



CLIENT DEVELOPMENT TIPS FOR THE SMALL LAW FIRM

Many lawyers think of advertising when they hear the phrase “law firm marketing.” The two aren’t the same thing, though.

Lawyers whose practices continue to grow year after year understand that advertising is just organized publicity but marketing is really business development – the overall system of legal and business activities which a lawyer or firm uses to deliver quality legal services, at a reasonable price, and in an ethical way. Client development activities are the things that keep good clients coming back to you for all their legal needs, and make them comfortable referring their friends, too.

In order to successfully build and operate such a system, you need a plan. Here are some steps to help you create a client development and work delivery system for your practice:

Identify the type of services you want to market. Write down practice areas you want to promote; then make a list of specific services you can provide in each practice area. Set criteria that matters must meet before you will take them.

Identify the clients you want to serve. Define them by gender, age, education, financial status, occupation, marital status, geographical area or some combination of these factors. Then determine where you can expect to find such people and the best ways to make them aware of your services, keeping in mind that about 75 percent of individual (non-corporate) clients begin with recommendations from friends and relatives when searching for a lawyer. And keep in mind that providing excellent client services while making sure that your current clients are completely satisfied is an important part of any client development program.

Create a checklist of what is needed to efficiently deliver services in your chosen area(s) of practice. To the extent possible, standardize how you handle particular types of cases, developing forms and checklists for every aspect of the litigation or transaction – and for easily communicating with the client.

Define your goals. Do you want to increase services provided to existing clients? Does your practice depend on a steady supply of new clients? Establish a quantitative standard you want to reach, such as making all the individuals for whom you do real estate closings aware of your estate planning services.

Create objectives to reach your goals. When and how will you notify existing clients of the other services you provide? Establish a regular, step by step procedure for transmitting the information, such as speaking personally with the client at the end of the case, giving out a brochure or a case closing letter, circulating a newsletter or providing free client seminars on the practice area you want to promote.

Measure your progress. Keep statistics on the number of new cases you receive in the targeted practice area, and where the cases came from. Are the cases repeat business or new referrals? Who's doing the referring? Adjust your strategy as appropriate.

Essential Marketing Activities

- Communicate regularly with your clients, keeping them fully informed of the status of their matters.
- Survey your clients to ensure complete satisfaction and consider implement their feedback.
- Make your support staff a part of your client development team.
- Become active in your community.
- Become active in your local bar association. The more lawyers you know the more possibilities you create for referrals.
- Develop a referral network to place the cases you can't handle.
- Always send a thank you note to anyone who refers a client to you.