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Delivering your marketing message

HOW TO CREATE YOUR MESSAGE, DELIVER IT EFFECTIVELY, TRACK RESPONSE AND USE THE DATA TO GROW YOUR PRACTICE

Today we're living in a world of clickbait, buzzwords, tag lines, slogans, jingles, headlines, social media, and a whole lot of noise. People want information faster and quicker, and there are many channels and mediums of information and *misinformation*. Perhaps more troubling than anything else is that in the age of information overload, the truth can sometimes get lost or blurry. People are unsure of what is true anymore, so if nothing is seemingly true, then everything becomes the truth. Your job is to deliver your marketing message through this gauntlet of obstacles!

Legal Marketing is defined as the process or technique of promoting legal services to potential clients through various online and offline channels, aiming to establish trust, credibility, and expertise in the field.

But before we explore the wonderful world of marketing, we must first take a deep dive into our own infrastructure, and our own internal systems and processes to ensure that we can properly handle the increase in leads once your marketing campaign becomes effective.

Pre-marketing to-dos

Obviously, the purpose of launching a successful marketing campaign is to drive more clients, and/or better-quality clients to your firm. But what if your intake team is not prepared? Or you don't even have an intake protocol? What if your systems and processes of reviewing leads are nonexistent or need to be perfected? We live and die by our intake processes, and this should be the first step before you even start your marketing campaigns.

This means that you are properly staffed for consultations, phone calls, or in-person/Zoom meetings. If you are doing digital marketing, you will be dealing with "lead forms" generated through your website or social media. You must have experienced training manuals and videos for the various team members. You should develop an escalation process for certain cases or clients' consultations that require escalation to a different person. Lastly, and perhaps equally important, is capturing the data of all the leads, even if they are rejected cases or clients.

Each potential client contact is something for which you have actually paid. Even the rejected cases are potential for future cases if you can capture email addresses and other contact information so that you can continue to remarket to them in the future. Also, make sure that you have a process for cases that have been rejected. There should be a nice and gentle rejection with perhaps some referral to a resource or something where the potential client doesn't feel unheard. Coupled with this should be some sort of confirmation email or text confirming that you are unable to proceed with their case. Even if you are a solo law firm, with two people, you must still treat this like its own department.

Your intake process is the first step in the client-experience journey and must be perfected.

The devil is in the data: Data is golden

Every marketing campaign or marketing initiative must be approached in a scientific way as far as data is concerned. Data is critical. But in order to have accurate data, you must first have tracking capabilities to make sure that the data you are collecting is in fact coming from the correct source. For example, a tracking number for phone call campaigns, and a different tracking number for digital campaigns (Call Tracking metrics and Call Rail are some readily available tools that your firm can use).

Next, you must have a CRM (Customer Relationship Manager) software to help manage all the pending and potential leads. Some case-management software like Filevine and Litify have this capability built in, and it is instrumental to any successful marketing project.

But this does not need to be something expensive or fancy. If you are currently maintaining this data on an Excel sheet, you are not alone! You must make it your mission to grow out of Excel and into a dedicated CRM as your next and most immediate personal challenge. This will help monitor leads, follow-ups, rejections, pending leads, etc. Even if your entire marketing campaign is strictly based on referrals from your network, this is still critical because you can differentiate different sources, so you know where your time is spent most effectively.

In order for you to properly calculate your ROI (Return on Investment) on any marketing campaign, the data captured through the CRM will be critical. Again, even if your entire marketing is based on attorney-to-attorney referrals, there is lots of significant data within that referral group that can be quantified. For example, which firms are referring the bigger value cases, or how much time have you spent with a particular referring attorney versus someone else? The beauty about accurate data is that once you have it, you can ask yourself many questions and get quantifiable answers instead of just "gut feelings."

One of our team members masterfully explained that the implementation of the CRM was the single most effective change we made as a firm. The CRM is the glue that keeps the lead management part of the firm together. It was a game changer.

Elements of an effective marketing campaign

Step 1: Identify and focus on your target audience. This is the "who" of the marketing plan. For instance, the same law firm may have different marketing campaigns tailored to different audiences. This could be as simple as different languages and different geographic audiences or different practice areas. However, even within a specific practice area, the potential clients may be different types of people, different socioeconomic backgrounds, etc. This may seem like an obvious first step; however, once the creative juices start to flow on the different ideas, it is quite easy to deviate from the target audience and let the idea take over. After every brainstorming session, stop and ask yourself: Did this new idea specifically target my intended audience or did it deviate?

Step 2: Define and create your message. What message are you ultimately trying to convey to your audience? This message must be clear, succinct, and easy to digest. The most famous quote that comes to mind when I think about this is "KISS" (Keep It Simple Stupid).

Once again, it does not matter what your practice area is, or what your method of marketing may be. You must always remember that the audience is generally not *actively* interested in your service. This simply means they're not actively looking for your service in an urgent manner. As a result, the message you give them must be simple and easy to remember. They must associate you with the specific service that you provide.

Step 3: Educate, entertain and give value. One of the most important components of any effective marketing campaign is the concept of "selling without selling." This means instead of telling people that you're the best at something or that you want them to call you or hire you, you use education entertainment, and providing value as the means of the actual "sale" itself. Of course, the ultimate goal of any networking plan, advertising plan or anything else is to get the client to hire you. Part of this process involves you displaying your skills and your knowledge to them in your initial contact. Ultimately, you must have a "call to action" so that you can tastefully communicate to the potential client that you are ready and able to take on their case.

Step 4: Stay consistent; consistency (and frequency) is key. Unless you are running a digital pay-per-click ad (and even then, some would argue) you must have a consistent and formulaic presence. We live in a generation of instant gratification. People want results immediately. Unfortunately, most marketing does not work that way, and nor should it.

The purpose of an effective marketing campaign is to permeate into the potential client's mind in a way that it sticks for a long time. This is how you achieve scale and volume throughout your practice. Be ready to commit to a marketing plan for an extended period of time. This all depends on your budget and your investment of time, but no matter how small or big the budget, there is a way to tailor some level of consistency. Without consistency, it will surely be a failed campaign.

Trial and error is king

Perhaps the most important concept of any marketing campaign is trial and error. Nothing replaces good, old fashioned trial and error. If you think your campaign is going to work simply because you personally love the idea, you're in for a rude awakening. You are *not* the target audience, and you are *not* the standard of "success." So, you must not assume that simply because you feel strongly about a particular campaign, or a particular idea, that the idea will be successful or well received by others.

The beauty of trial and error is that the more you can try, the more you can fail, and failure is a good thing as long as you are collecting data and learning from the perceived failing. Every successful marketing campaign starts out slow and requires many modifications and tweaks, but if someone quit at the beginning, they would never get to the finish line.

With that said, of course no one has unlimited time or money, nor unlimited resources to strictly rely on trial and error. That is not what I am suggesting. Within the concept of trial and error, there's something called A/B testing. This is done to compare and test different marketing campaigns to see which campaign yields the better results. The only way this is done accurately is by proper data collection and tracking. Without that, there will be no way to know the real effectiveness of a campaign.

Top 9 marketing campaigns for law firms

(In no particular order)

1. Internal clientele re-marketing and retargeting campaigns. This is by far the highest ROI any law firm will ever achieve on any platform. Whether you are a solo firm or a large firm, you have a rolodex of former clients, and former declined clients (hopefully you are capturing this data too).

There is so much added value in these contacts simply due to the fact that they are not "cold" leads. These are people that have interacted with your law firm at some point in the past. They come

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with their own network of family and friends who are waiting for your services.

There must be a systematic and frequent approach to them that provides value and education, and simply a reminder that you are there. Birthday cards, holiday cards, monthly newsletters (via email and snail mail) are just some of the ways.

We have seen successful firms put on local "client appreciation" events for all their former and current clients. Other examples include "Back to school" programs, holiday toy drives, holiday food programs and other ways to creatively engage former and current clients.

Practice tip: If you are sending birthday cards, include a $1 lotto scratcher with a handwritten note. This creates a long-term connection and a good story that they can share with their family and friends.

2. Traditional media: Traditional TV and radio are still not dead. If you are looking to explore this, I would suggest localized TV and radio, as they are more cost effective. Focus on a tight geographic region and master it.

3. Digital media: This is probably the largest and fastest-growing area. The digital-media landscape is quickly changing and growing all at the same time. This includes social media (both organic and paid sponsored content), pay-per-click advertising on Google, Yahoo, Bing etc. YouTube videos (both organic and paid sponsored), online streaming channels, banner advertising on websites, Artificial Intelligence-created videos and content.

4. Legal conferences and webinars. This can be a full-time job in itself. The number of legal conferences has seemingly doubled over the last decade, and this is a testament to the demand for knowledge and information that is out there. Approach this like any other large marketing campaign as it can generate long-lasting relationships and revenue sources.

Get out of your comfort zone and try various conferences in different cities and different states. You will find that there are many like-minded lawyers in different states who are encountering the same types of cases that you are. They will undoubtedly require local counsel.

5. Good old-fashioned boots-on-the-ground networking. Once again, this can be a full-time job. How do you balance this and run an active caseload? Develop a plan, and a funnel for your workflow. Make sure that you are being consistent with your visits and remember that follow-up wins the day! The most effective networkers I have ever encountered have a follow-up machine like no other. They utilize their CRMs, and organic touches by email, texts, and phone calls in a systematic way. This is critical to ensure proper case retention.

6. Co-counsel relationships and affiliate partnerships. There are many natural lawyer-to-lawyer relationships that can be the right fit. For example, many workers' compensation firms have very good relationships with employment-law firms. They are a natural fit. Find your natural fit by speaking to your colleagues and other industry experts.

7. Community outreach and community events. Many firms have successfully accomplished teaming up with local motorcycle clubs for motorcycle-injury cases, bicycle clubs, runners, and other specialized-community outreach programs. The key to this is to start locally in your own neighborhood and stay consistent. A few sporadic events without a plan and without a message will not yield results. If you are going to get into a community outreach program, meet with local leaders and determine what their "needs" are and try to solve some of their issues. Providing value and solutions is the name of the game here.

8. Lead generators and authorized data-contact lists. This is a controversial topic as it is strictly based on advertising in large numbers. There are many lead aggregators and lead generators that will "sell" their data to you. Of course, before you initiate this you must make sure that all the contacts have "opted-in" and authorized an attorney or law firm to reach out to them. Check your local state bar rules for proper handling.

For instance, a lemon-law firm can purchase contact information from thousands of Honda car owners and send mail marketing or email marketing directly to them in connection with their defective vehicles. This is similar to class-action advertising. Many successful criminal defense firms purchase data of recently charged individuals and then market directly to them. The effectiveness rate of this type of program is roughly 1-2% of total contacts. Although this may seem very low (it most certainly is), there are ways to make this successful. This should be approached in a very scientific way with the proper budgeting, projections, and excellent data tracking. Not to mention, the inbound intake infrastructure must be airtight as well.

9. Client reviews and testimonials. Online reviews are becoming very important in the digital landscape. It can be challenging getting clients to leave positive reviews. There is some good technology that will help with your ability to get reviews (and make sure that they are actually good reviews!) "Birdeye" is one of the tools that you can use to reach out to your own clients and get reviews on different platforms. It will scrub the negative reviews automatically and will send them to you for quality control, while posting the positive reviews automatically. Video testimonials can be a helpful tool in client retention as well as cross-marketing in various channels.

As the saying goes, "A jack of all trades is a master of none." Very few firms nationwide, if any, are able to successfully master more than a handful of various marketing channels. The goal is not to become overwhelmed or nervous that your firm is not doing all of the above. The goal is in fact, to pick and focus on just one area and become the master of that space. Every firm is different and every lawyer is different. What works for your colleague may not necessarily work for you. Comparison is the thief of joy, and in this case, you must only compare yourself to yourself (from the year prior). Have you taken affirmative actions to advance your marketing campaign this year versus last year? Have you developed yourself as a lawyer and operator better than you were last year? Those are the questions we should be asking as the year end approaches.

Arash Khorsandi has spent the last 15 years exclusively representing plaintiffs in personal-injury cases. His firm has grown to a team of over 100 legal professionals.