

LAWMARKETING Portal

Sales- August 7th, 2008

Avoid the Cost of Failing to Follow Up after Seminars

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Hosting informative seminars, booking speaking engagements, and participating in trade group meetings are great marketing avenues that can substantially build firm awareness and ultimately lead to increased business. In fact, the results of these activities should be directly measured to evaluate the overall effectiveness of a firm's marketing plan.

However, many lawyers fail to take the logical next steps:

1. **Further qualifying the attendees and asking for future business.** This omission may short circuit a firm's sales opportunities without the partners even knowing what they did wrong.
2. **Ignoring or taking a passive approach to earning new business.** This complicates matters further and perpetuates the "we will wait for them to call us" mentality that permeates the legal industry and cripples marketing efforts and initiatives vital to a firm's success.

A shocking discovery

To illustrate this point, let me share a recent experience. You can imagine the sheer excitement when I landed my ultimate dream job. Yes, I was hired to work as a sales attorney and acquire new business for our growing construction law firm. The first order of business was to bring me up to speed on emerging issues in construction and contract law by giving me a broad overview via an MCLE approved seminar provider. Great idea? Well, I did get a great thumbnail sketch of the construction industry and was pointed to the major contractual hot points, but what I learned from that seminar was far more revealing, almost shocking and it had nothing to do with construction.

What stood out the most was that the attorneys who were presenting the seminar failed completely at asking the attendees (a great source of qualified leads) for new business, follow-up meetings or trying to learn more about why each prospect attended their seminar. They certainly didn't build any interest in their firm's services by only focusing on their seminar topic and not addressing the potential needs of each attendee!

Don't get me wrong -- the speakers were very capable attorneys and did an excellent job of delivering a seminar. And, as far as their firm was concerned, these attorneys probably performed to the satisfaction of the senior partners in their performance of wearing the 'business development' hat. Little did they realize they failed to perform a simple, yet vital marketing practice: taking the next step. The next step is simply following a marketing process until completion. In this case, the marketing process for a seminar starts with all of the planning events, continues with the seminar implementation and delivery, and terminates with the opportunity to qualify prospects as potential firm clients.

Our particular seminar was small enough so that each speaker could have made a mental note of which attendees could be future prospects by following up with more qualifying questions. This sounds rather similar to the exercise all litigators go through during jury selection, but for some unknown reason, the skills learned as a lawyer sometimes do not seem to find a parallel use in the business development world. On this day, during most of the breaks, the attorneys sat behind their podium and exchanged legal stories instead of mingling with and getting interested in a room full of potential

prospects! It was obvious they really didn't understand what their true purpose was in giving a seminar. Sure, they handed out their business cards, and glossy presentation folders with nicely printed firm fact sheets, but something was drastically missing—any forms of conscious follow through!

A light alternative to typical closing techniques

A great approach and soft sell for attorneys petrified of “closing” a sale (or even to be associated with the term ‘sales’) or asking for future business might be something like this: write down a key point of interest that an attendee mentioned during a question and answer session and follow up with that attendee during a lull in the break, the awkward lunch time return transition, or at the close of the seminar.

If there is some genuine interest, or if the discussion lends itself to a more detailed conversation, ask the attendee if you could follow up with them by phoning them, having lunch, or sending an email or an appropriate article. Use whatever follow-up technique works best for your firm or practice group. The important thing is to actually do the follow-up.

All of these gestures help break down the formal and often standoffish image that many prospects have of lawyers. In my experience, the average prospect may be more reluctant to reach out to a large law firm with the glossy marketing materials, expensive stationery, and high profile street address. However, if the presenting attorney or firm representative removes that initial reluctance by reaching out to the prospect, then the approachability barrier is taken out the equation and one can move on to developing and exploring a potential business relationship.

Always move forward

The experience I just described is not an attempt to disparage the use of seminars or speaking engagements but rather to encourage presenters to think about their ultimate goal in giving a presentation. Besides providing helpful information, the goal should be to get more business. Being successful at getting new clients in a seminar environment is almost a gift. I would like to emphasize “almost” because it will still take a little effort, and it still helps to be likeable and approachable. Remaining passive in the hopes that a prospect is going to make the first move is not going to maximize your time spent going through the seminar process. Even though the individuals are already interested in what you have to say by virtue of their attendance, YOU have to move the sales process forward!

For these attorneys, some minor adjustments to their motivation, a better understanding of their purpose, and genuine desire to earn new business could have netted them a new client or two. Should've been like shootin' fish in a barrel!