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Six tips for developing relationships with potential clients

As a lawyer, you may not consider yourself a salesperson—but selling is an important skill for lawyers to learn, especially in a down economy. In the [ABA Publishing Presents](#) podcast “[Business Development in Tough Economic Times](#),” the authors of a new book shared tips for finding potential clients and building relationships with them:



Make a list of your current contacts.

Go through your various contact lists and compile one list of everyone you know who may be able to help you. You can use social networking sites like [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#) to find classmates and colleagues who you haven’t connected with in awhile. “We’re not suggesting that you would necessarily call everybody or reach out to everybody, but it’s important to know who these people are,” says Robert N. Kohn, senior vice president of Kohn Communications.

Consider blogging. Starting a blog allows you to share your expertise with the world and also gives you a reason to contact people. E-mail your contacts to tell them you’ve started a blog and invite their comments, suggests Larry M. Kohn, founder and president of Kohn Communications. “The fact that the blog exists is a reason to reach out to people and communicate with them, and then you might begin a dialogue with people whom you know or who don’t know about a particular issue,” he says. “We’re seeing that turning into business in a relatively short period of time.”

Get out there and meet new people. The biggest problem lawyers have with selling is that “they just don’t know enough people,” Larry Kohn says. “It’s unrealistic to think that if you’ve got a mailing list of 50 people—a few clients and a few social friends—that you’re going to be effective in building your practice.” First decide what kind of people you want to meet, and then choose methods that are comfortable to you: Connect with others through people you already know. Get involved with a nonprofit organization. Arrange speaking engagements and go to events. Host your own party so people will come to your event—and then invite you to their function.

Build trust by providing value. Talking about your qualifications can only get you so far. “Giving information and helping people is the best way to demonstrate that you’re valuable,” Larry Kohn says. Ways to add value fall into several categories, Robert Kohn continues: education

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(speaking engagements, writing and teaching), introductions (connecting people you know to each other) and entertainment (inviting people to lunch, ballgames and other social events).

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Understand the benefits you bring to your clients. When you've done something really well or a client compliments you, record the success. "Actually write it down on a piece of paper and keep it in a file and be very aware of it," Larry Kohn says. Many lawyers don't give themselves enough credit for the benefits they bring to a client relationship, he says. It's not about bragging about your achievements, but "you will be able to communicate benefits that you bring if you are aware of them."

Identify your prospect's needs – both known and unknown.

Prospects may tell you their primary reason for needing a lawyer, but what other legal needs do they have that they aren't even thinking about? Ask people what's coming up, such as who they're planning to hire and what kind of purchases they're likely to make. "The more you can get people talking about their future plans, the more effective you'll be in helping them reveal their needs," Larry Kohn says.

For more ideas from Larry and Robert Kohn, listen to the full [ABA Publishing Presents](#) podcast. Their new book, [Selling in Your Comfort Zone: Safe and Effective Strategies for Developing New Business](#), is for sale in the ABA Web store.

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