

GOOD IDEA:

**Create
Achievable
Plans**

Plan to



Robert N. Kohn and Lawrence M. Kohn | The harsh reality is that most marketing plans do nothing more for law firms than lay around gathering dust. Most of these plans are so complicated and elaborate that no one has the time or budget—or interest—to implement them. Still, a well-devised plan can lead to new opportunities for professional fulfillment and increased income. So, what’s the secret to creating a simple, and achievable, marketing plan?

Market

Six Guidelines

The process of creating a marketing plan feels productive because it is intellectually stimulating and involves the activities lawyers love: doing research, arguing over conflicting points of view and writing analytical documents. Lawyers love to plan. But let’s make one thing perfectly clear. *Successful plans are implemented plans.* The difference is in the doing.

How can your firm produce an achievable marketing plan? Here are six guidelines.

1. Don’t Bite off More Than You Can Chew

Many of the marketing plans we’ve seen are overly ambitious. They include a wide range of activities such as demographic analyses, client surveys, studies on differentiation, networking, newsletters, articles, public speaking, getting active in organizations, researching new markets and more. While all of these activities are valid, you can’t do them all. Especially if your firm is in the early stages of marketing.

Some people believe if you “shoot for the stars,” you may get lucky and “hit the moon.” We believe that when law firms over-commit to marketing activities, very few of the tasks actually get completed. This lack of success reinforces negative feelings about marketing and makes it more difficult to enlist support for a firm-wide marketing effort. Instead of over-committing, focus on a few things and do them well.

2. Pick the Low-Hanging Fruit

Focus on the marketing resources that will achieve the greatest results in the shortest period of time. The best resources for short-term results are the people you already know. It is much easier to convince lawyers to communicate with existing contacts than with strangers. Also, existing contacts are much more likely to be approachable and receptive.

Begin by taking an inventory of contacts. Not just clients, but every single contact of every member of the firm. Review each name and make an assessment about what you and your

partners can do for them. Think about who they know, and what organizations they support. Consider whether they could act as your ambassador to their business communities.

3. A Name Not Written Down May Be Lost and Never Found

Contact database maintenance should be included in every marketing plan. Lawyers often lose track of important contacts. The names get lost in rolodexes, client files and desk drawers. A comprehensive database ensures that contact names are readily available in a central location. Database maintenance helps to weed out duplicate and stale contacts and to identify shared relationships. And, it allows you to capture meaningful information about each contact that ultimately helps you strengthen relationships over time.

Lawyers, secretaries, paralegals and assistants should actively participate in the database maintenance effort. For example, after each letter or phone call, they could ask the lawyer, “Should this person be added to the database?” Or, if someone has moved, “Should this person’s address be updated?” Everyone in the firm should be taught to use a contact database maintenance form to standardize the information being added and to reinforce database maintenance habits.



TIP: THE 80/20 MARKETING RULE

80% of Your Time Should be Spent on RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- Contact your existing clients at least weekly.
- Create a list of other professionals outside your firm who might be referral sources.
- Have someone else do a client interview with one of your clients.
- Send personal notes of congratulations for accomplishments.
- Think about ways you can expand services to clients; cross-sell other firm professionals.

20% of Your Time Should be Spent on REPUTATION BUILDING

- Identify three newsworthy matters about which you can write an article or client alert.
- Make a list of ways that your practice is different from your competitors' practices.
- Get more involved in industry groups related to your expertise.
- Read a variety of industry publications to learn what issues are important to your clients/contacts.
- Make sure a press release is issued for your accomplishments.

From *The Complete Guide to Marketing Your Law Practice*. Edited by Hollis Hatfield Weishar and James A. Durham. (ABA Law Practice Management Section. 1999.)

4. Go Where You Want to Go and Do What You Want to Do

Assign marketing projects based on interests, not necessarily needs. Many marketing ideas don't get implemented because so few of the lawyers possess the comfort level to carry them out. For example, going to events and talking with strangers can be fun and profitable for those who enjoy it, but painful for those who detest it. It is much easier to convince lawyers to act if they are permitted to stay within their comfort zones. Give article-writing assignments to those who enjoy writing. Encourage public speaking activities to those who enjoy speaking. As lawyers begin to enjoy successes inside their comfort zone, they will be more willing to experiment with new activities later.

One way lawyers can expand their comfort level is to practice new marketing techniques in nonthreatening environments. Local clubs, charities and chambers of commerce offer valuable learning opportunities such as chairing committees, writing articles for newsletters and public speaking at their events. While these environments may not always provide an entree to clients, they absolutely provide training in leadership and self-promotion skills.

5. Money Isn't Everything

Measure results based on tasks completed. Marketing plans often measure results purely on an economic basis. They set goals for how much income should be developed over a period of time. While financial goals are neces-

sary, remember marketing is a long-term process that requires many interim steps prior to achieving financial results. For example, before publishing articles, someone must research publications and contact the editors to learn about their publishing requirements. An interim step may be as fundamental as having an improved attitude toward marketing, or an increased comfort level. Every interim step is necessary on the path to success. And, every step accomplished should be acknowledged and in some cases, rewarded.

6. The Difference Is in the Doing

Planning alone does not alter behavior. If you want to motivate lawyers to act, there must be follow up. Regardless of how committed some of your lawyers may appear at first, they will quickly become engulfed by their frantic lives and marketing commitments will drop to the bottom of the stack. Someone must be entrusted with the responsibility for following up with lawyers to ensure their tasks are being completed. This person must be someone who is highly respected in the firm, so that the follow-up is taken seriously.

Marketing plans in and of themselves have little value. The key to successful planning is to create steps that are practical, interesting and achievable. It isn't necessary to imagine everything your firm could be doing over the span of a year or more. The plan should begin with small steps and evolve into more sophisticated marketing activities as lawyers become comfortable with and knowledgeable about the process. ■

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