

Small Marketing Steps with Big Impact **By Aviva Cuyler**

Right now, as you read this, someone out there needs the legal service you provide. If you allow yourself to be quiet enough you might pretend to hear the click of keystrokes as your next lead searches online for what they need. Or, you might imagine the murmur of lunch conversation as your potential prospect asks a friend for a referral. As a solo, you've set yourself the formidable task of connecting with these people – finding them, helping them to find you. Luckily, not all of it is so formidable. There are a number of small marketing steps you can take right now – “small” in cost and relative time commitment – that can have an enormous impact on the growth of your business. Here's a look at some of them.

Write a Plan

This is the single most important marketing action you can take. The writing is the key. Doubtless dozens of great “how-to-get-new-business” ideas pass through your head every day. How to make sense of them all? How to replace your attorney hat with a marketer hat and take next steps? Start writing, even if it's just a single page.

The process of committing important details to paper requires a clarity that makes all the difference. No matter what you do next, begin by crafting the answers to these questions: what service do you provide? Who are your customers? Who are your competitors? How is your service better than theirs? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What is the best way to find (and engage) your customers? And: how much money do you need, monthly, to stay in business?

These basic, yet critical questions are the beginning of a plan. The answers contain information that is essential to the growth of your business. You begin to see things, for example, in terms of your customers' needs. (Your legal service answers those needs and a marketing message should explain this). You develop an understanding of your target market and where to find it. Equally important: where *not* to find it. (Probably don't need to advertise to C-level execs at big pharmaceutical companies in the Yellow Pages.)

Further, you gain an understanding of how much work – how many billable hours – you need monthly to keep the doors open. Critical information that determines how much marketing is enough marketing.

- Start with a written plan

JD SUPRATM

[Give Content. Get Noticed.]

Legal Marketing for lawyers, law firms, legal professionals...

www.jdsupra.com

JD Supra: [Legal Marketing](#) Scoop

- Read: “10 Steps to Create Your Law Firm Marketing Plan,” by Stephen Fairley/The Rainmaker Institute. (Available on JD Supra.)

Cultivate Your Existing Network

Many small business owners become so invested in trying to get what they don't have - new leads, new prospects, new customers – that they often miss what's right under their noses.

Reach out to the connections you already have, your current network. Law practice consultant Allison Shields (of Legal Ease Consulting, Inc.) says: “Former and existing clients can be your best potential source of business if you don't let them forget about you. Schedule in-person meetings with clients every few months (off the clock) with no specific agenda in mind, other than getting to know your clients and their needs better. Periodically check in with former clients, too – they might have new legal needs or know someone who could use your services.”

Attorney and author Carolyn Elefant (of MyShingle.com) agrees: “Host a happy hour or lunch at your office and invite people you haven't seen a while. I always get a couple of referrals after I do something like that. It's not high tech but it works!

Marketers call this type of target “lowest hanging fruit” – you don't need to know the term to see the big value in this kind of small action.

If you're just starting out and don't have much of an existing client base, turn to an even more immediate network: family and friends. Legal business strategist David Lorenzo describes these people as your “natural network.” In “How to Market a Small Firm for Less than \$500” (available on JDSupra.com), he writes: “Leverage this network to the hilt. Call everyone—your friends, relatives, and business associates—past and present. Let them know that you are on your own and explain to them the value you provide.”

- Schedule lunches with existing and former clients, just to stay in touch.
- Regularly call or email your network; keep up-to-date with their news and share yours.
- Send a regular newsletter (by mail or e-mail), sharing useful information with your audience.
- Remember birthdays and anniversaries; mark seasonal holidays; send a handwritten note or personal card.
- Follow up with phone calls or emails (especially if you've said you'll follow up!).

JDSUPRATM

[Give Content. Get Noticed.]

Legal Marketing for lawyers, law firms, legal professionals...

www.jdsupra.com

JD Supra: Legal Marketing Scoop

(Last December, while monitoring online conversations on Twitter, I was struck by how many attorneys mentioned they were writing out holiday cards. No small irony that the legal professionals embracing cutting-edge online technologies still rely on tried-and-true gestures that make a huge difference. A hand-written note, a holiday card.)

Don't Just Market Yourself, Become an Expert

You don't need to *become* an expert: you already are one in your field of practice. (Look at your law school tuition bills to remind, lest you've forgotten!) This requires an attitude adjustment more than anything else. At its core, I think, is the difference between reactive and proactive marketing. It's an approach that allows you to be a passionate lawyer rather than a reluctant marketer.

Instead of trying to get prime placement in the Yellow Pages, or to compete for Google AdWords, look for opportunities to showcase your expertise. Make yourself available as a leading source of free legal information, both online and locally. Your expertise is one of your most valuable marketing assets; share it wisely and it can make an enormous difference to your business growth. (Remember: informed leads still need your legal service.)

- Volunteer at local legal aid organizations, or via national groups like Pro Bono Net.
- Make yourself available as a lecturer for local trade organizations, clubs, or at your bar association.
- Join the online conversation. Start a blog and make comments in the blogs posts of others whenever relevant or worthwhile.
- Pitch and publish articles, both off and online (a point which has additional considerations, discussed later in this piece).

Manage Your Online Footprint

We live at a time when the word "Google" has become a verb ("I Googled him and found some interesting stuff."). More than ever, the Internet is a primary information source in our daily lives. Studies show this as true across most demographics, including C-level executives and your fellow legal professionals (a major source of referrals).

You will be Googled; count on it. Don't just count on it, do something about it. Start by typing your own name into the world's most dominant search engine. What are the results? Now, do it again – this time, Google your competition.

JD SUPRATM

[Give Content. Get Noticed.]

Legal Marketing for lawyers, law firms, legal professionals...

www.jdsupra.com

JD Supra: Legal Marketing Scoop

Online marketers and strategists say “Google is the new resume” and this is what they mean. Because so many prospects and leads inevitably turn to the Internet to learn more about you (by searching on your name), that first page of Google search results has become something akin to a Digital Age resume. Luckily, there’s much you can do to manage those first ten results. Every step in this direction will make an enormous difference.

If you don’t already have one, start an account at LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). Google “likes” LinkedIn and before long you should find that a search on your name includes your profile in the first page of results.

The same holds true for JD Supra (www.jdsupra.com). We’ve noticed that before long most JD Supra profiles also appear in the first page of related search results. Do the same at Tim Stanley’s free legal directory (www.justia.com). With very little effort, you will have taken possession of three of those ten results on Google. You are now shaping your online resume, controlling the message.

Tim at Justia recommends additional steps. Start a blog and (if you don’t already have one) a web site. For both, online offerings range from free to expensive. If you’re just starting out, I recommend using one of the free services. (For free blogs, Tim suggests Google’s Blogger.com or WordPress.com.)

Remember, we’re looking at small steps with big impact. Blogs and websites require a time commitment that makes them more than “small” marketing endeavors. Even so, if you do have the time try your hand at them, no need start by paying thousands of dollars to “own” the first ten results when someone searches your name on Google.

Additionally, author and business strategist Ari Kaplan suggests monitoring your online presence with Google Alerts. Easy to set up and available from any search result page, Google will email an alert any time it indexes a new page containing your keywords. Kaplan suggests not only monitoring your own keywords, but also those of your competition, and essential topics within your practice field.

Add

- Join LinkedIn, Justia, JD Supra, and other networking, publishing, or directory services.
- Start blogging. Build a web site, if you don’t already have one.
- Google your competitors. Start participating online wherever they participate.

JDSUPRATM

[Give Content. Get Noticed.]

Legal Marketing for lawyers, law firms, legal professionals...

www.jdsupra.com

JD Supra: Legal Marketing Scoop

Publish, Publish, Publish

David Lorenzo again (“How to Market a Small Law Firm for Under \$500”): “One good way to get in front of your target market is to write and pitch articles to trade magazines that target your niche. Trade magazines are always looking for good content, and they include a byline with your name and contact information. This will not produce immediate results, but it will have a cumulative effect if prospective clients keep seeing your name and information.”

By regularly publishing in niche markets, you’re not only grabbing the attention of your target audience, you’re also establishing yourself as an expert. If a LinkedIn profile *tells* people what you’re good at (by listing your professional credentials), an informative, on-topic article *shows* it, by showcasing your expertise as you digest, analyze, and present important developments in your field of practice.

Moreover, in this digital Age of Information, regularly publishing your written work has additional benefits with enormous impact on your marketing efforts. As mentioned earlier, it’s relatively easy to manage what people find online if they’re able to search on your name. Much harder: the job of being noticed in the crowd by people who don’t know your name but need your service. This is where Internet publishing makes all the difference in the world.

Your online written work will almost certainly be indexed by the major search engines (Google, Yahoo!, etc.). The more regularly you publish, the more chances you have of connecting with someone searching for the type of information you are providing. If the work connects back to you – well, that’s powerful marketing. These days we call it Content Marketing.

This model is at the heart of JD Supra, where legal professionals publish and distribute filings, briefs, articles, and other documents *and* connect the work to a practice-specific profile.

Content marketing is also one of the drivers in the popularity of blogging. It is no longer necessary to rely on the schedules and whims of busy editors; now, we can create and brand our own online publishing channels. For those who have time for it, blogging is a key part of this strategy.

(For the length and focus of this article, I’ve barely scratched the surface of online content publishing. Once you are in the habit of regularly posting work online, there are ways to “connect the dots” – as we say around here: to connect who you know with what you know. And the possibilities of this kind of dynamic online distribution and promotion

JD SUPRATM

[Give Content. Get Noticed.]

Legal Marketing for lawyers, law firms, legal professionals...

www.jdsupra.com

JD Supra: Legal Marketing Scoop

are practically endless. The topic of another article, perhaps.)

- Identify trade periodicals that influence your target market. Regularly pitch story ideas with the goal of getting published as often as possible.
- From Ari Kaplan again: ask for an interview with a leading figure in your field, record it and post online as a podcast. (“Easier than writing an article.”)
- Begin an email newsletter, advertise it (and solicit subscribers) on your website and blog. Regularly send your audience real content.
- Publish online: on blogs, on JD Supra, wherever you find a target market.
- Repurpose. Don’t let your work collect virtual dust on your hard drive. Get it online, as much as possible – let Google and the other search engines index it.

Ask

Other than committing a plan to paper, this may well be the easiest thing you can do, with the greatest impact. We hear it all the time from business development professionals, sales teams, and marketers: you don’t get what you don’t ask for. And so: ask for the business.

Here’s how best-selling author Patrick McKenna, a leading international figure in legal practice strategy, puts it: “A top fear shared by all of us is having to ask for the business, even if we know we can meet a prospective client’s need. (‘I don’t want to appear too pushy.’) Often, it’s just a simple matter of the appropriate wording. Asking for the business is the natural conclusion of having a solution to your prospect’s problem. All you have to do is say so.”

As a solo lawyer who ran her practice for over twelve years, now the founder of an exciting new online venture, I know that these are words to live by. And so, I close with not action items but further suggestions from Patrick. Here are some phrases that he thinks might help you to close the deal:

- We would be honored to work with you on this matter. What will it take to get started?
- It looks like we have created the right solution for what you need, and we can do this within a reasonable budget. Are you ready to move forward?
- You said that you would like to have these agreements in place by the end of this month. Working backwards, that gives us only two weeks to get all the parties to meet, so I’d recommend starting on Tuesday. Does that work with your schedule, or would you rather begin on Monday?

JD SUPRATM

[Give Content. Get Noticed.]

Legal Marketing for lawyers, law firms, legal professionals...

www.jdsupra.com