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## MARKETING YOUR LAW PRACTICE How to Get the Clients You Want

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To succeed in the practice of law, we must have clients and the skill to represent them. One without the other does not work. So in addition to mastering the skills of practice, we must master the art of attracting a steady flow of good clients. But our goal isn't just to attract clients; it's to attract high-quality clients. If you take any client, any case that walks in, you'll be busy, but you won't earn a living. An abundance of quality new prospective clients allows you to turn away the bad ones and accept only the good ones.

### Target your market

No lawyer can effectively market to everyone. So step one in marketing your practice is to reduce your market to a manageable size. Decide what kind of clients you want. Then figure out how to bring them in.

Marketing a law practice directly to potential clients works for some lawyers and some kinds of practices but not for others. Advertising is expensive and can produce a deluge of calls from people whose cases you would not accept. Screening those inquiries takes time and energy. One way to avoid those problems is to direct your efforts to referral sources, rather than to potential clients themselves.

For a specialized practice, the highest-quality referrals tend to come from other lawyers. Just as we would ask our family physician for a referral to a specialist, sophisticated people who need a specialized lawyer are likely to ask for a referral from a lawyer they already know. Lawyers will refer cases to a specialist, confident that you know how to handle your kind of case and that you will not encroach on the referrer's continuing relationship with a valued client.

Professionals other than lawyers also refer good clients. Accountants, because of long-term relationships with their clients, often become trusted advisors whose clients ask them for referrals.

### Fear and Other Obstacles

Fear of being seen as a huckster deters some lawyers from marketing their practices. But the image you project is more the result of how you market, rather than whether you market. One way to know if you are on the right track is to trust your

instincts and do only what you are comfortable doing. For example, some lawyers take pride in putting their faces on bus benches, while others are appalled at the idea. Some lawyers enjoy going out and meeting potential referral sources. Others cringe at the thought of approaching strangers to promote business. Do what works for you now, what your instincts tell you is appropriate.

Self-help gurus advocate pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. But consider practical reality. If what you think you must do to market your practice is outside your comfort zone, you won't do it. So keep your marketing efforts within your comfort zone for now. Rather than waste your time and emotional energy beating yourself up about your limitations, find marketing methods that you feel good about. In due course, you will find that your comfort zone expands as your confidence increases.

Since your basic marketing message is that you give value to your clients, you must believe that message yourself in order to be confident, motivated, and convincing. If you have misgivings about the value you give to your clients, some self-examination may be in order. Maybe you need to develop your skills or change the kinds of cases you take—whatever it takes to build your confidence and enthusiasm. Also, remember you are not the only lawyer to have such concerns.

Some self-doubt besets most lawyers. Some just hide it better than others, and some work harder than others to overcome their self-perceived limitations. Nobody comes out of law school, passes the bar, and instantly knows everything necessary to practice law. Even lawyers who excelled in law school have much to learn about the practical application of civil procedure and evidence, substantive law, business, accounting, and the day-to-day operation of the court system. We all have room to learn and grow and the ability to overcome our shortcomings. We can all improve our writing, public speaking, trial skills, office management, and marketing.

But sometimes our imperfections become part of our identities, and we cling to them for fear of losing a familiar part of how we see ourselves. If, for example, you think you are shy, you may be, but it's up to you whether you will stay that way or change.

In addition to working on what you consider weaknesses, identify your strengths and use them. Do you like to write? Are you outgoing in social situations? Do you like to speak to an audience? Use the talents you already have to market your practice.

### Patience

Marketing is a long-term activity, so if your marketing efforts don't produce an immediate flurry of excellent new clients, don't get discouraged. Months or years may pass before your efforts yield the results you want. Consider this example from my own experience. Many years ago, I ran into a law-school classmate at the courthouse.

We chatted a bit and exchanged cards. Soon, I began receiving his firm's labor-law newsletter, which I skimmed and tossed. After about 15 years, when a client of mine was sued in a labor-law case, I thought first of my classmate, who was still sending me his newsletters, and referred the case to him. His persistent and patient marketing paid off with an excellent client and a very large fee.

Now everyone will know

You may be thinking that all the lawyers in Century City will read this and future articles, do all the things I recommend, and because you will all have the same information, you won't gain any competitive advantage. Don't worry. Most of them won't. It's easy to read an article, even to come up with brilliant marketing ideas on your own. Only a small percentage of those who read this column will actually go to the trouble of getting organized and motivated and put these ideas into action. If you are the one who acts, you will be the one who gets the good clients.

In future articles, I'll expand on meeting potential referral sources and how to nurture productive relationships with all the people you will meet.

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