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Paula Black has advised law firms around the globe on everything from powerful and innovative design to marketing strategy and business growth. She is an award-winning, Amazon-bestselling author and the force behind **In Black & White** (inblackandwhiteblog.com), a blog dedicated to clear, straightforward advice and open discussion of legal marketing issues. For more information on Paula Black, her books and her company please visit paulablacklegalmarketing.com.

5 Legal Marketing Actions You Can Take For Free Today

They say the best things in life are free... and so are some the best things in business development. Even if your budget is tied up elsewhere, there are many things you can do to further your marketing efforts without spending a dime. I always tell my clients that there are no excuses when it comes to the importance of making time for marketing and business development, and I like to think that budget is an obstacle that is easily overcome. Below I've given you five ideas for actions you can take today, and for free.

1. Offer up your knowledge. Look at the list of organizations you belong to. Now think about your practice and how today's issues affect that realm of the law. Is there something in the headlines that has to do with your area of expertise? Is there a new law coming into effect that would be of interest to members of those organizations? Think about how you can offer help and pitch that idea to organization leadership. It might mean penning an article (or guest blogging) for their website or newsletter, giving a speech to members or simply making yourself available to answer questions. If your organizations aren't biting, another option is to go to the press. Sign up for free services such as HARO (Help A Reporter Out) or Reporter's Source and scan the daily e-mails. Writers will put out calls looking for experts in certain areas and there may be multiple opportunities for you to receive regional or national press.

2. Update your materials. Updating marketing materials doesn't have to mean spending thousands of dollars. One of the easiest ways to update is simply through information. Take a look at your bio and see what's missing. Does it speak to the clients you want to bring in or is it simply a resume? If you have more than one specific target for clients, consider creating several versions of your bio to hand out in your marketing package. Don't have a marketing package? Create one. Pull together a bio, firm brochure and any articles of interest that relate to your practice. Have a few ready and you'll be prepared in advance, should an opportunity arise.

3. Organize your address book. You can't always rely on your memory. Somewhere, buried deep inside your contact list or address book, are fantastic referral sources. Take a few minutes each day to scan your contacts and you might be surprised whom you run across. While you're looking, take a few minutes to send an email (or even make a quick call) to check in with former clients and referral sources you haven't heard from in a while. Additionally, try to make useful notes for contacts you wish to nurture. Remembering personal bits and pieces, such as birthdays and spouse's names can mean the difference in getting their business or their referral. Your firm may have software to help organize and track contacts... make use of it!

4. Write an article for the web. Article posting directories (such as this one!) are great, free opportunities to further your marketing and business development simply by getting your name out into the public eye. Think about your practice and the advice and expertise you have to share with the public at large. Then make a list of 10 possible articles that could come out of that knowledge. They don't have to be long (many are between 700 and 800 words), and should be simple, focused and easy to read. Once you've completed the article, think about where to post it. If your audience is other attorneys, look into legal-focused directories, if it's for a certain industry or business be sure to categorize it so those who will want to read it easily find it. It will not only help your SEO but will give you another piece to show potential clients.

5. Evaluate your client service. As I've mentioned in previous articles, everything you do relating to clients is marketing. From the way you answer your phones to the amount of time it takes to return an e-mail, marketing and business development is a part of your day-to-day routine whether you recognize it or not. So why not make sure it's working to help you? Take the time to stop and look around at how your office runs. Do you have a policy for how to handle client calls and emails? Do you have a plan for keeping up with past clients? Does your email have a formal signature with your phone number and address? Ask your staff for input and get them on board with any changes you decide to make. It's the little things that count and having them in place can do more for your business development than you might imagine.

As you can see, not everything having to do with marketing has to cost something. It's often the simplest and most basic ideas that have the biggest impact on clients and potential clients, as well as referral sources. Rather than focus on what you're spending, focus on the time and effort put into each initiative because, in the end, even with all the money in the world, if you're not dedicated to your marketing plan you won't see results.