

# A Lawyer's Guide to Integrated Marketing

Like many lawyers, I did not learn about marketing in law school. I knew nothing about communications or media relations before law school, either. When I graduated and began practicing at a boutique matrimonial law firm, there was no internal or external marketing resource, and no direct conversations or plans about public relations or branding. One founding partner talked about the importance of reputation for connecting with potential clients and how his connections in the legal community resulted in many referrals, but he never mentioned marketing.

Yet, as I tagged along to bar association meetings, drafted articles that the partner published in a legal journal, and received encouragement to network at Inns of Court sessions, I saw this side of legal practice come to light. We didn't call it marketing, or PR, and it was well before social media, but I understood that the partner was intentionally marketing the practice and generating awareness of the firm's experience – an effort that resulted in new client engagements.

When I decided to leave law after a few years, I enrolled in a New York University course about marketing for professional services. As luck would have it, the instructor was Deborah Brightman Farone, an extraordinary legal marketer then and now – she was inducted into the Legal Marketing Association's Hall of Fame at the organization's 2022 annual conference. Deborah introduced me to the field of law firm marketing, and since then, I have worked with hundreds of lawyers and professional marketers on business development and integrated marketing plans, and have helped them make marketing part of their daily practice.

Most lawyers need to understand what this marketing thing is all about. I see firsthand their appreciation for the importance of building client relationships, cross-selling expertise within the firm, and networking. However, I don't see an understanding of the terms and tactics of legal marketing as often. I think that with so much to learn in law school, there just isn't time to learn the business side of law. Once a lawyer is practicing law, there may be little direction about how to reach prospects and referral sources, stand apart from other lawyers doing similar work, and find time to "market oneself."

I frequently read articles where lawyers describe their routes to becoming partner or managing a practice or office. The words "PR" or "marketing" may not appear in their answers, but as someone who has advised lawyers about practice growth for more than 20 years, I know that positioning themselves as knowledge leaders played a role in the success of their relationship-building and practice development. And that, of course, is marketing.

This article will take you through five steps I always examine with lawyers who are just getting started with marketing, or participating in a firmwide marketing program.



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# 1. Acknowledge the Need for Education

Earning a JD and passing the bar exam prepare a lawyer for the practice of law, but not the business of law. My colleague Vivian Hood recently wrote, "Law schools focus on teaching the art of law, and not so much on the art of connections." Courses about marketing, public relations, or social media are not part of the law school curriculum. Rather, law school teaches students to read cases and apply precedent, analyze facts and frame arguments, and spot the real issues and see the red herrings. Likewise, legal writing courses, moot court competitions, internships, and other hands-on work prepare them for practicing law. Their understanding of marketing may extend to billboards they see on their way to work, law firm ads in legal journals, or networking events with bar associations.

Lawyers know how to practice law, but do not know what marketing is or how it supports business development and revenue. Education is the first step to heightening awareness. On many occasions, I have explained how PR works so lawyers understand the events that result in being quoted in a trade publication, or the behind-the-scenes steps that go into earning a speaking engagement at an industry event.

# 2. Discuss Perceptions of Marketing

The only way to know how an attorney perceives marketing is to ask, and then provide guidance about worthwhile and suitable marketing efforts.

Lawyers often shy away from marketing because they associate it with sales. My colleague explains, "Most attorneys envision some sort of sales when the idea of marketing and business development comes up. They see car salespeople, or aggressive pitches for timeshares. But that is the wrong mindset. Business development is not sales. Business development is cultivating and nurturing relationships."

Relationships can be built in many ways. A common misconception is that marketing success is based on the ability to be a natural rainmaker who can walk into any room and instantly make connections for the firm. That belief can create unrealistic expectations and undue stress, because rainmakers are few and far between. Relationships can be built and nurtured without that unique rainmaker quality. Everyone adapts to situations differently – some of us are introverts, others extroverts, or a combination of traits.

# 3. Assess the Impact of Previous Experiences

Lawyers may base their perceptions of marketing on prior experiences. Lawyers have told me, "I wrote many articles in the past, and they never amounted to any new business."

"I traveled to speak at a conference, and not a single attendee turned out to be a new client."

"I did an interview with a reporter who misquoted me."

"I have a LinkedIn profile, but I'm not interested in doing anything with it; it's just like

Facebook."

Many people fear failure, and many transactional lawyers and litigators are driven by winning. It is no surprise, then, that lawyers question the value of something that has not been a winner in the past. Understanding and acknowledging these hesitations can lead to productive discussions about marketing and, more specifically, about techniques that may be better suited for the lawyer.

## 4. Discuss the Time Commitment

The billable-hour model of legal practice can affect a lawyer's availability to market their practice. Too many business-driving commitments will inevitably frustrate a lawyer and diminish the success of marketing. It's better to work with a distinct set of action items that can take only a few minutes a day rather than many hours each week.

Business development coaches help lawyers identify their advocates – assistants, paralegals, the firm's librarians; people they can partner with to achieve their action items. One managing partner with a busy practice serves as an example of this effort. "He has made a commitment to conduct a certain number of meetings a month with current and potential referral sources." "He enlists a paralegal in the office to help schedule those meetings, as well as maintain his 'marketing' calendar. This allows him to keep his focus on his practice and manage the firm. He regularly checks his calendar for new appointments, and he says he looks forward to seeing whom he will meet with next. Once he realized that he didn't have to do it all and enlisted some help, his plan and marketing goals became not only manageable but systematic."

## 5. Find the Comfort Zone

Marketing efforts must be tailored to a lawyer's personality and interests. Everyone has a different comfort level. Some lawyers love to speak at conferences, and others would rather research a case and write an analysis for a journal. One lawyer may already enjoy engaging on social media, and another may feel crushed for time but would be amenable to doing a 30-minute interview with a reporter. Perhaps a lawyer may enjoy participating in an association's events or committees. "Knowing a lawyer's areas of confidence, and recognizing what causes any discomfort, is crucial to establish the right marketing plan with the flexibility to change direction as needed."

The avenues for marketing include website content and branding, social media posts and engagement, media relations, published quotes and articles, rankings submissions and awards, conferences and speaking opportunities, networking, events, and more. The questions and conversations I've provided lead to more precise choices of marketing tactics, as well as more informed expectations of results. An integrated marketing and business development program offers lawyers a selection of tactics, with deliberate matching to their preferences and the flexibility to change as needed.

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