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LEGAL MARKETING

Where Should You Be Spending Your Legal Marketing Time?

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Special to the Legal

Several years ago at an American Bar Association law practice management section marketing conference, a partner with a prominent intellectual property firm told the audience a wonderful story. He described how the firm had set out to do more IP work for an industry sector and had selected as its target the food industry. Tapping themselves as the “peanut butter and jelly IP lawyers,” the lawyers headed out to be exhibitors and participants at food industry conferences and they wrote an industry-targeted book on intellectual property. Importantly, their work paid off. They saw the business grow.

I have never forgotten this vignette and I have retold it many times. The reason is because it underscores one of the central themes of law firm marketing: Fish where the fish are.



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has been helping Pennsylvania lawyers and law firms expand their practices for more than 25 years. She is a former attorney with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius and was the firm's first marketing director.

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More than ever, lawyers today are successfully capturing new business by going deep into client-infested waters. By being active at various trade shows and industry conferences where targets and existing clients are, they are getting to know the lay of the land much more intimately than other lawyers who have not so ventured out into the landscape. They are able to rub elbows with clients and network with other vendors who could become referral sources. Besides trade shows, where are they going?

What about bridal fairs: With

one out of two marriages ending in divorce, I am aware of a terrific family law attorney, Amy De Shong of Wisler Pearlstine, who does go to local bridal fairs and answers questions about prenups, name changes after marriage and more—all in the hopes of being helpful and starting a dialogue. Upon starting such a dialogue, she is able to suggest that the bride-to-be consider an estates lawyer upon marriage—and thus stimulate referrals to a colleague in her firm.

Another client of mine is hugely active in a minority-based legal group and is ever-focused on referring and getting referrals from other members of the group. And still another spends all of her business development time mining her international law firm's alumni base—reaching out and reconnecting to former colleagues to bring in work to her firm from those who knew both the firm and her capabilities intimately.

What these four stories have in common is that in each case, the attorney put himself or herself in the shoes of the clients they wanted to represent and identified where they got some kind of education, where they networked, and more. And what is perhaps even more interesting is that none of their activities relied heavily on social media. The genius was and is in the one-on-one.

Are you at a loss as to how to find the right fishing pond for you? Ask yourself these questions:

- “What kinds of clients do I want to represent?” Be uber specific in your response. An answer that won’t get you started would be something like this: “I like to represent companies to whom I can provide creative and out-of-the-box counsel.” A better response that would actually get you to the right pond would be more along the lines of: “I like to represent family businesses when there is infighting or succession issues.” Or, “I like to represent toy manufacturers in products liability cases.” These kinds of answers will lead you to, first, a family business association or a local chamber and, second, to a state or national toy manufacturers association.

- “What kinds of problems do they have that I can solve?” The answer to this might not be readily apparent, so go do some homework. Check out a

few companies you would like to work for and see what litigation they have faced in the past, what deals they have done, who they hired to represent them, what their regulatory landscape is like and more. Talk to senior people at a few companies and ask them what are some obstacles to their business’s financial success. There is no better source than the potential clients themselves.

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I got another perspective from a conversation I recently had with a lawyer whose book of business is in the double-digit millions. I asked him where he “fished” and his answer to me was: “I don’t go to any trade association meetings and my bio is scant of association memberships. I fish in the pool that my client swims in. I spend all of my time visiting their offices all over the country—on my nickel—and getting to know their key people and talking through issues that are preventing them from making more money or getting them sued. And, I encourage junior

partners who also work for this client to get on planes, trains and automobiles and do the same.”

The beauty of all of these stories is that the lawyers in each case have chosen a focus for their marketing efforts. They can avoid the perils and wastefulness of having a rifle shot approach to their marketing initiatives. This is huge. As a result, their marketing dollars and time are being spent much more wisely and efficiently. They have a targeted plan—and because of that, they are better organized, better in control of their time and able to track what is truly working for them.

It’s just about summer. How about going out and grabbing your fishing rod and heading out to the right pond. •