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Supercharge Your Referrals with Technology

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It's easier and cheaper to keep an existing client than to develop a new one, yet many of us focus our marketing efforts on finding new clients. Existing clients already know the value we can bring to their legal matters, so it pays to stay in touch--not only to have them hire us again and again, but to refer their friends, family, neighbors, or colleagues too.

In this article, we'll discuss how to keep in touch with all of your clients, past and present, and even ethically contact potential clients providing them with valuable information about you, your firm, the changing legal landscape and how those changes will affect them. From newsletters and education to blogs and social network sites, learn how to keep your name before your clients and potential clients, for new business opportunities.

I. Understanding Referral-based Marketing

What is it?

When it comes to hiring an attorney, consumers want experience, reliability, and value. However, few people actually know which lawyer is right for them if they have a legal problem. To find that lawyer, most consumers are unsure where or how to find an attorney. Many do research--usually through traditional media and now the Internet. However, many consumers are skeptical about advertising and unsure of their own research efforts, so they often turn to people they know and trust to help them find the right lawyer for their legal problem. They seek a personal referral.

A referral is a personal recommendation from one person to another, but is grounded in multiple trusting relationships. The first person--the one seeking a referral--has a relationship of trust with the second person--the referral source. These two people could be friends, relatives, co-workers, neighbors, or in some other relationship with each other in which they have developed a level of friendship and trust one another to some degree. Furthermore, the referral source must have a relationship with the object of the referral--for our purposes, a lawyer. For example, a person might ask a co-worker for the name of a good divorce attorney, knowing that the co-worker recently went through a divorce. The divorced co-worker has personal experience and interaction with the lawyer, so is in a position to give their friend first-hand information about his or her lawyer. (Or even their spouse's lawyer, for that matter!)

How does it work?

If a lawyer has provided a positive experience to a client, that client is likely to become a referral source of new business. If a friend, colleague, relative, or neighbor brings up the need for an attorney, that client will often extol the virtues of their own lawyer. People like to do that. Just like getting a bargain on a TV or new automobile, clients are often happy to tell others about how they picked a great attorney, even going so far as to figuratively joke that "my lawyer can beat up your lawyer!" By giving a positive endorsement, the referral source is helping both the person asking for the referral and the lawyer.

Why does it work?

It works because people want to help the people they know, like, and trust. Referral sources want to help their friends, family, and colleagues who are asking for help as well as help the lawyer who provided them exceptional service and value.

The referral source could also be a friend, colleague, neighbor, relative, or anyone else who knows you, trusts you, or has experienced your abilities as a lawyer could provide referrals.

Benefits of Referrals

For lawyers, referrals mean a flow of business without having to market themselves. When we build a practice of satisfied clients, we are also building a network of people who can refer their friends, colleagues, neighbors, and relatives to our firm.

And it does work: The average lawyer receives approximately 80% of their new clients through the magic of personal referrals--more than any other source of clients. Know, too, that people have to feel comfortable asking for a personal referral from a friend. For some referrals that might be too embarrassing, such as for a DUI or bankruptcy, consumers will often rely on the Yellow Pages and Internet rather than reveal what to them is an embarrassing situation.

Referred clients are often the most cooperative and appreciative because of the personal trust they bring transferred from their friend who referred them. Furthermore, referred clients are less likely to demand price competition when they believe they are working with the best. They are more willing to pay when it means better quality.

If we can deepen the relationship of trust between ourselves and our current and former clients, we will increase the opportunities to obtain more referrals. We deepen relationships with clients and other referral sources through communication. Through communication we can impart valuable information, build and exchange empathy, and maintain a feeling of personal connection. As lawyers and business owners, we now have new Web 2.0 tools to improve the methods, modes, frequency, efficiency, and quality of communication.

Referral vs. Word of Mouth

“Word of mouth” is similar to a personal referral, but does not include a recommendation based on personal experience. It lacks much the transference of trust from one person to another. Without the trust, the consumer is far less likely to accept the referral without doing significant additional research about the referee. This is where the new Web 2.0 marketing tools can be a major factor in developing new business. These new on-line tools provide a new opportunity to expand the information available about a lawyer’s experience and expertise. The choice of tools is up to the individual attorney, of course, but used together these online services can create significant depth. This depth, in turn, makes a lawyer more accessible and makes word of mouth advertising more effective than ever before.

Improving word of mouth advertising occurs by reaching out into the marketplace to communicate with others. The closeness of each relationship aside, the goal is identify and expand a lawyer's range of contacts. Once a person's contact base has been codified into these tools, it is easy to expand to reach potential new clients and opportunities to expand your business further.

II. The World is Changing—*Now!*

- **Commoditization of Legal Practice** - The web offers lots of potential in terms of market size, but that also means more competition. Making a legal practice stand out requires differentiation. Those that don't specialize, or at least 'showcase' a prominent area of their practice, are at risk of only competing on price. Lawyers can avoid the 'race to zero' by marketing themselves based on demonstrating expertise & experience - think articles, books, speaking engagements.
- **Traditional Media is Waning** - We are in the midst of a shift in where and how people obtain, share, and value information; those who understand and participate in the shift will benefit far more than those who do not. As venerable newspapers file for bankruptcy, TV fights Google for ad revenue, and the Yellow Pages become far less relevant to consumers, we see the rise of new media across the Internet. Blogs, self-publishing of books, syndicated news feeds, search engines, video conferencing, and professional networks are all changing the way humans interact and consumers buy goods and services. Savvy lawyers will be changing too.
- **Vast majority of lawyers have no online profile.** Often limited to a paragraph or two description on the firm website. This can cause a number of problems, but the biggest problem is not being found in Google searches for your name. A fact of modern life is that even if your marketing efforts are 100% offline, potential clients are going to conduct diligence searches on you before picking up the phone. This is equally true for referrals: Lawyers need to be 'findable', and support those searches with substantive content.
- **The number of free/low cost tools available to craft this online image is rapidly increasing-** Are these tools truly free? Of course not. The soft costs of *lawyer time* actually make online networking a very significant investment. However, the same statement can also be said about other types of networking and business development. Taking an evening off and going to a hockey game with your client is just as big an investment. On the positive side, the barriers to entry for many online tools and communities are extremely low. For the lawyer leveraging an existing set of contacts (built with actual 'face time') there's a great opportunity to get a head start on the social networking craze. These tools can help chart relationships based on substance, and help expose new relationships.
- **Real Friends -vs- Web Friends** - One of the most valuable aspects of any social networking tools is their ability to identify the '*who knows who*' relationships. As the degrees of separation increase from the original *substantive* contact, however, the potential for any kind business referral also reduces. There is also the new class of web friends evolving, based entirely on virtual relationships. While it would be an easy decision to write these relationships off as a referral source, these contacts can often very

valuable - but for different reasons. Just like 'real friends', the degree of relationship closeness may vary. These web-friends are, however, easier to acquire in volume, and much easier to maintain. In some cases, especially with regard to business referrals, the understanding (spoken or unspoken) of work referral reciprocity, can make for a very simplistic and valuable relationship. Once again with the concept of working strategically: if lawyers understand the demographics of *who* their best sources of work referrals come from, web-friends can provide a very steady and valuable flow of new work.

III. Be Strategic About Your Efforts

- **Know who you are, know who your clients are, have goals** - It's easy to see the web as a large market with lots of competition. Those that are successful, however, often have clear definitions of what that distinguishes their practice:
- **geographic or jurisdictional expertise** - whether imposed by the area of practice or self-imposed, setting boundaries based at a State level.
- **industry expertise** - demonstrating a solid track record within a particular industry. This can really help focus the content you create, distribution, and the relationships you establish.
- **thought leadership, academic qualities** - Can be as simple as providing timely commentary on new decisions, but can also be more academic in nature. Some lawyers are well suited to inspiring new thought and new ideas; this can be a huge driver to creating an online reputation for a practice.
- **specific transactional experience or niche areas of practice** - Web allows more finite boutique practices to exist. This can be an important aspect in how you craft your online presence. It's important to demonstrate a focus, and to stay on message. Being authentic and natural online is an extremely important aspect to maintaining relationships, but generating referrals means creating a clear picture about your business.
- **Have a plan** - It's very important to understand your existing network of contacts. Some may be buried in a rolodex and never use a computer; while others may be several years ahead, and able to jump start your online visibility. Once these relationships have been documented, you can then be more analytical about how to cultivate going forward. Hint: one of the common features of many social media tools is to allow you to import your email address book - they compare your email list -vs- their users, and tell you which of your contacts are using their service.
- **Same information, same audience, different tools** - Become aware of the automations possible with many of these web tools. For example, if you have a blog, your post headlines and links can be set up to auto-update your Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn accounts. This process of content syndication often means working smart. Write your content once and then auto-publish to many services simultaneously.
- **Repurpose existing and new content** - Pay close attention to the content you are creating, and where your different contacts are consuming it. A great blog post can resurface in an email newsletter, or a limited run of a paper newsletter - hitting a completely different segment of your personal contacts.

IV. Multiple New On-line Tools Are Available to Lawyers

New (Web 2.0) communication tools are expanding across the Internet, and are available to help lawyers supercharge their referral marketing. Although the exact tools are difficult to predict for every lawyer, here are the most common tools available today:

eNewsletters

Newsletters have long been a terrific marketing tool. When properly written, each issue provides value to the recipient, reminds them of your expertise, and puts your name at the top of their mind, making it more likely they will remember you when they need services or a friend or colleague asks them for a referral. Some firms have successfully published periodic newsletters to send to clients and other interested people on a regular and timely basis; however, many firms—especially solo and small firms—have had difficulty writing content and administering the process to publish, print, and mail a newsletter on a regular and meaningful basis.

However, new tools are being developed all the time to allow firms to publish a newsletter electronically without many of the hassles of a paper newsletter. There are a number of on-line subscription services that do almost all the work: They provide the e-newsletter template and send it out, while you provide the e-mail addresses and the content for the newsletter. These services make it much easier for a smaller firm to mail an e-newsletter that is professional and timely without sacrificing hours of valuable time.

Do you need a newsletter if you have a blog (or vice versa)? Newsletters have the benefit of being "pushed" to clients, former clients, and other interested recipients, because the newsletter is delivered via e-mail. Be sure that recipients actually want to receive your newsletter. If they don't, you are sending spam.

In contrast, blogs can be updated constantly, but clients and others have to remember to look at them or know how to set up an RSS feed to read it. Alas, many consumers do not know how to do the latter. One solution to this problem is to engage a tool like Feedburner (now owned by Google) which converts your blog's RSS feed into a email newsletter service. The sign-up box is the same as any other online newsletter service, and you are able to offer your readers alerts in both email and RSS format. No matter which technology they use, maintaining regular contact is simply a '*must be done*'.

The good news is that blog posts often make great content for an e-newsletter, and e-newsletter articles can be used for blog posts. Remember, "repurposing" is a key to our Web 2.0 marketing efforts!

Blogs

Law blogs have become the dominant tools for lawyers to drive their personal profile, and with notable examples in almost every major market, these personal & professional online journals have developed a reputation for being an instant celebrity maker. Personal blog commentary can be used for an infinite number of reasons, but for lawyers, the goals are:

crafting an image of expertise, networking, and increased exposure. Blogging is an easy way for lawyers to rapidly expand their web presence. Regular posts can position a lawyer for mainstream media quotes, referral network expansion, and increased exposure in the search engines. Leveraged properly, the value of incoming blog-to-blog links can also be passed to the firm website, ensuring the firm is found for its core areas of expertise. Most law bloggers tend to generate:

- increased media exposure;
- Increased offers to do speaking engagements;
- More writing & publishing opportunities (i.e., magazine articles);
- A dominant presence in the search engines; and
- Behind-the-scenes exchanges with other experts, which increases one's exposure to an industry's leading strategies & tactics.

Micro-blogging provides a quick connection in less than 90 seconds of thought and key-entry into your smart phone or computer. The newest and hottest Web 2.0 tool of influence is Twitter (Twitter.com). Widely considered the fastest growing tool of web influence, lawyers will hear a lot more about Twitter in 2009. With entries capped at 140 characters – about one sentence – brevity is both desired & required. The big selling point of twitter is how it captures human reaction. News stories are reported before media outlets can respond, and discussion between groups - including lawyers – can provide candid & quotable commentary. Business Week recently co-wrote an entire story via Twitter submitted entries.

Webinars

Educational seminars for clients have always been a marketing tool; many trust and estate lawyers hold them locally to attract new clients. However, such seminars can be difficult and expensive to organize for many areas of practice. Now, lawyers are using new media tools to provide on-line educational seminars to provide additional value to clients, and to showcase expertise and abilities to potential clients.

Screen-sharing services such as GoToMeeting, Adobe Connect, and DimDim, allow users to hold private on-line meetings, visually sharing information on computer screens while talking via telephone. Participants can be all viewing a PowerPoint presentation, looking at a document, or anything else on the computer at the same time, all while communicating by telephone. Lawyers are using this technology to hold informational seminars for clients or seminars to attract new ones.

Videoconferencing

Especially when dealing with multiple groups who may be geographically distributed, facilitating meeting communications via videoconferencing can be another great way to win client loyalty. The easiest facilitation may be a firm-to-client videoconference directly. Or alternately, as many larger multi-office firms do, use the firm's intra-office video conferencing to

support the client's project. The firm comes off as innovative, and the client remembers how their lawyers went out of their way to help them.

Video Messaging/News

In the next year or two, Internet video will be the "Next Big Thing" in Internet marketing. You can expect video based blogs, web-based TV programs, video whiteboard discussions and other video genres. For the incredibly persuasive lawyer or 'the storyteller' in your firm - it might be a perfect match. In short, with that development of better quality video at increased download speeds, the Internet will now do to television news what it has done to newspapers over the past 10 years. Lawyers and firms should begin to exploit the benefits of this growing technology in order influence debate on law and policy, serve as an educational delivery system to clients and potential clients, gather information to learn more about the flattening world marketplace, and expand law firm marketing.

It seems that most of the videos/visuals presently contributed by lawyers and law firms on YouTube are amateurish, boring, and ineffective, so there is plenty of room for others to command a presence. In fact, a good portion of the contributions from lawyers on YouTube may *diminish* reputations, not enhance them. Consumers don't want talking heads statically sitting at a desk talking. To make it interesting, firms must add graphics, camera movements, quality sound, and even music. Yes, YouTube is for amateurs, but that does not mean videos can be amateurish. Remember, what is produced and distributed on YouTube (and similar sites) will be viewed by people used to viewing television as well as seeing professional websites on computer screens. Your competition for consumer eyeballs is not just limited to other law firms, but is made up of all other media your potential clients are viewing.

The use of the Internet for the storage, sharing and delivery of visual/video information is still in its infancy, and is certain to grow in importance in 2009 and beyond. Law firms that take the time and initiative to create, share, and promote interesting, professional, and timely videos will certainly have an advantage in the evolving legal marketplace.

Social Networking

Social networking sites are free services to connect to others through your existing relationships in order to obtain business referrals, and build new alliances for future business.

How to Benefit?

All social and professional networks are free to join. For those readers unfamiliar with the concept, here is a general overview:

The first step on all of them is to build your "profile". Basically speaking, it is putting your resume on-line for others to see. Your profile should include business information, a professional photo, and links to your on-line presence--like your website, blog and other social networks.

Next, start adding connections to other people. Basically speaking, it is taking your contact list off of your computer (or desk) and putting out for the rest of the world to see. The more people you connect with, the more people can connect with you. No longer do friends have to call you for the name of a (fill-in-the-blank) they can get it on-line. More importantly, now potential clients can get *your* name on-line when they need a referral to a lawyer!

Finally, use the tools on the networking site to improve existing relationships with clients, former clients, colleagues, friends, family, and others--recommend people, add new connections, communicate with others. Be sure to check in frequently (daily, if possible) to see what is going on with the people in your network. Almost all of these services have a public timeline of *your* contacts changes and latest news - so getting up-to-date can take mere seconds. Know that every time you participate in your network you make small deposits into relationships in order to maintain them and have them grow.

Becoming involved in social networks helps us manage our existing relationships and build new ones. Spending time through social networks is an investment in future business. Increasing communication is an important aspect of social networking--more frequent, more varied to deepen your relationships. However, like so many marketing activities, many lawyers are loath to invest that time, preferring to "just be a lawyer." Social networking is more fun and less drudgery, especially if you are not comfortable in face-to-face interactions.

- **Illustration:** An often untapped source of quality referrals is an individual's past, and sometimes distant past: childhood friends, elementary & secondary school classmates. While most people will think to reconnect with University peers from their past, one of frequently told benefits of social networking is 'the excuse' to re-connect with people we've known in the early part of our lives. Interestingly, these bonds can be exceptionally strong; and can be especially beneficial when an individual comes from affluent background.
- **Illustration:** If you represent businesses, use your social network connections to add more to your client roster. As part of your overall marketing efforts, identify businesses that you would like to represent and find the names of their top decision-makers. Then search for those names across social network websites (all of them provide this simple service), then find people in your own social network to help you get an introduction to the decision-makers.

Finally, know that you may never meet these people in person, but you will still know who they are. These on-line relationships, while seemingly shallow to some of us, are part of the entire societal movement to an Internet-based world.

Benefits of social networks include:

- Improving Relationships
- Establishing New Relationships
- Permission Marketing: Social media connections have given permission to communicate about your business; this is meant to be less aggressive, so don't violate the "rules"
- Competitive Intelligence on existing clients

- Provides public-facing knowledge about a lawyer and their practice - knowledge & experience
- intangibles like temperament (black & white -vs- shades of grey)
- reduce the risk of entering into business transaction
- It makes the intangible more tangible; makes the invisible more visible

Common Social Networks for Lawyers and Professionals

The common social networks for lawyers today (not necessarily in order) are LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, Legally Minded, LegalOnRamp, and Plaxo. Here is our quick take of each:

LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) - LinkedIn is a social networking site developed exclusively for business professionals (unlike Facebook). It's widely used by the Fortune 500, and currently lists more than 216,000 lawyers. The value proposition of LinkedIn is putting your formal CV online where it can easily be found by other business professionals.

- Related statistic: All 500 of the *Fortune* 500 are represented in LinkedIn. In fact, 499 of them are represented by director-level and above employees.
- LinkedIn is an excellent way to back up word-of-mouth, personal referrals and other forms of traditional marketing. One of the first things most modern professionals will do post-referral is to 'google the person's name.' LinkedIn profiles tend to rank very well in the search engines for individual names; and provide more depth for potential clients to conduct diligence research.
- LinkedIn's 3 degrees of separation between contacts can often provide a network-based route into a potential target client. Leveraging existing relationships to forge new ones is a good example of working smart online.

Facebook (www.facebook.com) - One of the largest networks originally populated by college students. Some larger firms are blocking Facebook access in the name of business productivity. Justifiable? Perhaps. But for solos and small firms this also represents an opportunity. Identifying and targeting relationships with key industry decision makers, especially when a younger and less formal demographic is involved, can be good for business.

- Started out as a university-exclusive network, but has evolved into the world's largest social network with more than 140 million users.
- Not just for kids any more: Fastest growing segment is users over-35.
- The legal industry is growing rapidly on Facebook, including law firm profiles, industry discussion groups, personal document collections.
- Even more than email, younger lawyers are using Facebook as a primary method of keeping in contact with university peers. The often cited benefit is keeping social communication out of their inbox. Many younger lawyers will use email for formal & business communication, and social networks for informal messaging.

MySpace: Not for law firms. Yet.

Legally Minded:

- Launched in late 2008 by the ABA as the premier social network for lawyers.
- Open to all lawyers, not just ABA members
- Has all the professional features you'd expect but none of the "fluff" of FaceBook and some other social networks.
- In short, if you are a lawyer, you need to be here.

LegalOnRamp:

- 7300 members, over half are in-house corporate counsel & GCs. If your existing clients are in this space, they may already be on LOR.
- Fairly active discussion boards: shows that people aren't just joining, but participating.

Plaxo:

- Similar to LinkedIn, without the online CV component, or the adoption rate. Completely focuses on charting relationships.
- If you have a blog, the RSS feed can be connected so your content is syndicated out to your network of contacts.
- Easiest interface for adding contacts (photo based)

Self-Publishing: The Goal of Thought Leadership & Building and Aura of Expertise

The selling of 'expertise' has always been a crucial element of legal marketing. Why else would lawyers with heavy billable targets take months of their valuable time to write a book? Creating an online image for professional services over the web is no different, with one important additional consideration: the web offers a much larger audience. *Thought Leadership* is a phrase that's evolved in online communities to describe those individuals who become the hub of online conversations; individuals whose opinions are watched by hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of others interested in the same topic.

Is this important to referral marketing? Absolutely. It's important because:

- (1) All professionals need to be clear as to what their business is, and the services they provide. How often have we heard from close friends, "I didn't know you did that type of work, or I would have sent them your way";
- (2) A lot of new business can still be had based on reputation and word-of-mouth;
- (3) Even a full out endorsement from a close friend will likely be followed up with that person searching online to validate your background and skills;

Becoming a *thought leader* can deliver one of the longest lasting effects to an individuals' personal brand. If we consider the fact that links are the currency of the web, and that incoming links are one of the key elements to boosting Google rankings, *thought leaders* are often in an ideal position to generate 'buzz' related to their online presence. Regardless of whether it's a blog posting, threaded discussion or a watch of what that person is reading online

(one example of this is a 'linkblog'), it is the individual *thought leader* that online observers will watch -- an effect that interestingly transcends which technology trend is the currently being embraced.

One of the biggest opportunities in the modern web is the ability to brand individuals or small groups as 'experts' in their chosen field. Self-publishing, done well, can offer lawyers a low-cost way to showcase their knowledge and skills. Some of the more popular methods include:

Blogging and micro-blogging, discussed above.

Document Collections (JD Supra) - JD Supra is a new website that allows lawyers to publish longer discourse materials online, including work product. Got hundreds of court filings, marketing materials and decisions sitting on your hard drive? This site helps lawyers share their work product, and in the process, documents experience, successes and niche areas of expertise. It's one thing to tell people you're *an expert*, but quite another to *prove it* with a quantifiable collection of work documents. This service also has the ability to automatically publish abstracts of a lawyer's collection to their blog and into their Facebook account.

Content Distribution Methods:

Once a collection of tools have been chosen for self-publishing, and there are a number of combinations, the next consideration is the routes and channels that will be employed to distribute that content.

Real Simple Syndication (RSS) - RSS has evolved into a lingua franca for web communications. Lawyers need to understand the potential of using RSS to automate their online publishing routines. Almost every tool mentioned in this paper will be aided by RSS technology, including: blogs, microblogging, LinkedIn, Facebook, and the varying legal industry based social networks. Many times, getting these tools to 'talk to each other' using the language of RSS is as simple as cutting and pasting a web address.

Web Based Press Release Services (PRWire, BusinessWire, OnlyWire) - There are many differing opinions on the value the traditional press release. Journalists often prefer to discover stories and issues, which is one of the reasons blogs work so well. Online press release services have also been advocated by search marketers as a link building technique to increase citations from more prominent websites. In some cases, however, the exact opposite has been known to happen. Online press releases tend to create large amounts of low quality incoming web links - which to the search engines can also look like web spam. Websites with very low online profile, for example a PageRank under 3, would be well advised to avoid this strategy. Conversely, law firms with established web profile can get good value from doing online press releases for their best projects throughout the year.

Social Bookmarking (Delicious, Digg, Stumbleupon) - Social bookmarking websites can best be described as personal link collections: web locations that people want to retain for later use. When friends, web-friends, or peers capture your content in their personal collection, it can act as

a form of endorsement. If a lawyer's content is repeatedly cited in these tools, it can become a factor in online profile and reputation. Achieving these citations, however, often requires being involved in the social networks surrounding these tools, and encouraging your personal network to help build these references.

Tips for Crafting an Image Online:

- **Trend of Web 2.0 - Self-publishing & publicly documented written exchanges -**
Establishing a lawyer's presence through self-publishing is important, but equally so, are the online conversations that are now possible. Exchanging comments and online discussion can tell a lot about an individual's personality and demeanor.
- **Content Marketing - using written discourse to craft a personal online image - for both clients & non-clients -** Content marketing is a subtle method for showcasing your track record. Not just telling people you are an expert, but a much more humble approach: showing them with public materials.
- **Opportunity to build subject & regional expertise-** Web brands are all about crafting a picture. Always consider the image you want to create, including which areas of work you want to highlight, and if there are regional barriers to your area of practise. If there are, this should directly influence your content creation strategy.
- **Documenting existing relationships - some clients, some not -** Part of building your online image is the context and credibility that's established when you are '*seen to be*' well connected with industry players. Just as the content you create paints a picture, so do the people you associate with. *One example of this:* Many professionals will carefully cultivating their LinkedIn network to show a finite portion of their business contacts, while pushing personal friends and casual contacts over to Facebook. Both have a good opportunity to produce work referrals, but there may be value in segmenting the two demographic groups.
- **Building relationships without a sales context -** Similar to Rotary, relationships lead to business. Being analytical about the groups to which you belong, and then documenting those connections using these web tools can be a valuable strategy. Even if those groups are not professional or business contacts by nature, webifying those relationships may help to yield new work referrals.
- **Can be applied to multiple levels of legal brands -** While the tendency today is to focus on lawyers, legal brands are multi-dimensional. Similar strategies for social visibility can be applied to: *the firm* as a wholistic entity, individual *practice groups*, and *regional offices* if the firm has multiple offices.
- **Biggest trend right now is the rise of the lawyer brand -** Old adages tend to come back to haunt us, and one of the oldest - *people hire lawyers, not law firms* - is a growing trend in online profile building. Solos and small firms are having great success crafting their image around not only expertise, but aligning that expertise with a human face that is both approachable and trustworthy.
- **Firm brands online are more about a cumulative effect -** One way in which law firms may be able to stand out is to become a matchmaker of smaller brands. By placing more focus on practice expertise and high-profile lawyers, and pairing those groups with the firm's tradition and track record, larger firms can show synergies that might not be possible solos and smaller firms.

Law Web Sites – Are They Still Worth While?

Is the firm website still relevant in a Web 2.0 world? Absolutely! The firm website remains an important cog in the business development process - it qualifies the lawyer, establishing trust, experience and expertise. Other Web 2.0 tools may grab the attention, but the firm website remains a key place to establish credibility. Think: practice group pages, detailed lawyer profiles, success stories, client lists, transaction lists, speaking engagements, media quotes, publications, and so on. The firm site should: 1) tell the visitor your experience with the issue; 2) show you're good at what you do; and 3) that others have trusted and benefited from your past service. Regardless of how someone arrives at your website, it must close the lead opportunity - convincing him or her to pick up the phone or make e-mail contact.

Not more than five years ago, a lawyer's web presence could almost exclusively be found on a firm website. In recent years, many lawyers and firms have expanded their online presence with a variety of new web tools to help create a more complete online persona and a greater indication of their practice expertise. The fundamentals of the Web 2.0 movement – market conversations, and audience participation – should be seen as opportunities to expand a law firm's presence, and not replace existing functionality. This type of *online conversation* can humanize the face of a lawyer's practice, and serve as an informal introduction. An analogy can be made to meeting someone at a cocktail party before a more formal meeting at the lawyer's office. The firm website, like a law office, can be very formal; but when used in combination with the more informal conversations of web 2.0, the mix of communication styles can offer a more complete view of the lawyer in question.

Ignoring the firm website and its role in establishing professional credibility would be a mistake. More so, it would mean removing one of the few elements that law firms do well.

Conclusion

Building a quality referral network isn't an inexpensive investment. Especially if we consider the biggest costs are soft costs: our 'time'. The best advice is to work strategically, and for each attorney to select tools that fit their personal network of contacts. Building and enhancing your referral network requires building closer relationships, both with personal contacts and those on the periphery. Using new web technologies these relationships can be documented, creating closer and more regular contact. Also important, these contacts be leveraged to expand a lawyer's personal referral network.

Another important consideration for lawyers online is to learn about the power of creating web-friends. These virtual relationships will not only serve as advocates who can support a lawyer's online presence, but can also help cultivate new referral opportunities.

It's all about keeping your name and your brand in front of your clients. Like any other marketing and client development tool since the beginning of time, it takes a commitment to participate regularly. As with so many things in life, you have to invest to get something in return.

Supercharge Your Referrals with
Technology
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