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LAW FIRM MARKETING

Pitching to a Prospect and Getting Your Ducks in Order

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Special to the Legal

OK — up and at 'em. It's a new year. Time to dust off those marketing shoes and get to work. Where do you start?

The answer never changes: current clients. They are your number one source of new business and you should be spending 80 percent of your marketing time expanding these relationships.

What's that? You are already doing that but want to do more? Great.

Do you have a marketing plan? I do not believe in rifle-shot marketing. Instead, lawyers should carefully decide which clients, prospects and referral sources they will go after this quarter or year and in which industry they will develop an expertise.

What's that? You have a plan and are comfortable with doing everything except finding and meeting with prospective clients? OK, no worries. Where are targets?

HOW TO GET IN THE DOOR

I tell my clients there are several ways to strategically get new clients. Here are my three favorites. First, ask your clients to introduce you to their colleagues/friends in their industry. Second, start relationships with service-providers to the targets — their accountants, their IT vendors, their printer and more. You both have the same goal and may be able to offer one another introductions. Third, become active, I mean really active, in a trade association that your current clients are members of or that your tar-



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gets attend. Go to the meetings, join and participate on a committee. Make friends. Rub elbows and show them your stuff. Head up an effort. Host meetings at your offices. Consider donating your services.

Getting in the door to meet with a prospect is not for the weak or tired; it is an active activity. My friend William Flannery, president of the WJF Institute and a leading business-development consultant to some of the nation's top law firms, tells his clients that cold calling is still the best way to get in the door. According to Flannery, "cold calling, the tried-and-true activity of stockbrokers, corporate strategy consultants, technology sales executives and investment bankers, if done right, has been a proven approach for lawyers to get in the door and get the work they want. The vast majority of lawyers don't do it — most recoil at the idea — saying general counsel or business executives would never take a call from, let alone hire, a lawyer who approached them in this manner.

Moreover, lawyers typically don't like

getting cold calls and they feel the buyer of legal services must feel the same way."

But Flannery said the opposite has been true for his clients who have done it correctly.

Unlike lawyers whose day-to-day work does not include buying financial products or services, the mission of in-house counsel is to buy legal services and, according to Flannery, cold calling can be informative and has worked for many of his clients.

"What you need to make a successful cold call is a thorough knowledge of the potential client's business, their legal needs and a good story that talks about the potential benefits for the buyer. We train lawyers on how to do it right," he said.

One very successful approach his clients have used is to have the managing partner make the cold call. "Wouldn't you take a cold call from the managing partner of Cravath Swain & Moore, Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom, or other prestigious Philadelphia, New York, Chicago or Los Angeles law firms?" Flannery said.

Flannery's new ABA book, *The Lawyer's Field Guide to Effective Business Development*, suggests that getting new clients is a process-driven series of well thought out steps, not random invitations to sell somebody something at lunch that they don't need. Flannery said that "the idea of cold calling raises many issues that are provocative however to show genuine interest in a potential client's business and an authentic desire to help them become successful is neither unethical nor self-serving. Remember, the buyers have choices and they can always say no. It may be no for now however it may not be no forever."

So you have a meeting scheduled, now what?

Once you have an appointment set up with the target, follow this step-by-step guide to preparing for and holding a pitch meeting with a prospective client:

- In advance of the meeting, learn everything you can about the target — both the person you are meeting with and his/her company. Understand how they make money. Read their Web site — especially their “press” or “news release” section. Google the company and the individual. Use Westlaw/LexisNexis or all available search engines to identify current and past legal issues, obstacles to the company’s success and other “pain points.” (A pain point is something that keeps your client up at night — like dealing with a regulatory inspection, handling a tough internal political situation and more.) At the end of your research, you should be fully conversant about the company’s business.

- If you are not familiar with their industry, go to some of the trade group Web sites and learn what the pressing issues are that face companies in that area.

- Based on your research, consider some free advice or handouts you can provide at the meeting that might help with a challenge they face or save them dollars or legal fees in the future.

- Get a handle on work the firm is doing for similarly situated clients in all areas. Know your firm’s practice areas, recent successes, and more. Review your firm’s Web site and newsletter, or walk down the hall to find out what hot areas your firm is involved with right now. You never know what issues the target

may raise at such a meeting so be prepared to cross-sell your firm.

- Think of questions you will ask the target at the meeting which demonstrate your knowledge of his/her business and industry and your concern for it.

- Alert the receptionist (if the meeting is at your office) that your guest is coming and explain how to greet him/her. “Welcome Ms. Clark, We are so glad you are here.” I call this the “*Cheers* greeting.” Remember how great it felt to hear the whole bar in the comedy TV show say “Hi” to Norman and personally greet him when he walked in the door? It really does make a difference if your guest is made to feel special. Note: Also check that the magazines/firm materials in your reception area are current and your receptionist looks and acts very professionally.

- Inspect where you will be meeting. Sit where the target will sit. Make sure the walls are not scuffed, paintings are hung straight and there is not clutter or garbage in their view.

- Let others in the firm know whom you are meeting with in case they have any connections or intelligence that might be helpful.

- Make sure your appearance is immaculate. Check your clothes, teeth, breath and hair. Check for dandruff or hair strands on your jacket. Even if you think you look fine, double-check it.

- Practice your handshake. According to an article that appeared in *Marketing the Law Firm Newsletter* by Olivia Cabane, “A Fortune 500 CEO once said that when he had to choose between two candidates with similar qualifications, he gave the position to the candidate with the better handshake.” Make sure you have a firm handshake and that you

take steps to ensure your hand is not clammy. (Yes, there are steps you can take.) Don’t be afraid to shake.

- Once there, ask questions about the business, its goals, the target’s legal needs and, then listen, listen and listen. Learn as much as you can. Maintain eye contact.

- To the extent you can, offer free advice or cost-saving tips at this initial discussion.

- Demonstrate how you have helped other clients facing the same issues as the target.

- State that you would very much like to help him/her reach their objectives.

- Never say you are “swamped” with work. Make the target feel like his/her case would be the highest priority on your desk.

- Discuss and give examples of “value-added” services your firm provides.

- Include in your discussion, if possible, your personal client-service protocol such as phone calls returned within four hours and emergency plans in place for your secretary to find you.

- After the meeting, follow up with a handwritten note and/or a phone call. Send the target information or news that somehow has an impact on them or their business. Copies of news articles, press clippings, proposed legislation or firm white papers would do the trick. Place the target on your Google-alert list so that Google can notify you whenever the person’s name is mentioned on something on the Internet.

- Finally, if you do not get the representation, ask why and indicate you would be happy to help them in the future. Use this information to inform your other marketing activities.

You can do this. Get up, get out and get going. •