

Law Firm Marketing On a Daily Basis

By Nancy Byerly Jones

Law firm marketing is an everyday job and this article will explore how to do this. First, however, a relevant analogy is shared below:

Warning: The Easy Way Out May Backfire

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered up any way. Bottom line - it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey.

He invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. As soon as the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly.

Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off.

Life is going to shovel dirt on you - all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and to take a step up.

Each of our troubles is a stepping stone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up! Shake it off and take a step upward!

Oh yes and by the way, the first thing the donkey did after he escaped from the well was to kick the you-know-what out of the farmer who tried to bury him.

Feeling a Bit Buried Yourself as a Busy Lawyer?

How often do you - like the resourceful donkey above - feel buried up to your you-know-what as a practicing lawyer? All too frequently is a typical answer. Overcrowded calendars and caseloads leave little room for a lot of other things the small firm would like to be doing including marketing its services more actively. This article focuses on how marketing can be done on a shoestring budget and how it should be ongoing (i.e. on a regular, **daily** basis).

Marketing Is Not A Four Letter Word

While larger firms often have the luxury of full time marketing personnel to attract certain types of clients and cases, the small firm lawyer *is* her firm's marketing department along with her many other titles (e.g. the buck stops here person, maintenance and repair person, substitute receptionist as needed, garbage remover, etc.). Furthermore, when lawyers think of marketing, yellow page or television ads are often envisioned and the next train of thought centers around the high cost of this form of advertising.

The negative connotation of the word itself is yet another challenge for consultants like me whose job it is to motivate their law firm clients to take marketing seriously and more importantly, to apply it each and every day. Many attorneys also consider marketing as synonymous with having to spend lots of money and with sleazy lawyer ads. No doubt, some legal marketing ads are less than tasteful and some marketing plans do indeed come with a big sticker price.

Marketing is no longer an exclusive tool of larger firms nor is it a concept we can ignore and discount as an unnecessary expense. ***Every firm from the solo to the biggest conglomerate must effectively market itself in today's competitive and ever-changing legal market.*** So, how can the smaller firm do this without breaking its budget or adding more time to its already crowded days?

Day to Day Marketing

We need to identify and make sure we are taking advantage of the many ways we can be marketing ourselves and our firms on a daily basis. This does not mean that bigger, more formal marketing steps shouldn't be considered if and when appropriate and budgets allow.

Featured below is a checklist of marketing steps that can be easily incorporated into the busy lawyer's and legal assistant's days. Hopefully, readers will find many of these worth giving a fair trial.

Law Office Marketing Suggestions

1. Create a specific ***design, servicemark, logo*** for your law firm's name and one that fits its mission. Use it at all times applying it to everything...your stationery, website, business cards, blog, etc.
2. Create a ***slogan*** for your firm and include in on your letterhead, faxes and emails (e.g. my consulting firm slogan is: ~ *Helping Clients Build Success Stories That Last* ~)
3. Make doggone sure the right person is greeting your visitors and answering your phones! Our receptionists are our ***first impression marketers*** -- our front door marketing ambassadors -- and it is foolish to not have a properly trained and people oriented employee in such an invaluable position.
4. Ensure someone from your office ***returns all calls promptly***; existing clients deserve it and prospective clients can be won or lost by the timing of your return calls. A comprehensive and well chosen case management system will prove invaluable with phone call documentation, to do reminders and overall organization of your clients' files.
5. Start out each and every client relationship with a ***productive initial consultation and a written engagement agreement*** that clearly spells out the terms of the attorney-client relationship – excellent communication – verbal and written - is one of the primary foundation blocks of client retention and client referrals.
6. Enclose one or two ***client feedback***/survey questions with other correspondence being sent to your clients; explain how valuable their feedback is to you and the firm; and make it easy for them to reply (i.e. a self-addressed, stamped envelope perhaps).
7. In the alternative, ask clients and others you speak with by phone or are communicating with via email for their feedback.
8. Offer the option to clients (and others) of providing their suggestions and comments on the appropriate feedback page of your firm's website. Note...some folks are more likely

- to offer their feedback if the questions are kept to a minimum. Perhaps asking one or two of the following questions for starters would work: *How are we doing in keeping you informed in a timely manner? Do you always receive a warm and courteous greeting when calling our office? How can we serve you better? Any services we don't offer that you wish we did?*
9. Whenever possible, **complete client matters ahead of schedule**; they will be most grateful and most impressed with your services.
 10. Send **congratulatory notes** or cards when you hear or read of achievements of another attorney, a client or one of your vendors (ditto re any of their family members).
 11. Make your voice mail greetings friendly, professional, succinct and enthusiastic.
 12. Create "mail boxes" and web pages that interested persons can log into for general information about your different practice areas, court procedures, directions to your office, etc.
 13. Make sure your **staff understands the firm's mission** and their role in helping you in your marketing efforts. Give them specific examples of how you and other employees have brought the mission to life through the years. Offer other, creative ideas on new ways they can live, demonstrate and prove your mission statement is far more than mere words on a sheet of paper.
 14. Have business cards made for them and teach them when it is and is not appropriate (per your jurisdiction's ethical rules and other guidelines for attorneys and staff) to give them to prospective clients or referral sources.
 15. Do not tolerate employees who talk rudely to callers or visitors (or each other for that matter!). Regardless of their years of experience or incredible expertise in certain areas, **such a person is poison** in disguise to your marketing and good will efforts (not to mention law office morale).
 16. When budget permits, offer to pay for the printing of team schedules for Youth Rec Leagues and the like. Most everyone puts these schedules on their refrigerators for easy viewing. With your firm's name prominently centered at the bottom of the schedule, the day to day exposure will be multiplied many times across your community.
 17. Have pens, mugs, notepads and more imprinted with your law firm's name, logo, servicemark, and/or brand slogan for giving to clients and others.
 18. Ensure morale stays steady and upbeat at your office. Chronic morale problems lead to disgruntled employees whose friends and family are more than likely made aware of their job woes (This is **negative marketing** at its worse when our own employees are talking us "down" within our communities).
 19. Consider holding annual or semi-annual firm-wide **retreats**. These don't have to be held at expensive, exotic places, but I do recommend you meet at a location other than your office (perhaps a local hotel's conference room). These events are excellent opportunities to re-group the team, to share ideas and brainstorm new policies and procedures and to offer mini-continuing education courses on relevant matters.
 20. Create a website that offers your visitors far more than an electronic business card; include articles, audio and/or videos of interest regarding your different practice areas; as mentioned above, have a page for client suggestions and other feedback; include links to other community resources and other websites that may be of interest to your clients.
 21. Send **file closing letters** at the close of client cases; they are a great way to document the end of your attorney-client relationship, to thank your clients again for the opportunity to assist them and to remind them you stand ready to help again in the future if needed (assuming, of course, that you do want them back!)

22. Write and have press releases published to local and other publications about employee and firm achievements and activities.
23. Speak to school and community groups on areas within your realm of expertise.
24. Network by joining professional national, state and/or local organizations
25. **Volunteer** for organizations and efforts in which you believe and support.
26. When asked if you are busy, don't talk about how exhausted you are and how crazy it is at your office; most everyone is busy these days for different reasons and they sure don't need to listen to our moaning and groaning. Instead, let folks know that while you are blessed with lots of business, you **always welcome new opportunities to assist people**. With that said, please also consider this ... when we're being wise enough **not** to take on more than we can chew in a timely and successful manner, we must let prospective clients know we appreciate their interest, but that our caseload volume is maxed out at the current time and to please check back with us in a month, two...or whatever future time is appropriate and realistic. This does many things...reminds people we don't take their inquiries for granite...we **appreciate** their contacting us and if we know it's not prudent to take on another matter at time, it is letting them know we're realistic **and** obviously in demand.
27. To re-emphasis, #26 above, it is critical that you are wise enough to know when your plate is so full that you need to hold off accepting any new clients for a while. Having more clients than you can serve in a timely and excellent manner begs for problems including negative marketing, malpractice claims and ethical grievances. Many attorney clients of mine regularly have a month or two each year when they take no new client matters on board...not one of them has yet to tell me that policy has financially hurt them. Instead, it has helped them keep their sanity and to give their existing clients first class legal services.
28. Take care of yourself! Whoa...how do I qualify this as a marketing tip? An out of balance and under-exercised attorney is a burnout disaster waiting to happen. When at our best thanks to healthy diets, exercise and adequate rest, we are far more productive. Likewise, our **work product will be far better**. The fanciest marketing efforts in the world won't bail us out long-term if we repeatedly fail to produce a quality work product for our clients.
29. Does your office location and physical setup help your marketing efforts? For example, if you want more elder law cases, is your office located in an area with easy access, ample parking and near bus routes or subway stations? Do you offer big print magazines, ample lighting and appropriate seating in your reception area? Everyone who works for us, every piece of correspondence and the physical makeup and organization (or **disorganization**) of our offices all reflect an image about us and our firms. **What does your current office set up and appearance say about you?** Remember, often it's the little things that make us appreciated and memorable to others (e.g. respectful communications, friendly greetings, attentive listening skills, etc.)
30. Look for ways to **go the no-charge extra mile for your clients**. Visit your corporate clients' places of business once per year to learn more about their world. If you practice domestic law, offer your clients a list of community resources that may be of value to them during their transition from married to single life (e.g. counselor names, information regarding support groups, children's programs, etc.). Give them a book that might be helpful (my former domestic clients always appreciated my giving them a complimentary copy of *The Present* by Spencer Johnson).

31. Make visitors to your office feel as welcome and comfortable as possible. Be on time for your appointments. Ask clients ahead of their scheduled appointments if they prefer decaf or regular coffee, tea or soda. These may sound like silly recommendations, but while clients are not experts perhaps at brief writing, they are all *experts when it comes to knowing how they want to be treated*. When treated with respect and kindness, they are most appreciative. When treated as if their time is not as valuable as yours or as if you are rushing them through an appointment, client resentment grows. They may not voice their concerns and most do not, but they also will probably not refer others to you. Client referrals play a huge part in bringing business to our firms. Anything and everything we can do to improve client relations should be done and we should never be satisfied that we have done enough. There is always room for improvement when it comes to client service.
32. Make sure your clients hear from you or someone from your office on a regular basis. Even when their cases are in an inactive mode, call them or write them a short letter to touch base at least every six weeks or so. Clients need to know you are still there for them and haven't forgotten them. Like our employees, they need to feel valued and that means we should always be striving to maintain excellence when it comes to our client communications efforts.
33. Remind your employees to ask themselves these questions each day: *“How would you want to be treated and what kind of work ethic and quality would you expect if you were the client?”*
34. Send clients cards on their birthdays or special anniversaries (e.g. on the day their patent was issued or trademark granted, the date of their business incorporation, etc.)
35. And last but definitely not least, never ever fail to *thank your referral sources* appropriately. This can range from sending out handwritten thank you notes to appreciation meals and all sorts of thank you efforts in between (e.g. flowers, fruit or goodie baskets for the entire office, gift certificates and thank you phone calls). Do not take your referral sources for granite. Let them know you sincerely appreciate their referrals and when appropriate, send some clients their way as well.

And also

Before implementing any of these steps in your practice, I also strongly recommend that you:

- ◆ take the time to identify your goals with clarity and simplicity (we sure can't get *“there”* unless we know *where* we are heading!);
- ◆ list the steps you and your staff need to take in a simple written marketing plan so you will have the benefit of a *quick cheat sheet/road map* to keep you on the right track; and finally
- ◆ make a steadfast commitment to stick with your plan regardless of how many obstacles (e.g. red herrings!) you may face along the way.

Capitalizing on the Wisdom of the Ol' Donkey

All the suggestions listed in this article are small steps when singled out one by one. As a group, however, they can be powerful allies when it comes to helping us reach our ultimate marketing goals.

Marketing can indeed be effectively, economically and successfully incorporated into the small firm's busy days. Like the ol' donkey, however, we must be wise enough to recognize the need for it, savvy enough to see how simple the solution can be and determined enough to make it happen. And also like the donkey, once you achieve your goals, your success will be equivalent to kicking the you-know-what out of those ethically challenged (e.g. the truly sleazy!) competitors who may have tried to bury you previously!