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Expert Analysis

Surefire Marketing Methods To Build Your Legal Practice

By **Daniel Karon** January 28, 2020, 4:31 PM EST

“At a funeral, most people would rather be the guy in the coffin than have to stand up and give a eulogy.”

—Jerry Seinfeld

For some people, promotion, connection and outreach — aka marketing — are their favorite parts of our practice. For others, they’re terrifying. But for everyone, marketing is essential because without it, we’re out of business.

What type of marketing is the most effective. What sorts of efforts will keep you busier than you could ever have imagined. I only know what’s worked for myself and why. And there’s no reason why these tactics can’t work for you too.



Daniel Karon

Speaking

Many lawyers believe they deserve a speaking slot because they have something to say. Everybody in our business has something to say, but that doesn't make everybody worth listening to.

To be special, you need to know and say something more or special or better. You need to be an expert at something, and you need to sell that expertise so your (and not someone else's) message becomes the essential one. Of course, presenting your remarks presupposes that you know how best to present them.[1]

Critically, delivering remarks will only be worth your while if you know precisely why you're delivering them. Assuming you have the presence and chops to control a room and to deliver a powerful and enduring message, you must make certain that you're speaking to the right audience — an audience that matters to you and that can advance your goals, whatever they might be.

Focusing exclusively on opportunities that suit your practice and advance your well-defined goals is the only way you can expect audience members to call you for help with their problems or with their clients' problems. After all, if you're a family law attorney, there's little sense accepting an invitation to speak to the patent bar.

So just where are these speaking slots? Bar associations and other professional organizations offer countless speaking and leadership opportunities for showcasing your talents and creativity. But don't merely consider the visible and popular groups like the [American Bar Association](#) or local bar associations.

If your practice involves, say, food labeling, research trade associations in the food-labeling space and contact their media department or general counsel. Ask when and where the group's next annual meeting or industry CLE will occur and see whether the event needs presenters. You can also inquire by email.

In both cases, because other assertive lawyers will surely be competing with you, be sure to dazzle the event coordinator with your CV and any written materials that set you apart from your competitors. Speaking to a group of referral sources or clients is one of the most

immediate ways to showcase your talents and encourage people to call you when they or their clients have problems you can help solve by making or saving them money.

But unless your program is taped, speaking promotes only a fleeting message. After 60 minutes (or less), your message is finished. It lingers only in your audience members' minds — that is, to the extent your message held meaning for them. To promote an enduring and permanent message, you need to write it down.

Writing

Writing is eternal. It delivers your message to new prospects over and over, year after year. You can enhance this inherent marketing possibility by posting your articles on your website and social media, repackaging them into future articles in other journals, and emailing them to your friends.

In my experience, too few lawyers are willing to take the time required to generate a marketable idea and package it into a publishable piece of prose. But their loss is our gain, as this means more marketing opportunities for us.

When writing, just as when speaking, you must research which journals are most appropriate to feature your message. For instance, you have no business submitting your manuscript on tax law to a criminal law journal. Not only would the journal reject your submission, if the journal ran it you'd get no mileage from it because the wrong audience would be reading it.

State, County and Local Bar Journals

State, county and local bar journals, which are general-content publications, provide the most accessible publication opportunities. And if you're a bar association member, these opportunities are especially easy to come by.

Publishing locally or regionally elevates you as a thought leader in a certain area and encourages local and regional attorneys to call you when they have needs that tap your expertise.

Professional Association Journals

Plenty of associations besides state, county and local ones offer publication opportunities. The most obvious group is the ABA. Every ABA section, committee and subcommittee offers print or online publication opportunities.

So if, for instance, you practice class action litigation and you are a member of the ABA's class action subcommittee, you could submit a clever class action essay that allows the subcommittee's members to realize you're the person to call when they inevitably encounter the issue or new case that you wrote about.

Plenty of specialized organizations also exist, from the [American Association for Justice](#) to the [Defense Research Institute](#) to innumerable organizations in between. Plus, if you join a group that interests you and you grow within it, you will likely be one of the first people to learn about publication opportunities that will allow you to create or enhance your credibility among your organization's valuable referral sources or clients.

Law Review Articles

If you're feeling ambitious, scads of law reviews exist that continually crave content. The thing is that the bar for law review publication is high, as law review editors tend to favor manuscripts from law professors. For this reason, a law review manuscript, after meticulously documenting a legal topic, must offer an original or provocative solution to or slant on its topic.

Though the timeline for a law review article can run about two years, the payoff can be significant. Academic articles boost your credibility as an expert on the topic you've discussed. Pouring yourself into academic prose also demonstrates your deeper and more thoughtful commitment to textual concerns affecting our practice, which commitment and seriousness courts value, recognition and respect via citations to your work.

Importantly, if you want to get noticed not only by courts but also by referring or in-house counsel, make sure any law review to which you submit your manuscript is accessible on Westlaw and [LexisNexis](#).

Finally, if you're inclined to write a law review article, there's no sense starting from scratch. If you've written a brief that includes a nice historical discussion followed by a provocative suggestion concerning how the law should turn, you have the beginning of a law review article. I fashioned my last four law review articles from briefs, so I know this is a process that works.

Write a Book

If you're feeling even more ambitious and you want to create a new and different platform for yourself and your practice, you can always write a book. But if getting a law review article published is challenging, publishing a novel is downright daunting.

If you're writing fiction, which is the nonlegal genre that I know best, you must first unlearn how to write like a lawyer. Legal writing is about answering questions; fiction writing is about raising them. Converting your writer's toolbox begins by taking rigorous fiction-writing classes and reading countless fiction-writing books.

Of course, before you convert, you must already be a proficient legal writer, as is required for publication in bar journals and law reviews.[2] Refreshingly, unlearning your legal writing will make you a better legal writer by allowing you to become a better and more compelling storyteller.

After you've spent years polishing a manuscript that tells a dramatic story that you believe people will want to read, you'll need to dive into the demanding world of agents and publishers — a world that space doesn't permit me to describe here but that you can easily learn about online.

Teaching Law School

I believe that teaching is our profession's highest calling. The knowledge, insight and judgment that I've accrued generate less than their full value unless I share them with others. And when these others are law students — students who, with the benefit of my experience, can do a better job and avoid missteps that I've made — I've done my best job.

But if you must be an expert to speak and write, you must be a super-expert to teach. After all, students are paying thousands of dollars to learn from you. So just what's involved in teaching a law school class?

First, you must come up with a provocative course topic — one that is essential for students to learn. Then, you must research and design a compelling syllabus and sell it to the appropriate dean at a suitable law school. If the dean and curriculum committee approve your syllabus and offer you a course, you must hope you receive enough student interest to sustain your class.

If you do, you'll need to prepare each week and teach for hours where no one tends to participate despite your ceaseless encouragement. All the while, you'll need to prepare exercises to keep your students engaged, remain accessible via office hours, email, phone and text, prepare a final exam, grade the final exam, figure out how to curve everyone's grades and, finally, hope the evaluations are positive considering all your hard work.

All this is a ton of effort, but when you pull it off and make a group of soon-to-be lawyers' lives better, there's no greater feeling. As for how teaching law school generates business, I've found that it indicates the highest level of commitment to the practice and the people within it, whether counsel, clients or judges.

It demonstrates that you're in the profession for reasons beyond simply making money or helping your own clients. Teaching shows your eagerness to empower people to become better and more effective problem solvers, so they can better help their clients and, thus, make the world a better and happier place.

Conclusion

My suggestions certainly aren't the only good techniques for generating business. Professional group and board memberships, involvement in legal aid and participation in Inns of Court are other effective ways. I've just highlighted the methods that I find most fulfilling and productive for myself.

You might have noticed that I've not mentioned websites, search engine optimization or blogging. Those are risk-free marketing methods that, in my experience, net scant results at best or bad results at worst. What's more, those marketing techniques allow you to hide behind your screen and avoid taking any risk.

Who wants to work with or hire a lawyer like that? I feel this same way about paid lead-generation services. They're easy and expensive, which, to me, is an unproductive combination.

To get leads and results you can count on, you not only need to control your message, but you must also direct it to an appropriate audience — one that will present you with good and thoughtful opportunities. And the most appropriate audience is the one that had the good sense to listen to your remarks or to read your prose in the first place.

That's the audience you want calling you for help, whether co-counsel pursuing a consumer fraud case, general counsel defending a price-fixing claim, or whatever. Those leads are worth the hard work required to generate them. And if those leads don't pan out, no matter. There's always next time; plus, you've boosted your credibility by letting your suitors know their case is a bad one.

Marketing is like all other aspects of life: you get out of it what you put into it. If you spend days waiting for your phone to ring, it won't. If you spend money letting someone else call you with leads or update your blog, you'll get bad results, if any.

But if you put in the time and take some risk, I think you'll find that opportunities will begin building upon themselves to the point where you'll end up generating more business than you can handle.

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[1] See my Law360 article [Simple Secrets For Improving Your CLE](#).

[2] See my Law360 articles [Simple Secrets for Writing A Killer Brief](#) and [Top 10 Techniques For Crafting a Dazzling Brief](#).