IMPROVING YOUR TOOLS TO ENTICE NEW CLIENTS

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One of the many realities of our mature marketplace is that our client prospects nowadays are often more sophisticated when it comes to selecting an attorney. It used to be sufficient to have a visible neighborhood office for prospects to walk in. Being recommended by a trusted advisor or friend virtually guaranteed the prospect would call. Conversion rates were fairly high before, e.g. the percentage of prospects in the door who ultimately became clients was high.

If you've been practicing ten or more years, compare the conversion rate today to when you started out. Except for certain niche areas, you know it's no longer the case that the hardest part is getting enough people in the door for an initial meeting, in order to guarantee a flow of new matters into the pipeline. It's now an equal or greater struggle to "convert" the prospect to an actual client.

Before the initial meeting is made, today's prospects typically do more homework. Many start a search online, which may lead them to aggregate listing sites such as those offered by AVVO and FindLaw. There, they are focusing on ratings, schools, reviews and other credentials before picking up the phone. Yes, many of you are being looked at with the same diligence one would use to select a restaurant on Yelp!

Online searches vary considerably. We just don't know today where the search will start. Google may be #1, but Twitter and YouTube are both vying for the #2 spot. Starting there typically leads to content firms have posted. Videos on YouTube, and blog posts or articles which have been pushed out to LinkedIn, Facebook and/or Twitter. Unique content is king when it comes to the internet. If you want to be found through other than paid SEO/SEM (search engine optimization and/or search engine marketing — for which you can pay dearly) you need to keep adding unique content. Within that content, you have to answer questions or provide information which a prospect will likely search for online.

If we are fortunate to have someone reach out to us due to content found on social media, the conversion rate will be much higher. Those who follow your bread crumb trail to phone or email have already concluded that you have the knowledge they need. They're not kicking tires, they're serious prospects at the decision stage.

The want to know about service and pricing to sign on the dotted line. Take advantage of the opportunity and fast track them to the engagement agreement.

My favorite story to drive this point home was the call I received from the managing partner of a 65-attorney firm in Knoxville, TN. His first words were to request my engagement agreement so they could sign me up for an assignment. He didn't even ask my rate, because he had already selected me as the best person to do the job.

I asked what path he took to my phone. A question that you should ask of every prospect. His response was, "Well, I started my search on Twitter . . ." I didn't hear much after that, as I struggled to comprehend why this individual, obviously extremely smart and sophisticated, used Twitter as his search engine of first choice. The remaining gist of the conversation is that his search produced a teaser for one of my blog posts, which was directly related to his project. The blog post led him to the article I blogged about, on my website. There he found 3 articles I had written over the years on the same topic, from different angles. I assume he looked at some of the favorable reviews from satisfied past clients as well.

I remember his concluding words clearly "… after reading the articles I realized you are exactly the person we want for this project."

Bottom line is that we need to recognize that the strategies we need to employ today to reel in clients include those which are tried and true, but we need to amp them up on the "steroids" of the new social media tools.

Speaking of new tools, I invite you to join me at the Solo & Small Firm Section Conference at Bedford Springs Resort in July. (Conference information found elsewhere in this newsletter.) I will be presenting a few seminars. The opening session "*Billing Arrangements and Best Practices*" will focus on developing some new tools in the financial management area. I'll also be doing my one-on-one sessions again, so don't forget to sign up for a slot when you register, as available slots book fast!

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