

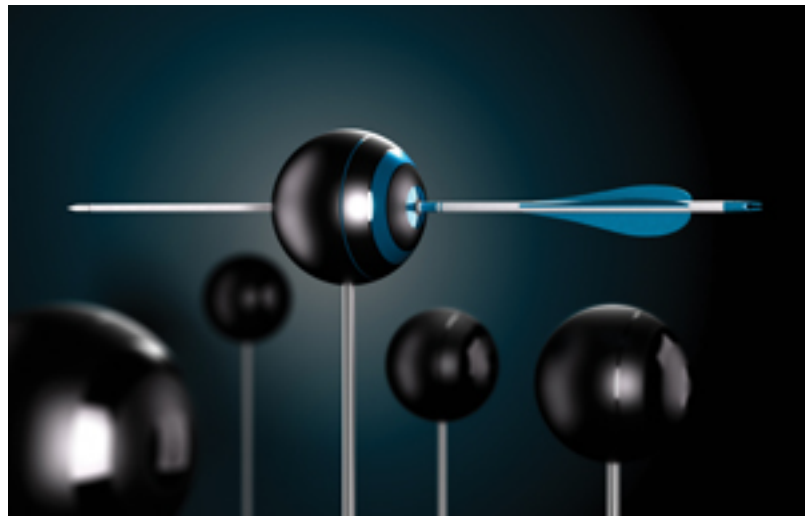


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## Low-Cost (or No-Cost) Marketing for Lawyers

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In the article below, I outline a basic framework for creating and implementing a successful law firm marketing plan. My intention is to share marketing insights I've gained over the past 30 years, the majority spent at the helm of a small practice. My mission is also to demonstrate how lawyers without the budget for a professional marketing company can start strong.

## Marketing Plan: Basic Framework

Marketing consists of strategically educating potential clients and referral sources as to the scope and benefits of your legal services. No matter the method used to distribute the message, certain steps need to be taken by all entrepreneurial marketers to maximize results.

**Step 1: Draw up a business plan.** The marketing plan should be an integral component of a well-constructed business plan, which is part and parcel of a long-term strategic plan. Expending efforts and funds willy-nilly in reaction to randomly obtained advice rarely works in the long term. Applying a results-oriented approach forces you to quantify expected financial growth.

Benchmarks must be established to measure the marketing plan's effectiveness. Setting forth a specific, ideal outcome in writing is a critical component of the process. Such a goal is normally articulated in terms of a measurable increase in either gross revenue or net income.

**Step 2: Undertake an initial assessment.** Before committing to new marketing programs, step back and thoroughly assess your current initiatives. Basic questions to address at the inception are:

- Do you have a written marketing plan to which you and all members/employees of your firm adhere?
- Who is your target market?
- What is your current brand?
- What was your marketing budget for the prior year?
- Do you know your top 20 referral sources?
- Do you have a marketing database that is updated at least weekly?
- How do you currently measure the effectiveness of marketing endeavors?

- What has been your past return on investment (ROI)?

**Step 3: Create, evolve, and control your brand.** Most businesses and law firms let their brand develop by chance. With the best of intentions, many engage in a “visible branding” campaign (consisting of graphic components such as a logo and randomly chosen tag lines), neglecting to strategically develop image and core message.

I recently heard “brand” defined as a promise. The promise is conveyed through strategic communication and action, always evolving. An attorney who consistently fails to promptly return phone calls has so branded him- or herself, whereas a lawyer who is always prepared for court is branded with that reputation. Implicit in actions are promises about the future.

Start defining your ideal brand by exploring the unique qualities that differentiate you from your competitors. Because the identity of a progressive business is forever growing, its branding process is an ongoing endeavor.

**Step 4: Set specific, written, monthly goals with respect to marketing activity.**

Marketing plans produce results only when carefully laid out steps are implemented on a consistent and persistent basis. Create or adopt an activity management and accountability system that keeps you on track. My process is to establish annual, quarterly, monthly, and weekly minimum activity goals, recording progress (or lack thereof) on a spreadsheet. For example, I track the number of social media posts to be made, networking events to attend, and direct marketing pieces to be sent within a given time period.

**Step 5: Establish a specific and ongoing follow-up process.** The frequency and method of future contact with the prospective client or referral source is context dependent. Sometimes the situation calls for an immediate lunch or even a phone call. When immediacy is not necessary or appropriate, you could schedule periodic “soft touches” over the course of the upcoming year. “Soft touches” include sending notifications of blog posts, copies of your published articles, and invitations to firm-sponsored seminars. Connecting through social media is also recommended.

A well-run follow-up program requires the support of a modern marketing database system created and maintained by the law firm. Although capturing complete information

is ideal, even e-mail addresses alone are beneficial. After all, most marketing is currently done online as opposed to via “snail mail.” (For more, see the discussion of direct marketing below.) The crucial factor is constantly to update the marketing database with contact information for each and every new potential future client or referral source.

**Step 6: Monitor and reassess results.** A structured approach for accountability and assessing ROI creates the basis for shifting away from efforts that aren’t productive and directing resources (time or money) toward endeavors that prove profitable. A monthly analysis has worked well for me. However, keep in mind that some marketing initiatives take longer than others to produce appreciable results. Data to be reviewed at this juncture includes:

- The source of each inbound contact, whether or not an immediate client relationship is developed. Reviewing this information enables you to track the efforts yielding the most results. Each team member must be required to capture this information (in accordance with your system) at the time that the initial inbound contact is made.
- Current revenue figures compared with past and ideal figures (as identified in Steps 2 and 4 above).
- Total revenue and time expended on the marketing initiative by you or others in the firm.

Determine whether you are satisfied with the ROI (after giving the particular plan a reasonable amount of time to produce results). If not, recalibrate the plan on your own or consider investing in a short-term contract with a consultant or coach experienced in law firm marketing to get you on the right track.

## Marketing: Suggested Methods

The marketing methods discussed below have been used by me personally in either the law firm setting or in my current business enterprise. Although I rely on a number of other

methods, the following were chosen because any reader can immediately implement them at no or low cost. My results depend on the amount of effort I expend and on my diligence in following the steps outlined above. So will yours.

**Content-based marketing.** One of the strongest methods of communicating the value of your legal services is by writing, publishing, and speaking. You and your clients benefit because in the course of branding yourself as an expert in your field, you become an expert in your field. The research, analysis, and preparation pay significant dividends, indeed.

Content-based marketers strategically write, publish, and repurpose the message conveyed in published articles and columns. A column written for attorneys or other professionals (usually referral sources) can be rewritten for the benefit of non-professionals (usually potential clients) and published in an appropriate periodical. Both traditional print and online publications (such as newspapers, newsletters, blogs, and journals) are clamoring for valuable information to share with readers. It's up to you to seek them out, determine their specifications (such as word count and audience), and submit proposals and manuscripts for publication.

Your written word should be leveraged through offering live and/or online presentations. Endless opportunities await the lawyer willing to master the craft of presenting at programs, workshops, and seminars. Teaching CLE seminars for lawyers or educational programs for other professional groups puts you in front of potential referral sources and further enhances your image as an expert. Spreading the word about your area of expertise at self-sponsored seminars or before community groups will also prove valuable. Make sure that you collect contact information from the attendees to add to your ever-growing marketing database.

**Relationship marketing.** In a "high-tech/low-touch" world, strategic in-person networking remains the most powerful way to create and deepen relationships. Here are a few tips to successful networking at an event or conference:

- Research the background of any speaker or other attendees (if you have that information). I normally connect through social media prior to the event, which warms the atmosphere for an in-person introduction.
- Instead of hanging out with others from your office or social group, be sure to mingle. The purpose is to establish new business relationships.
- Engage fully while conversing. Glancing around the room or at your watch or cell phone sends an unattractive message to your conversation partner. Unfortunately, many lawyers (and other adults) have not mastered basic social skills. Make sure you're not one of them.
- The most important and neglected part is the follow-up. Immediately after a networking event or conference (usually before leaving the premises), I take a snapshot of the business cards given to me. Using Evernote, I send the image to my virtual assistant, along with instructions to add contact information to our marketing database as well as the appropriate follow-up action (e.g., send a letter or schedule a lunch date).

**Direct marketing.** Direct marketing campaigns can take many forms. Two that have worked for me in the past are (a) "targeted" mailings (print or e-mail) aimed at those with a known immediate need and (b) "drip" campaigns designed to build or reinforce a loyal referral/potential client base.

An example of the first is a bankruptcy attorney who sends mass mailings to individuals involved in foreclosure proceedings. Targeted direct marketing can produce excellent results; however, attorneys must ensure compliance with the rules of professional conduct and design mailers that differentiate them from the sea of mail the potential client will surely receive.

A drip campaign consists of pre-designed mailings (usually e-mail) sent at various predetermined points in time usually via an automated system. Ultimately, a "call to action" message is sent, whereby the recipient is encouraged to make an appointment for a consultation, attend a free seminar, or even request additional written information.

An attorney can run a number of these campaigns at once. For example, one mailing may be directed to individuals who recently heard you speak. Another may be directed to potential referral sources, designed to educate as to the intricacies of your practice.

No doubt, you have been on the receiving end of these campaigns. They can be very effective for attorneys, especially if the content of the mailings is high quality and relevant. Those intending to send mass e-mails are advised to investigate an e-blast platform such as Constant Contact ([constantcontact.com](http://constantcontact.com)), MailChimp ([mailchimp.com](http://mailchimp.com)), Emma ([myemma.com](http://myemma.com)), or one of many other vendors. Customer relationship management (CRM) platforms can take your drip campaign to a new level. Infusionsoft, the leading company in the field, offers a free demo on its website ([infusionsoft.com](http://infusionsoft.com)) explaining the benefits in great detail.

**Social media.** Social media have indeed upended the marketing world. In the social media landscape, often referred to as the digital Wild West, the power of content, relationship marketing, and direct marketing are combined and supercharged as never before. Fortunately, significant educational and training resources have been developed specifically for lawyers. Make sure that you are exposed to the most up-to-date information, as the major applications evolve rapidly, as do the applicable ethics rules.

Keep in mind the following as you become involved in the social media conversation:

- Distribute excellent content (i.e., curate).
- Engage with your connections and followers. Don't just blast out information. Social media is not a one-way street.
- Strategically build your platform. Michael Hyatt's recent book, *Platform*, is an excellent resource on this topic.
- Check out automated systems to assist in distributing content across several social media platforms at once. I use HootSuite ([hootsuite.com](http://hootsuite.com)), but TweetDeck ([tweetdeck.com](http://tweetdeck.com)) and others are also effective.

## Conclusion

Like most worthwhile endeavors, the marketing process requires effort, focus, and commitment. Adherence to the steps outlined above will prove significantly more productive than taking a haphazard approach. Keep up your efforts on a consistent and persistent basis and watch your practice grow.