



IMPROVE CLIENT DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS BY APPLYING A LASER FOCUS

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Scattergun marketing was effective in an expanding marketplace. Essentially, being "out there" in almost any marketing venue served to bring in more clients. Typical activities included participation in the bar association, civic and charitable associations. Serving on Boards. Presenting a seminar to any willing audience. Writing an article for publication wherever possible, and obtaining reprints for distribution. Publishing of an occasional newsletter. Mailing a holiday card.

I am frequently asked whether these activities are still effective. I am usually asked by those who have used these techniques and failed to achieve results. Or by those who make little if any marketing effort, and wonder where to invest the least amount of time for the maximum impact. But I am increasingly asked by those who are recognizing that their consistent efforts over the years have not changed, but the results have markedly diminished. Why is that so?

Clearly, we are not in an expanding marketplace, and have not been for many years. Competition is fierce, and virtually everywhere. When the marketplace is this crowded, it's difficult to gain attention, or as I like to say "be heard in the crowd." For that reason, scattergun marketing is no longer effective. The activities themselves are still valid when utilized properly. Plus we have a whole host of ways to put those activities "on steroids" by leveraging social media.

So what has changed? The biggest difference is that we must now apply a laser focus to our efforts. We have to first identify very specifically the area of practice we wish to develop, and then further identify our ideal client or referral source. Only then can we select the very best strategies to apply.

Before I provide a specific example, let me add that a practice niche helps a great deal, too. I know that those of you who practice in small communities are already thinking "this doesn't apply to me . . . lawyers in my neck of the woods have to be generalists." Of course that's true. However, that doesn't mean that you can't and

shouldn't identify one or two of your practice areas as your primary niche, and focus efforts in client development there. It will enable you to focus and compete in a less crowded environment.

If you're trying to simultaneously develop business in all of your practice areas, you are diluting your efforts and confusing prospects as to what you're "known" for, e.g. your brand. It is impossible to differentiate yourself from your competitors when you're non-specific about what you do and what special skills you bring to the table. A majority of lawyers have multiple practice areas. Although the inclination may be to market yourself equally in each, you will create a strategic advantage for yourself if you can find the area(s) which differentiates you the best, and focus your efforts there.

Think of it this way: every new client is a budding branch on a tree. It can grow and unfold into hundreds of leaves, or wither and die off after just a few. Without the new bud, however, there is no chance of growing additional leaves. So if focusing your efforts in a particular practice area or two will get you more "buds", that's the right strategy to employ. It's far easier to get new business from existing clients. So market your strongest or most unique practice area to reel in the new client, and then work to further service them in your other practice areas, and get that word of mouth referral from the client. Every practice depends heavily on word of mouth for growth. The more mouths, the more referrals.

Deciding on which area of practice to focus your marketing efforts on is only half the battle. Next, you have to focus on identifying your ideal client and referral source. For example, I work with a practice group in a midsize urban firm. Five lawyers share the same practice area. Yet, each lawyer's clientele is very different, as are the referral sources which guide work to each. Within their practice area, each seems to have nuanced areas of particular strength. So in total they complement one another in skill sets. In this manner they are not competitors. Each is able to enhance the desirability of the others by furthering the firm's brand in the practice area. And collectively they are able to be "out there" much more successfully than many competitors.

The laser focus is key because it takes as many as 17 – 20 "touches" to turn a stranger into a prospect and subsequently into a client. Touches must be carefully orchestrated. Touches are made through all of the methodologies described in the first paragraph of this article. And amplified through the effective use of social media.

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Let's explore just one activity: presenting a seminar. Scattergun methodology dictated that the act of presenting alone demonstrated ones expertise in an area. It led to development of referral sources. Often it led to immediate or future clients.

Today, failure to apply a laser focus more often leads to training ones competitors. You want to make sure that if you present to attorneys, for example, that they are not your competitors, unless you are one of the foremost authorities in your area and need them to know it. You are better off presenting to attorneys in other practice areas, who may frequently encounter or serve your ideal client. Teach them enough to know how complex the area is, what the warning signs are that let them know they need to get an expert involved, and scare the bejeebers out of them about the risks for not doing so.

Not only does the "who" matter, but the "where" of your presentation can also be critical. For example, if you know where your desired clients go for their own education, that's the ideal location to present a seminar. To figure that out you may need to think in terms of industry segments, and then do your homework on educational events for the industry. You may need to team up with another professional trying to reach the same prospect. For example, if you want to locate high net worth individuals, you may want to create a seminar collaboratively with a CPA, financial advisor, or maybe even a custom home builder.

Space limitations preclude me from providing additional examples, but hopefully you get the jist of what I'm suggesting. I'm here if you want to explore this area further, bounce ideas around, or obtain referrals to highly-regarded marketing consultants and coaches.

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