

Client Development

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Have a specific vision of your dream file cabinet

- Consider a niche practice and gain a reputation as a particular type of lawyer.
- Don't dabble, your learning curve will be high and you will do your clients a disservice.
- Stop taking cases that do not fit into your plan. If you hate doing divorces, don't take another one. It might put you up against the wall financially, but it will also force you to problem solve.
- Find out what you enjoy, your quality of life will be much higher.
- By staying focused, you will not only get good, you'll get efficient (value billing).
- Reputations tend to pull business from many directions, including lawyer referrals.

Make yourself known

- Plant seeds, plant seeds, plant seeds. If ever there's a magic bullet to law firm client development, this is it. Once those seeds are planted, *be patient and persistent*. If you want it badly enough, you can *will* your practice into existence and prosperity.
- You never know where business might come from. Always take the time to be courteous and answer questions.
- Make the rounds, stay out there interacting whenever possible.
- You are the commodity, not your firm. Work to establish trust and reputation. Many lawyers are successful despite themselves (see opportunity).

Opportunity is king

- Being the best is good, but opportunity trumps all.
- Generate as many opportunities as possible.
- People don't like to shop for a lawyer, they want to go with the first one who they believe can remedy their problem and *can trust*.

Create a small base of clients and fan the flames

- From this base will come your practice.
- As new business from your existing base meets brand new business, your firm will mature.
- For every person who considers you their lawyer, every person they come into contact with is a potential client.

Some Thoughts on Various Marketing Techniques...

Newsletter Hands down the best marketing your firm can do is to mine your existing client base. This brings no comfort to the younger law firm that doesn't have a client base, but it is a lesson all attorneys learn at some point: don't forget to take care of your existing clients. For every client that considers you their attorney, they are a potential source of referrals to every person they come in contact with. Keeping your name on the forefront of their minds can be as simple as sending out a quarterly newsletter. Today, this can be accomplished by email, drastically saving time and costs.

Referral service Most local bar associations run a lawyer referral program. I had moderate success with this while building my practice. Often the referral service takes a percentage of your fee. Some do a better job than others at marketing themselves, which translates directly to how many calls you will get.

Web site Your firm must have a web site. People expect legitimate businesses to have an online presence. Your web site is your flagship web presence, so make it a good one. Some attorney web sites are so horrific they chase business away. Use the firm brochure test: if you could print your web site, would it make good print material that you would be proud to put on your waiting room coffee table? Also, make sure they can find you by promoting your web site well, particularly through search engines and online directories. See below.

Online directories There are literally hundreds of online directories out there. These are essentially online phone books with listings of attorneys. Determining which ones you should be in should begin with you searching for an attorney in your area of practice in your city in the top 15 or so search engines. What directories pop up? Do you see their banner ads? Which directories have the top positions? The directories you see in your search results are the same ones your potential clients will see. Make sure you try a few combinations of search terms. Get your firm listed in the directories that are doing a nice job of promoting their site.

Colleague network Some attorneys develop a network of colleagues with a loose affiliation for the purpose of sending business back and forth. When the attorneys' practices don't overlap, this can be a nice arrangement. Be aware of ethical requirements and restrictions

Seminars Estate planning attorneys have done well sponsoring free seminars. They give free information to the public and bank on picking up some business from the attendees. Defense and business attorneys may also benefit from this type of promotion (i.e. 'Protecting your business from the slip and fall').

Yellow pages A marketing arms race. If you can't be in the first several pages, don't bother, no one will see your ad. If you do insist on spending the money,

make sure your ad is different from the others.

Radio Another marketing arms race. Be prepared to spend loads of money branding your firm or don't bother doing this. I've heard some attorney radio ads that run a few times and disappear. The name of this game is branding, which is best done by saturating the market through redundancy. If you're going to do it, go big.

Print Attorneys love advertising in local television guides. I'm not sure why, but I guess some are getting the results they want. My experience with this type of advertising is you will get a lot of price shoppers who are mostly concerned with how little you will cost them, not a good foundation for an attorney/client relationship. That's a whole topic in itself. Some do billboards, which can work if you have an easy way for the casual observer to remember your phone number, web site, etc. (i.e. 555-OUCH).

Pre-paid legal I haven't had a positive experience with this yet. Pre-paid legal companies are quasi-insurance companies that charge a membership fee for access to their group of attorneys who provide legal services at a discount. Sounds good in theory, but I haven't seen it work in practice.

Insurance defense Some firms build entire practices doing contract work for insurance companies. The pay is low but steady. Be careful accepting this type of work because you might conflict your way out of lucrative plaintiffs cases in the future.

For more practice tips, visit www.poweradvocates.com and click on 'Resources' and 'Practice Tips' for articles related to client development.