

# Business Development Innovation

By Robert N. Kohn

There is no shortage of business development ideas. Thirty years of coaching lawyers has taught us that when motivated, lawyers can identify great ideas. The problem is getting them motivated. Many lawyers don't like business development. They are often skeptical. They often don't like leaving their comfort zones. And, they are typically not risk-takers. To become motivated to market, lawyers must find business development strategies that they are excited about.

The key to finding these strategies is innovation. And so, I would like to introduce a concept: The law entrepreneur.

With the increasing availability of technology, greater competition, and more sophisticated clientele, lawyers need to become more entrepreneurial. This means challenging established beliefs; finding or inventing technology; identifying systems for reaching out to larger numbers of targets quickly and cost-effectively; and creating compelling offers that give targets a reason to respond.

## **To become motivated to market, lawyers must find business development strategies that they are excited about.**

Let's examine the biggest business development weaknesses lawyers have and then look at how being a law entrepreneur can help solve these problems.

### **Common business development weaknesses:**

#### **1. Lack of excitement for marketing**

This is the greatest weakness. When you don't like something, you find reasons to avoid it. But, when you are excited about something, you find ways of doing it, even when there are obstacles in your path. Entrepreneurs constantly search for good ideas—a better way to deliver services, a better way of communicating their value, or an altogether new service. Good ideas will stimulate your excitement to let people know how you can help them.

#### **2. No differentiation**

One of the reasons lawyers aren't excited about business development is that they think of their service as ordinary. Being entrepreneurial means identifying qualities that make your services superior to the competition. As you become more confident that you offer a superior deal, you will become more enthusiastic about communicating that value, and as you do, others will become more excited about working with you.

#### **3. Bad habits and misconceptions about business development**

Many lawyers are hampered by antiquated beliefs about how business development is done. Beliefs that it is seedy, pushy, and deceitful; that it requires having a "sales" personality; that it doesn't have to be a priority, are deeply rooted. Entrepreneurs constantly challenge old beliefs. If you aren't comfortable with the marketing techniques you are aware of, then search for different ones—ones that keep you in your comfort zone.

#### **4. Poor systems for meeting new people**

Another big weakness is underestimating the quantity of good targets you need to meet. Business development is a numbers game. The more quality contacts you know and stay in touch with, the more business you are likely to generate. So, you need to innovate your strategies for meeting lots of targets—much more than you probably imagine.

#### **5. Lack of reasons for following up**

Once you meet people, you must stay in touch. Your goal is to be top-of-mind when the timing is right. But, too much follow-up can feel inappropriate. So, you must innovate your reasons for staying in touch.

#### **Become a law entrepreneur:**

So, how do you become more innovative in your business development? Here are some techniques:

I want to begin by saying that innovation doesn't mean thinking of something completely new that no one else ever thought of. It can be something that is new to you or to the people with whom you want to communicate.

#### **1. Notice the moment of resistance**

The first step in becoming innovative is to become aware of the beliefs that stop you, and to challenge these beliefs. Lawyers love to argue and they are good at it. But, arguing against something that is beneficial to you is detrimental. In our book, "Selling in Your Comfort Zone," (American Bar Association, 2009), we identify 28 reasons why lawyers

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don't market. One of the ways you stop this cycle is to notice the reasons you procrastinate, so that you can determine whether or not the reasons are valid. Some reasons are in fact valid, but many turn out to be untrue. These may include beliefs such as: "I'm too busy," "I'm too old," "I'm too young," "It won't work," "I'm too shy," "I can do it later," and/or "I shouldn't have to do it at all." Before you can be innovative, you need to be aware of these beliefs so that you can evaluate their validity, and if they are not valid, replace them with more accurate and profitable beliefs.

#### **2. Examine your attitude about failure**

Entrepreneurs understand failure. They accept the fact that you try many things to find a few good ideas that work. Lawyers, by contrast, typically don't like failure. They are afraid of being judged harshly by colleagues for innovative ideas that are not well-received. Becoming entrepreneurial means acknowledging this fear, and weighing the risks of failure with the benefits of success.

### 3. Schedule time for brainstorming

Good ideas are hard to find. They require immersing yourself in a problem. There is a concept in psychology known as the Incubation Principle. This is the process of your unconscious mind searching for ideas that you have been consciously dwelling on. Having an epiphany, that sudden realization of a great idea, is an example of the incubation principle at work. The more you consciously schedule time to brainstorm, the more you will benefit from the incubation principle.

### 4. Notice ideas around you

Ideas and opportunities are often all around you. You have to train your mind to notice them. For example, in conversations with clients, notice when they mention the names of people you'd like to meet. Notice what other businesses/entrepreneurs are doing to generate business. Get out of the "order-taker mentality," and use your day as a trigger to notice new ideas.

### 5. Look for technology or create it

As of last year, Apple announced it was adding over 20,000 new apps per month to its store. If you want to stay competitive, you should become aware of apps that can improve both your client services, and your ability to build relationships. Find out what your clients and friends are using. Read tech journals. Consider developing your own apps. App development has become affordable. Think of checklists and routine procedures that could be converted into fun and useful apps. Or, create something in Microsoft Excel. Having your own app will give you something that you're excited to use and talk about with targets.

### 6. Innovate technology for meeting new targets

Consider how to use technology to improve your ability to meet strangers. For example, if you are currently not doing webinars or telenars, this is something worth looking into. A telenar is a seminar over the phone in which unlimited numbers of people can listen in. The technology is currently free and easy to use. The biggest obstacle to these types of programs is time. So, keep the programs short. Have a few people talk for a few minutes each. You can interview outside experts or clients. And, you can record the discussions and keep them on your website.

### 7. Identify compelling offers

Most of your prospects already know other lawyers. Unless there is a conflict of interest, or they are dissatisfied with their legal provider, they are not going to be motivated to meet you. You need to identify compelling offers that give prospects an incentive to meet. There are several types of offers.

**The more you talk with people, the more you learn. Discuss your ideas with your colleagues, clients, family, and friends.**

**Introductory:** Introductory offers help you meet prospects for the first time and build trust—it could be something free like a seminar, service, or checklist.

**Low-cost closing:** Once you build trust, you may need to offer a small, inexpensive service that is easy to get approved and allows you to have ongoing interaction.

**Loyalty-building:** These are offers to maintain relationships. One exciting idea to consider is a signature event. It could be something social, educational, charitable, or that involves your interests. These events may begin small, but grow, as you add to your invitation list, and as your friends invite their friends.

**Leveraging:** Leveraging relationships is a way to meet new targets, but the obstacle is overcoming your contacts' discomfort of imposing on their contacts. To overcome this discomfort, you need to offer something of value.

**Cross-selling:** Finally, for existing clients, you need to develop an inventory of offers made by the partners in other practice areas so that when someone expresses a need, you immediately have something to offer.

Identifying offers may be difficult at first. But, if you schedule the time and brainstorm with others, developing offers is a skill you can improve.

### 8. Talk with everyone

The more you talk with people, the more you learn. Discuss your ideas with your colleagues, clients, family, and friends. These conversations will help clarify your ideas and stimulate new ones. Make innovation a regular part of your conversations.

Being entrepreneurial is new for many lawyers. But, as lawyers embrace the entrepreneurial mindset, they will become more innovative, and as a result, more excited about marketing.

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