

Finding and landing the perfect speaking role

Like any good team, a practice group is only as good as the contributions of the members of that team. This means enhancing the reputation of a practice group must start with the individual attorneys who collectively make up the group and build from there. As legal marketers, our work is often multifaceted because we are faced with a multitude of "customers" with differing opinions about the best tactics to help them build their practices. Fortunately, we have a number of tools in our arsenal to help position attorneys as leaders in their fields. These include newsletters, blogs, publications, social media, media relations, legal rankings and speaking engagements,



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Often times, the last tool on the list – speaking engagements – is underused because public speaking can seem daunting to even the most-seasoned attorney. But if we can push attorneys to give this tool a try, the right speaking engagement can provide attorneys the opportunity to set themselves apart from their peers, allowing them to establish themselves as thought leaders, generate leads and gain connections. For the firm, a speaking engagement is a great way to generate publicity and positive exposure.

Because there are tens of thousands of conferences in the U.S. every year, finding the right conference for an attorney can be an overwhelming endeavor. Given the many summits, training sessions and webinars, which offer a variety of audience sizes, you should be able to identify the one(s) where your attorney will be comfortable presenting. The challenge for legal marketers is how to cull through the multitude of potential opportunities and then identify and select the appropriate conferences to target. It can take hours to identify just a handful of good options. Then, once a list of possibilities is completed, time must be spent on preparing a winning speaker submission.

Where to Start?

As with any search, identifying the attorney's goals and understanding why she wants to speak at events will significantly narrow your search and point you in the right direction.

Identify the Audience

Establishing who, what, where and how often is key to matching your attorney with the right audience. These questions will help get you started.

Who is your target audience?

Identifying who the attorney would like to speak to narrows your search by industry and organization. The audience could be corporate counsel, CEOs, entrepreneurs, other attorneys, etc.

What types of events do they attend?

Beyond conferences, there are summits, forums, conventions, webinars and meetings for everything. Identifying the industry, number of attendees and type of event will help you narrow your search further.

Where is the attorney willing to travel?

Whether an attorney wants to stay in his or her home state or is willing to travel anywhere, knowing geographic limitations will help you identify the best region for an engagement.

Is the firm willing to sponsor the event?

Sponsorship is a tough one. While sponsorship is often expensive, it can sometimes guarantee the lawyer will be presenting.

Once you have identified and vetted the conferences, you must monitor the event websites for the call for speakers and complete the speaking proposal.

Best Practices for Submitting an Attorney to Speak

When completing speaking proposals, it is critical to think like an organizer. If you were planning an event, what would help you in selecting a potential speaker?

Propose Topics that Fit the Event

Conference organizers strive to offer agendas that provide attendees with useful, actionable information. What this means varies by event. If it is a niche summit, then a specialized presentation tailored to the audience is appropriate. For a national conference, broad topics that provide top-level information will be more appropriate for a larger, more-diverse group of attendees. Regardless, proposed topics must be suitable for the type of conference and the attendees.

Multiple Topics

Conference speaking engagements are highly competitive. Organizers frequently receive hundreds of applications for only a few speaking spots. By submitting multiple topics for consideration, you are highlighting the breadth of the attorney's knowledge and improving his or her chances of being selected.

Show, Don't Tell

Try to refrain from offering "how to" presentations since there are many media that people can access to learn how to do something. Focusing the presentation on explaining why and highlighting best practices will leave attendees with a desire to learn more.

Thought Leadership

Given two otherwise equal submissions, organizers gravitate to the attorney who is the established thought leader. As a legal marketer, the time you invest in establishing the attorney's brand increases their presence and likelihood of being selected. The attorney who has an active social media presence and published content will increase followers and attract influencers. Additionally, attorneys who are involved with the host organization and have a more-prominent presence in it will attract more attendees to the conference.

Specialization

Whatever the attorney's practice focus, make sure it is clear to others that your lawyer is a

known thought leader on this subject. As discussed above, publishing articles, tweeting and blogging will help establish thought leadership. Make sure to carry this over to the attorney's bio page and conference materials. As your attorney's industry changes, so should his or her specialty. Keeping on top of trends and adjusting published information accordingly will reinforce renown.

Equally important, never forget that the speaker proposal is a sales pitch. It has to be compelling without being overly self-serving. You are selling the attorney to the event organizers, which should not be difficult if the attorney is established as a thought leader.