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OBA - STARTING YOUR OWN LAW PRACTICE

Marketing Tools for Lawyers

5 ways to get clients for your new law practice

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Marketing to Get Clients - a practical approach to getting clients for your law practice.

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Starting your own law practice is like starting any other small business. As such, there are a wide range of factors you will need to consider - including determining your physical location, staffing levels and putting systems in place for accounting and bookkeeping matters.

Notwithstanding the importance of all of these matters, if you do not have clients, you will not be in business for long.

Marketing must be a priority for any new law practice and this paper will consider 5 marketing tools you might wish to consider to bring clients in the door. Needless to say, this paper is not exhaustive in terms of the almost endless variety of marketing techniques out there. More importantly, this paper is not written by a marketing guru or an MBA graduate. Instead, what I can offer you is some practical, common sense tips based on my years of working at, and now managing, a successful law firm.

Yellow Pages Advertising

Despite its somewhat archaic nature, there is arguably still a use for advertising or at least listing your practice in the Yellow Pages. This is especially true if your target market is outside the large urban centres and/or consists of older, more mature people. There remains a certain segment of the population that is reluctant to go online to find legal services and there is no reason to exclude these potential clients from your target market. Of course, as with all of these tools, it is important to perform a cost/benefit analysis on a periodic basis to ensure you are bringing in sufficient clients to continue to support the cost of this tool. On balance, this type of marketing is relatively expensive and should be geographically targeted so you receive the best bang for your buck.

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Online Presence

There is no question that technology has dramatically changed the way people communicate and obtain information about the products and services they wish to purchase. Lawyers who ignore the Web will likely do so at their peril. If your name does not come up when a potential client “googles” your area of practice, you are missing valuable potential clients. Without going into a technical discussion about Search Engine Optimization and rankings, suffice it to say, this is an area you will want to put some resources towards in terms of developing a website and/or having a presence on various social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter). While developing an extensive website might not be a practical reality in terms of cost in the beginning, engaging in some blogging or having a presence on LinkedIn etc. will help raise your practice’s profile on the Web.

Network with other Lawyers

In my view this is an underused source of marketing for lawyers. All of us went to law school and consequently have access to lots of different lawyers practicing in all different areas of law and in different geographic regions. While some might be your competition, others can become useful sources of potential clients. Call them up – take them out for lunch and develop relationships that will benefit you both. It can turn into something as formalized as a referring lawyer relationship or can remain a more ad hoc situation (for example, if you have a conflict on a certain file you refer that client to a particular lawyer).

Under this general umbrella, I would also strongly encourage you to stay connected with other lawyers through organizations like the Ontario Bar Association, the Law Society of Upper

Marketing Tools for Lawyers

5 ways to get clients for your new law practice

Canada and the Canadian Bar Association. This is especially true if you are practicing outside of the GTA – these organizations provide a great life line for lawyers who may feel geographically isolated.

Join Local Business Groups

Another source of clients might be found if you connect with local business or community groups within your community. This is a variant of “word of mouth” marketing – if you are known in the community as an active and interested community partner, you will likely be viewed favourably when a person or business is in need of legal assistance. Examples of these types of groups include the local Chamber of Commerce or Rotary chapter as well as groups like Community Living. A word of caution – make sure you join a group that interests you (apart from the marketing aspect!). If you are not truly interested in the work the group is performing, you likely will not keep up your commitment and this may adversely affect your reputation within the business community.

Seminars for Client Groups

Educating your various partners is another marketing tool which can help bring business to your new law practice. Everybody loves a free lunch so why not put on a free lunch time seminar for a target audience? A real estate lawyer could talk to local real estate agents about common pitfalls when executing a purchase and sale agreement. In my case, giving a talk about changes to no-fault automobile legislation to a group of physiotherapists, cements my status as a knowledgeable and approachable lawyer who could assist some of their patients.

Marketing Tools for Lawyers

5 ways to get clients for your new law practice

This is a relatively inexpensive and efficient way to market yourself as an expert in your area of the law.

In addition to these 5 general marketing methods, it would be remiss not to mention one of the most important and basic ways to market yourself. I alluded to it briefly in my earlier discussion on Joining Local Business Groups – namely “word of mouth”. There is no substitute for doing a top notch job for each and every one of your clients. Clients have friends and relatives who will no doubt hear about their experience with your new law firm – make sure it is as positive as it can be.

In law school, and to some degree, during your Bar Admissions course and articling experience, the focus is on learning the law and how to apply that knowledge to come up with solutions to complicated factual situations. Undoubtedly, you need those skills to be a successful lawyer.

However, running a law practice requires more – you need to turn your attention to some basic marketing matters which, along with the other topics covered today, will help you start and, more importantly, thrive as a successful law practice.