

How Will You Make 2015 a Game Changer? - #1

By Kimberly Alford Rice

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About this time every year, I receive a flurry of calls and e-mails from clients and contacts who are indecisive and unclear as to what they can do to make the new year successful for their practice. I hear a variety of comments along the lines of, "I've tried this marketing tactic and that marketing tactic and it just doesn't work" Sound familiar?

Therefore, I would pose, how will *you* make 2015 a different kind of year? A game changer?

While lawyers may know "what" they need to do to promote themselves and their services, I have found over many years that:

They don't always understand the "how" to promote themselves and their services;

More often than not, they approach "marketing" like a blinded quarterback — in a scattershot manner; and

They are unable or unwilling to consistently follow through (usually due to time-management issues).

To get started on strong footing and to make 2015 a different kind of year for you and your practice, allow me to challenge your marketing mindset.

Times Have Changed

For decades, professional services providers such as lawyers, accountants and others have been reluctant marketers. They thrived in a cozy world where networks of personal relationships and word-of-mouth referrals brought them enough new clients to grow a profitable business. Those days are all but gone and lawyers who bury their heads and do not embrace the "new normal" do so at their own peril.

For many services buyers, personal relationships are still the driver of purchase decisions, but the cracks in that buying model are now apparent. In a recent study of client buying behavior, analysts found that more than half of professional services clients are receptive to switching service

providers. *More than half — ouch!* Sports and theater tickets, trips to the golf course and other such perks are losing some of their appeal as ways to strengthen relationships.

To compete for and win profitable work, lawyers must rethink familiar marketing practices, and focus their marketing strategies on the issues that *really* matter to clients.

Begin to shift your marketing mindset by challenging four common myths.

Myth 1: Great Work Wins the Day

There is a long-held belief by many that producing exceptional work product and results is an effective marketing strategy and enough to build a healthy practice. Seems reasonable, but sadly is not the case in an uber-competitive marketplace and in these economic times.

It is true that superior delivery is essential for long-term success, but assuming that word of your great performance will travel through your clients' organizations and to that of others without proactive and sustained effort on your part is wishful thinking and not a wise business move.

To create awareness and build a strong reputation, lawyers must significantly ramp up client-level communication and integrate the details of the clients' successes you have helped them achieve into a well-crafted marketing plan.

Myth 2: "Following the Leader" Is a Sound Strategy

Many law firms follow a safe and predictable strategy — a series of "safe" marketing tactics based on what "other" law firms and lawyers are doing.

The result of "me-too" marketing is that: it does very little to differentiate one law firm from its competitors; and it often does not work because all law firm targets are not the same. The result: attorney frustration and business reduction. Lose-lose.

Better to lead your marketing communication in a more client-focused manner, such as your detailed understanding of a client's problem followed by how you helped others in a similar situation. See what a different approach can make.

In our next installment, we will examine additional marketing myths which trip up some lawyers and how to overcome them.