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Nine Unique Ways to Differentiate Your Practice From the Competition

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A recent call to the Pennsylvania Disciplinary Board indicated that there are over 14,000 lawyers in Philadelphia County alone. That's a lot of competition for you and your firm. A great number of these lawyers are unlikely to be hired if they do not stick out or "differentiate" themselves in some way from their competition. Saying "we do excellent legal work and provide top service" is not enough. Every law firm is saying this!

The following are examples of how several top law firms and lawyers have successfully differentiated themselves in unique ways.

1. They learn everything they can about a particular, very specific topic—whether it is a new law or regulation or how a certain kind of business is run. These lawyers "credential themselves" to become the "go-to lawyer" for the topic. They write regularly on it, blog and are frequent educational speakers. An example is newly minted Orrick partner Emily S. Tabatabai, who founded her firm's cyber, practice and data innovation practice. In addition to being a prolific speaker and writer, Tabatabai is a certified information privacy professional.

2. They create a specific niche. Steven Barrett, co-chair of the litigation group at Hamburg Rubin Mullin Maxwell & Lupin, just started his firm's sexual abuse and assault group. There are few attorneys who specialize in helping victims of abuse in religious, educational, workplace, medical and nursing home facilities. His new microsite, describes the exact nature of this practice and how they are helping victims.

3. They provide uncanny concierge-like service to their clients. What does this mean? These attorneys (and their staff) go the extra mile to "delight clients" in every interaction—whether a phone call, in-person meeting or email correspondence. Believe it or not, these attorneys express real joy when they are in touch with clients—and clients know it and it creates an extraordinarily unbreakable bond. I love the fact that in his email signature, 800-plus lawyer Duane Morris Chairman Matthew Taylor includes his cellphone number. My husband, Peter Clark, global head of Reed Smith's restructuring and insolvency group provides our home phone number on his business cards. These are such little and easy things to do that speak volumes!



Stacy West Clark

4. They do amazing acts of charity and pro bono work. My legal "alma mater" Morgan Lewis and Bockius is not just a mega-firm, they are a philanthropic powerhouse. Not only do they treat all pro bono hours as billable hours, with no cap or artificial limit, they expect and actively encourage all of their lawyers to contribute. This past fiscal year, every lawyer in the firm globally contributed to the pro program—that is over 1700 lawyers—for a total of over 117,000 pro bono hours. In addition, this year is the 10th anniversary of the firm's Community Impact Week. During this week, the firm hosts hundreds of events ranging from pro bono clinics to volunteerism to

fundraising for charities in every one of its 30 offices. Firm Chair Jami McKeon, who has a long personal history of commitment to pro bono, says “I think our pro bono practice and community service programs are a great example of how we can contribute more together than we ever could as single individuals. Whether you are volunteering at a food bank in Philadelphia or working with vulnerable school kids in London or supporting the arts in Singapore, those activities connect you to your colleagues and the community where you live and work in a very special way.”

5. They do something no other law firm is doing in the area. Examples I have heard include not billing first-year associate time, providing a slew of value-added services that don’t show up on the invoice like “office hours” and educational programs at the clients’ places of business, participation in board meetings and review of contracts and policy manuals—all off the clock.

6. They shout out their successes in impressive ways. A highly sophisticated boutique law firm in Marlton New Jersey, Hyland Levin, last year was able to tell clients and friends that its five-person real estate team had closed in excess of \$1.3 billion in transactions in 2017. Chester County’s 33-lawyer MacElree Harvey was delighted to announce in the beginning of 2017, that its five-person business and finance department had closed over a half a billion dollars in deals. In so doing, they clearly set themselves apart from

other small firms—and even major ones—in Philadelphia.

7. Their offices are outstanding and good for you, too. Larsson & Scheuritzel, one of the area’s top real estate firms, makes a practice of selecting materials that will promote their employees’ and visitors’ well-being. Environmentally friendly paint coats the walls, they decorate with nature-focused art, their flooring is made from natural materials whenever possible, and amaryllis plants fill the office during the dark winter months—not to mention that they stock their kitchen with fruit and other healthy snacks.

8. They focus on their heritage in meaningful ways. David Larsson is of Swedish descent and makes a point of representing U.S. affiliates of companies with Swedish origins. His longstanding success in serving the stateside needs of the international business community has led him to membership with the Consular Corps Association of Philadelphia (CCAP) and board membership with the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce (SACC) in Philadelphia. This spring, he was invited to the SACC-USA Executive Forum in Washington, D.C., where he joined with dozens of other SACC attendees in learning about the state of transatlantic trade and artificial intelligence in the legal field, saw a demonstration of the T-POD self-driving truck, and enjoyed a lovely dinner at the Swedish ambassador’s residence.

9. According to Jason P. Lisi, president of Legal Internet Solutions Inc., “An effective way

to differentiate is to show how a firm practices law differently from its competition, such as by a better litigation or client-communication model or process. One of our website-development clients, Margolis Edelstein, a 100-plus lawyer insurance defense firm in Philadelphia, stresses in its marketing that it tracks and measures each part of the litigated matters it handles. By being accountable via practice-hour metrics, the firm shows how it lives up to the tagline, “Measurably Better.”

Think about how you and your firm are different in a way that will be impactful and helpful to your marketing efforts. Shout if from the rooftops. I am rooting for you.

Stacy West Clark *has been successfully helping lawyers and law firms grow revenues for over 25 years. She is a former attorney with the international law firm of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius and was its first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC, a firm specializing in helping lawyers and law firms implement successful business development strategies.*