, good clients still ask their friends, family and business colleagues which attorney they would recommend. I recently read an article in the *American Lawyer* entitled *The Mighty Quinn*. The article discussed the formation of Quinn, Emanuel, Urquhart & Sullivan: a powerhouse litigation firm that started with three attorneys in 1986, and now employs more than 600 attorneys worldwide. In the article, John Quinn, a founding partner, recounted his days as a struggling attorney who, through hard work and dedication, built a firm that would be named 2012 Law Firm of the Year by Legal Business. Quinn, Emanuel, Urquhart & Sullivan is a high technology firm that

has handled some of the largest intellectual property cases in history. In spite of all of its success, according to the article, many partners at the firm still cold-call to gain business.

As attorneys, our business is a competitive one. Like any successful business, in order to compete, law firms must constantly evolve and reevaluate their business models. Technology makes us more efficient as lawyers, which saves our clients money. However, no matter how large and successful the firm, or how much technology that firm has, one thing may never change: clients still like face-to-face contact with their attorney, and timely responses to their e-mails and telephone calls. The roots you develop with your clients are one of your firm's most valuable commodities. I encourage you to nurture these roots, and always show your clients that you appreciate having earned the privilege to represent them. ■

SHAN DAVIS is the founder of Shan Davis & Associates – Attorneys, and is the secretary of the Solo and Small Practice Section of the State Bar of Nevada.