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## Public Relations for the Small Firm and Solo Practitioner

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Public Relations is an effective marketing tool for lawyers to gain exposure. However, for small firms and solo practitioners, public relations often seems out of reach. Large law firms are effective in getting public relations because they have their own marketing departments or they hire public relations firms. Fortunately, public relations is also available to small firms and solo practitioners. The purpose of this article is to help you implement a public relations campaign that is both effective and affordable.

In order to implement an effective and affordable public relations campaign it is necessary to understand what public relations is and why it works. There are two common misconceptions about public relations.

### **Misconception #1**

Lawyers who are unfamiliar with public relations, often begin with the expectation that effective public relations means celebrity style media exposure. They envision radio and television appearances and articles that are either about them or quote them. While this type of exposure is exciting, it is also relatively difficult to get. As a result, lawyers may quickly become disheartened and eliminate public relations as a viable option.

The fact is that celebrity style media exposure is not a requirement for achieving marketing success. In fact, the most common type of public relations for lawyers typically includes activities such as public speaking, writing articles, producing events, and participating in community service. The reason that these types of activities are so effective in developing business is that they help you to maintain a persistent and positive presence in the minds of your targets.

### **Misconception #2**

Another misconception about public relations is that it requires having a publicist do the work. The assumption is that getting media exposure and invitations to speak, requires someone with all of the necessary contacts. While it can be extremely beneficial having someone knowledgeable helping you with public relations, the fact is that you don't need a publicist to get publicity.

Editors of specialty magazines and trade journals are always looking for topical articles. Event chairs in organizations are regularly looking for speakers at their programs. And, all of these contacts are accessible to lawyers.

### **Doing your own public relations**

The first step in implementing a public relations campaign is to identify the publications and organizations that communicate with your targets. Begin by asking your existing clients and friends what organizations they support and what publications they read.

The next step is to identify topics that would appeal to these groups. One tip for selecting interesting topics is to consider the cases and issues you are presently working on. Make a list of the questions your clients are asking you. The answers to these questions are often the basis of quality articles and speeches.

Finally, reach out to the publications and organizations you've identified and suggest your ideas for topics. Be prepared to follow-up with a synopsis of your topic ideas and possibly your resume. And, don't be discouraged if you don't hear from them right away. Often, editors and event chairs are poor at following up. It is **your** responsibility to be persistent in following up.

Of course, if you are too busy to do your own public relations, a publicist can be of great assistance. If you decide to use a publicist, here are two important characteristics to look for.

### **Characteristics of quality publicists**

1. Look for a publicist who is willing to work on an hourly or a project basis rather than a long-

term monthly retainer. In this way, you can experiment with public relations and determine whether or not it is right for you without committing to a long-term public relations campaign.

2. Look for a publicist who is willing to provide you with a progress report of the people contacted on your behalf and the follow-up that is scheduled. Some publicists consider this to be proprietary information and refuse to share it. However, we believe that having this information is critical to your success for three reasons. First, seeing a progress report will help you learn about the public relations process. Second, a progress report will help you monitor your publicist's activities. And third, if for any reason you lose your publicist, you won't lose the information necessary to continue your public relations effort.

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