



## MARKETING INFORMATION OVERLOAD

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I frequently get hot line calls from attorneys asking for marketing information. Most of the time the information request is specific, e.g. how to do a seminar, create a web site, establish a brand, develop a plan, and so forth. But every now and then I get a call from someone who is attempting to develop marketing skills for the first time, and the request is for “everything.”

I wish I could say that those calls are always from freshly minted baby lawyers, but that is not the case. Many experienced attorneys eventually come to realize that developing their rainmaking skills are as essential to their future success as are their technical skills. From my perspective, better late than never. It's *never* too late to learn how to develop business. And yes, it is something one can learn.

The amount of information I send out when someone requests general marketing information is substantial. That's because there are so many facets to marketing. The additional reading list is 12 pages long— just one of the items— if that gives you an idea how much information we're talking about here. When dealing with massive amounts of information, I always suggest that callers get back to me once they've reviewed it, so that I can answer questions, help them sort through and prioritize the information, and coach them as they formulate an action plan.

It's disappointing to me that fewer than one in five attorneys actually takes me up on the offer. For those who do, the first thing I hear is that the volume of information is so overwhelming that their impulse was just to forget the whole thing. It just doesn't seem possible to “do” all of the things that need doing. Fair enough. I can see how the breadth and depth can overload the mind and undermine the spirit.

How do you sort through all of the marketing information coming at you? How do you make sense of it? How do you pick and choose what you should be doing, and map out a game plan? What is realistic to expect of

yourself? What activities should you do first? What skills should you master first?

Ok, let's try to wade through it, and make some sense out of this marketing information overload. First, let's look at the various types of activities, which I've grouped into reasonably understandable categories.

**Networking.** Included in this category is everything having to do with getting known by and getting close to or at least familiar with people. These people include prospects, referral sources, other attorneys, social contacts, and clients. There are all sorts of familiar phrases to emphasize this fundamental marketing concept:

Fish where the fish are.

The biggest key to success is just showing up.

It's who you know.

**Education-based marketing.** Included in this category are activities which serve to position the attorney as an "expert" without any obvious "sales" activity. Seminar presentations, published articles, print and electronic newsletters, client alerts, radio and TV interviews, and web content including blogs and podcasts are all examples of this type of activity.

**Branding, differentiation, and presentation materials.** A firm's brand is the uniqueness— the very essence— of the firm, which gives life to its perceived identity. It's not a slogan or logo, although they can and should become associated with the brand in the marketplace.

If the firm has been successful in establishing its brand, it will permeate the entire firm. It will be a vision shared by everyone at the firm, from top rainmaker to copy clerk. Some view a brand as nothing more than the old-fashioned concept of a firm's reputation. But while a reputation usually arises externally to the firm, and may or may not reflect qualities which please, flatter or benefit the firm, a brand is visualized and molded purposefully and strategically within the firm and then externalized. [For more information on Branding, see *Does Your Firm Have a Brand?*; Pennsylvania Bar News; October, 2000.]

Along with the branding of the firm is the need for creating differentiation— that which distinguishes the firm favorably from its competitors; what enables it to be "heard" amid the noise from all the other firms attempting to be noticed by prospects.



Activities which belong in this category include creation of a mission statement, strategic thought and development of a plan to build the firm into a unique entity equipped to service a market segment, development of logo, slogan, and presentation pieces such as brochures, letterhead, newsletter masthead, signage, and so forth, all of which reflect the brand and differentiation strategy of the firm. It can best be summed up this way: don't try to do what everyone else does, thinking it's the safest thing to do. By blending in you get lost in the crowd. Instead, think of how you can stand out in the crowded marketplace.

**Advertising.** This is a pretty obvious category. Included are things like billboards, TV, radio, local newspapers, and yellow pages. Perhaps less obvious but still advertising are things like Martindale-Hubbell, Super-Lawyer designations, search engine optimization including strategies like pay-per-click, advertisements in charitable event program books and so forth.

**Public Relations.** While seeing ones name in print is gratifying to the ego, and what most lawyers seek when they think of PR, it is not what improves the bottom line of the firm. You need to really think about where your name should appear. Where will it provide benefit for your firm in terms of letting your sources of business know you're "out there," and on "top of your game" as it were? The most important components of successful PR are 1) having a game plan; 2) doing appropriate strategic intelligence; and 3) creating and maintaining good lists. Make an appropriate list for each attorney at the firm. Don't forget to include alumni newsletters. [For more information on public relations, see *PR Made Easy; Pennsylvania Bar News*; October, 2003.] And then use your lists to get the word out quickly when you've done something newsworthy.

**Relationship Maintenance.** These activities include such things as client surveys, client focus groups, developing personal relationships with clients, client entertainment, free on-site visits to clients, personal notes, gifts, and so forth.

**Planning.** The most important building block in development of rainmaking skills is learning how to develop a plan. Your plan should be written, concrete, with specific goals and objectives which are measurable and realistic. It should include target dates which spread your activities out and which can be put on your diary to make sure that you don't get stuck in that "there's never time" syndrome.



**Putting it all together.** Ok, so where do you start? Well, like a Chinese menu, you need one from column A and one from Column B. In other words, you should be doing a little in most categories throughout the year. You start with the more simple tasks in a category, and you build as you grow your skills.

Lets take, for example, education-based marketing. Let's start with one activity: writing an article. If you're a solo, you write your article. At a larger firm, a baby lawyer's role might be the research behind the article. A young attorney's role would be drafting the article for a senior associate or partner's review and publication. A partner might be writing a regular column.

Let's get back to the planning and strategic intelligence components. The plan is to write the article. That means starting with strategic intelligence to determine where the best publications are to reach your targeted audience, making contact with the editors, creating opportunities to write, and then making sure you calendar your deadlines carefully.

Depending on the size of your firm, you may have someone there to do a lot of this work for you. Large firms have marketing people whose sole job is to find you opportunities if you're willing to write, for example. If you're at a solo or small firm, you need to find and create those opportunities yourself, or hire someone to assist you, such as a marketing consultant.

Ok, one more example. Networking activities. Let's start with one network: the bar association. As a baby lawyer you attend bar association meetings and events and get to know people. As a young lawyer you participate in committees of interest, and volunteer to help out here and there. As a seasoned associate, you should be chairing a committee, and perhaps even running some complex events. This enables your peers to see you as a future leader. As a more senior associate or junior partner you would serve as an officer. At any point you can widen your range by participating not just at the local bar level, but also at the state bar level. If this is an effective strategy you can always increase your visibility further, and widen your network of contacts, by becoming active at the national bar level.

Keep in mind that in the legal industry it takes a *minimum* of seven quality "touches" to turn a stranger into a prospect, and ultimately into a client. A touch includes such things as reading an article you wrote,



attending your seminar, have someone mention you to them, reviewing your web site, meeting you socially, reading about you in the newspaper, and so forth. So your planned activities for generating new clients should be designed to provide as many opportunities to “touch” your targeted audience as possible.

Another thing to keep in mind is that 80% of new business comes from existing clients. And it takes only 20% of your efforts. Whereas 20% of new business comes from new clients. And that takes 80% of your efforts. You can't do one without the other. You have to keep putting new work in the pipeline, but you also have to continually expend effort to maintain your existing client relationships, and grow them if possible. Another reason to make a plan. It will ensure you do sufficient quantities of each activity.

This article barely scratches the surface, however space constraints prevent me from providing additional detail. But the good news is, you can always pick up the phone and call me to discuss this and your unique needs and abilities in greater detail. Just don't fail to get moving on your marketing activities because it's so overwhelming. Pick one activity from each category, and make a plan to get it done. You can do it. And even if you don't do it well at first, you will get better over time.

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