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12 Tips For Making Your Seminars A Superior Marketing Machine

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With a well-planned seminar, you can meet a high concentration of quality prospects, save time by interacting with many targets at once, showcase the expertise of multiple members of your firm and provide valuable networking opportunities for clients, prospects and referral sources.

With all the marketing benefits of seminars, there are many reasons why lawyers are reluctant to try them. One reason is the perception that there are already too many lawyers competing in the seminar market. This is self-defeating thinking. Even if your competitors are actively giving seminars, it is unlikely that quality targets have had their fill of quality speakers and programs.

Another reason for reluctance is lawyers' lack of confidence about choosing a hot topic. The solution here is to realize that just about any client matter you're dealing with is a potential subject. It's logical to assume that if one client is having a problem, there are prospects out there who are suffering through it too. Hot new topics are by no means a requirement for a successful seminar.

Lastly, some lawyers are gun-shy of producing seminars because they fear poor attendance. The solution is to set reasonable expectations. In the beginning, limit your efforts to modest audiences. Wouldn't it be worthwhile to meet just five to ten high-quality new prospects? In fact, for building relationships, small, well-targeted seminars can be more successful than large events.

Tips for Terrific Seminars

Once you've decided to produce a seminar, you want it to run as smoothly as a well-oiled machine. Here are 12 tips to maximize your success.

1. Anticipate a modest response rate.

Response rates will vary based on current recognition of the firm name, the topic's significance, the perception of need, the distance that targets must travel and the cost of attendance. While it is impossible to anticipate the number of RSVPs, you might use 5 percent of new targets. This means that to attract 50 people, you would need to send 1,000 invitations. If you underestimate the response rate, your worst problem is a huge turnout. If your venue is too small, implement the same seminar several times.

2. Clean up your invitation list before mailing.

If you buy a list, it may be full of errors. Call invitees to confirm the accuracy of their addresses. Ask if this is the right person to invite—and if not, find out who is.

3. Make follow-up phone calls.

Once the invitations are out, phone as many of the invitees as possible and recommend that they attend. If they can't attend, suggest that they send an alternate. Telephone follow-up dramatically increases attendance.

4. Consider joint venture partners.

If you implement a seminar with other, non-competing businesses, each can invite their targets.

5. Include a guest speaker who's a draw.

Many well-known people with their own outreach agendas will speak for free or for a modest fee. Even a high fee could be justified if the presence of a celebrity will attract your targets.

6. Send invitations by e-mail.

This technique's success has been astounding. In some cases, we've seen response rates of up to 98 percent (meaning that 98 percent communicated a "yes" or a "no," with a request to keep them on the invitation list for future programs).

7. Provide several ways to RSVP.

Give your phone and fax numbers, e-mail address and a mail-back response form along with your mailed invitation.

8. Call to confirm.

Phone all your expected registrants before the event to confirm attendance. It will make them feel more welcome and significantly decrease no-shows.

9. Make all attendees feel welcome.

Make it easy to find parking and your venue. Have partners greet all attendees at the door. Provide name tags. Have a friendly staff person for registration. If someone isn't on the attendance list, don't appear concerned. Simply smile, maintain eye contact, nod your head supportively and usher them in. And definitely validate parking.

10. Practice your presentation.

Make sure all content is clear, concise and valuable to the audience. Include lots of tips and practical advice. And keep the program moving. Provide a fast-paced, stimulating experience that leaves the audience wanting to come back for more.

11. Keep in contact.

After the seminar, be sure to follow up with each attendee. Get everyone's feedback on the program. Ask for future topic suggestions. Remember that follow-up is the key to your marketing success.

12. Maximize future success.

Experiment with the elements of your seminar. For example, some people prefer seminars in the morning; others prefer programs in the afternoon. Some like Mondays; others like Fridays. Modify the machine to produce the most business possible.

Build It So They'll Recognize You

The only way to really develop your ability to implement a successful seminar is to go ahead and present one. Don't try for a big event. Make it small to start—but make it happen. Then, as you develop experience, you can build a marketing machine that will manufacture goodwill, name recognition, referrals and increased revenue.

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