

# HOW TO EFFECTIVELY MARKET YOUR LEGAL SERVICES



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## **Introduction**

The days where attorneys simply practice law are gone. Today, a shrinking demand for services, increased competition – including service substitutes – and an overwhelming supply of professional talent can make the legal profession seem daunting at best, challenging at worst. This merger of sorts makes the marketing of legal services that more important to your law firm.

Knowledge of marketing legal services is limited for most attorneys, but cannot be ignored if you want to survive into the future. Rarely does the discussion include marketing aspects of legal services in law school or legal education courses. Preservation of their pipeline of cases is a deterrent for discussion among peers.

So, what are you to do when it comes to marketing your legal services? This white paper explores that question while offering tips and strategies on effectively marketing what your law firm has to offer.

## **The Market for Legal Services**

There are fundamental ways that the market for legal solutions among consumers is changing, which is primarily due to the ascendancy of the Internet. By some estimates, approximately \$20 billion exists annually in a latent market for legal services. In recent years, a new category of non-lawyer legal information has emerged on websites offering low-cost solutions directly to consumers.

Self-help books and forms within the legal information industry have expanded to online access. Some believe this puts a small law firm or solo practitioner of the legal profession squarely in the crosshairs. Often, a legal information solution serves as a substitute for the professional advice of an attorney.

Legal information services and web-enabled legal forms are not the only substitutes for the professional guidance of an attorney. The new reality facing the legal profession is the presence of legal information sites that offer advisory systems, law guides and tools to resolve a legal problem.

Consumers and businesses can access information for every aspect of the law including creating a living trust, child support enforcement, trademark law and copyright registration, bankruptcy and business corporations. These new alternatives have captured or acquired clients from existing firms as well as the latent market.

These legal information websites are having a significant impact on the legal profession. Take for example the no-fault divorce process. Various legal sites can process thousands of online divorces in a matter of months. Imagine if the average legal fee for an uncontested, no-fault divorce costs \$1,500 and one site processes 5,000 forms, attorney practices have lost \$7.5 million in legal fees. This amount will increase as legal information sites become more sophisticated by incorporating features that substitute the labor and judgment of an attorney.

Crafting the right marketing strategies for your law firm could expand opportunities to serve consumers and businesses in this area. However, doing so requires understanding what consumers and businesses want, and why they believe alternatives to lawyers is the better approach.

## **Effectiveness of Marketing Tools**

Studies exist on the effectiveness of various marketing tools for legal services. Beyond commodity-type consumer oriented practices, you may want to consider relationship building and personal networking to spread the word about your legal practice. Other tools to consider include:

- Client surveys to solicit feedback
- Hosting or speaking at seminars and conferences
- Marketing materials such as newsletters
- Connecting with client trade associations

## **Create a Marketing Culture in Your Firm**

As you begin thinking about how to effectively market your legal services, you want to give equal consideration for creating a marketing culture. In addition to client service needs, marketing should be incorporated into every role within your firm. This includes attorneys and staff who should consistently walk and talk to reinforce marketing goals that you have set for your law firm.

Formulate marketing goals and action plans that holds everyone accountable, and over time, a mindset towards marketing will emerge. Absent an effective infrastructure, marketing your legal services is virtually impossible. To shape the culture, consider the following essentials:

- Have a written marketing plan.
- Assign staff to coordinate all marketing activities. If you have a large firm, this could be a team of marketing professionals or a marketing director. For a small firm, a responsible attorney, office manager or administrative assistant could fill the role.
- Have a law firm brand identity plan for all external communications such as brochures, letterhead, business cards, presentations, seminar handouts, websites, etc that reflects the image of the firm.
- Content driven website that may counter some of the legal information sites readily available.
- Database of referral sources, media sources, target and prospective clients, and current clients.
- Content on recent verdicts, case studies and articles to demonstrate unique capabilities.

As the leader of your law firm, you want to practice and exhibit leadership behaviors that:

- Articulates a shared vision
- Establishes goals
- Empowers attorneys and support staff to accept responsibility and make decisions in the best interests of the firm
- Coaches and develops others in your firm

## **Effectively Market Your Legal Services**

The following information can help to jumpstart your plans to market your legal services.

### **Develop a Social Media Strategy**

Develop a marketing strategy before launching a social media campaign. With a written strategy, you can outline goals and objectives that can connect social media to your legal services. In part, this requires having a well-crafted message that promotes your law firm on various social media channels.

Once you have a concise message, evaluate social media platforms to find the ones most suitable for marketing your firm. For example, you might find that having a YouTube channel is better compared to sending messages on Twitter.

### **Have a Consistent Message**

The message you create should be consistent, even if you use different social media channels. Never create a social media account and never add useful content. Maximizing your marketing efforts requires providing quality content on a regular basis. Actively sharing content through consistent messaging solidifies what you want prospective clients to know about your law firm.

## **Incorporate Social Media with Offline Marketing Activities**

Marketing your legal services through social media doesn't mean you should neglect offline activities that can also get your message across. In fact, you can incorporate your firm's social media marketing campaign into an offline plan. Include social media icons on business cards, brochures and office location. This tells existing and prospective clients that they can connect with your firm if a social media platform is more convenient. At the same time, you can increase your social engagement with clients and get new followers to the services you offer.

## **Start a Legal Blog**

Generally, a legal blog can help to promote your marketing message directly to readers. Posting to the blog site at least once a week should increase interest in your firm. If you are short on time, hire a professional legal writer to submit content. Share blog content on your social media websites, which can drive more traffic to your website and increase the brand awareness of your firm.

Another idea is to follow subscribers to your blog. Engage in conversations with those who comment. If they are not looking for legal services, they might have potential leads.

## **Begin Now**

Time waits for no one, especially those defending their position against a mammoth Internet exploding with free legal information. Billable time is for your current income. Non-billable time should be devoted to marketing projects that can affect your firm's future.



## **Ethical Issues to Avoid**

Striking a balance between consumer protections and access to justice is no stranger to attorneys who want/need more clients. There is a constant struggle within the legal profession in setting policies on marketing and advertising that does not compromise the law. Self-imposed boundaries are demonstrated through conscious efforts to make sure lawyers do not overreach. At the same time, it is important that people have enough information to make decisions about legal representation.

There is consensus that ethical risks are inherent in online marketing and networking activities. Agreeing on the objective is not the issue; rather, agreeing on the means to accomplish this delicate balance is usually the conflict. In 2012, the ABA amended the Model Rules of Professional Conduct to include ethics rules on Internet advertising and online client solicitation. Of primary concern is issues of confidentiality and inadvertent practice of law.

Embracing a new medium to market legal services can present many challenges to the legal profession. Worlds can quickly collide when the legal profession operates in cyberspace. On one hand, you have the information superhighway where unlimited content is freely offered to consumers. On the other hand, you have the self-regulating legal profession that is steeped in tradition and slowly adapting. In between sits your law firm trying to navigate cyberspace based on the rules governing attorney conduct regarding marketing activities.

For instance, you might think that your website home page is not advertising and not subject to advertising rules. From a marketing perspective, avoiding the rules means not including disclaimers and placing “advertising material” labels on written copy. From a legal perspective, however, not including such labels could cross ethical boundaries if someone acts on the information provided on your website.

Creating and maintaining an online presence changes the threshold of whether your home page becomes commercial speech. Caution is the best advice when marketing your legal services. It is important to stay within the boundaries of jurisdiction rules on professional conduct.

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