

What You Need to Know About Marketing Your Practice in 2012

By Sharon Berman

You've heard it before. "The more things change, the more they stay the same." When it comes to marketing your practice in 2012, some aspects of marketing, especially the tactical aspects, are continuing to change, while many fundamentals, such as the need to know who your market is, remain the same. Social media – LinkedIn, blogs, Facebook, etc., – is growing in importance to a firm's overall marketing strategy as a means to magnify traditional marketing tactics, such as networking. And, with the advent of these opportunities, marketing channels have become more integrated than ever. As we move into 2012, it is important then to understand how this wide array of tools works together so that you can effectively market your practice in the New Year.

Integrated Marketing

Integrated marketing has always been the watchword, and continues to grow in importance. Integrated marketing means each component reinforces the other – reinforcing your brand – ensuring that every piece has the same look and communicates the same message points. For instance, your hard copy marketing materials encourage your prospective clients to visit your website or related micro-sites, which are then linked to your social media profiles and blogs. Intertwined marketing provides more channels through which you can convey your messages, taking them even further and raising your visibility. Each time you post an article on your website, mention it on your blog, or even better yet, have it mentioned in someone else's blog, for example, you are using online channels to make it known that you are a published, credible expert. Opportunities such as this that create greater visibility



and demonstrate your expertise allow you to establish and enhance critical relationships, which are the core of your success.

Because today's marketing efforts are intrinsically connected, there is always more to do. Perhaps you are considering updating your website. But that is just a starting point. From there, you want to think about how you can expand. Perhaps you plan to write a blog, post more frequently to your blog, or post something on a regular basis to your LinkedIn profile or Facebook page.

Online Marketing

The egalitarian nature of online marketing means that everyone has these same opportunities, and in some ways, because the playing field is leveled, smaller firms have more opportunity – more opportunity to demonstrate their expertise and credibility that allows them to go head to head with larger firms. If you haven't already, it's something you want to take advantage of now. It makes sense, then, to move items like your website, LinkedIn and Facebook to the top of your marketing priority list. In terms of updating and expanding your online presence, it's important to take steps such as enhancing your attorney's biographies on your website, and completing your

LinkedIn profile – all to immediately persuade prospects that you and your firm are right for them.

There are attorneys who minimize the importance of their online presence – "The kinds of clients we want will not do a search online." This is changing every day, as the world moves online for everything. While it's true that prospective clients and general counsel will ask their peers for referrals, they may do so after they have searched online and found a number of different law firms already. If you are not visible online, you aren't among them, and you lose the exponential advantage of familiarity – a prospect being referred to you as well as having already come across your site in their search. There's legitimacy from just having appeared as part of the search results.

This is also the time to optimize your website. You want to appear as high as possible in search engine rankings while you still have a competitive advantage. Past thinking was that search engine optimization (SEO) was only for personal injury, bankruptcy, or foreclosure defense firms. However, SEO is important for any kind of law firm that wants to be credible and claim its place in 2012 and the years ahead. The movement toward searching for everything online will only increase, and now is the time to be getting into the game while others are waiting on the sideline.

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Sharon Berman is principal of Berbay Corp., a marketing and public relations firm specializing in working with law firms. She can be reached at berman@berbay.com

Because you are thinking long-term, you know that you need to cultivate a younger demographic, so you want to know that your professionals will help you reach new audiences.

Marketing Your Practice in 2012 *(continued)*

Proliferating marketing channels offer opportunity as well as challenges. With so many outlets clamoring for attention, it's important to be creative in order to keep your prospects' attention and focus. You need to make the material "sticky," as they say, so that prospects actually read it or at least skim it before they turn their attention elsewhere. Tailoring material and speaking to a very specific group's interests ranks high on your ability to attract attention. Because others are vying for the same attention you hope to garner, targeting your messages is more important than in the past. Segmenting your markets and tailoring your messages to those markets increases the potential for attention.

Expanding opportunity can be overwhelming, especially if you've let marketing inertia carry your business along. It can be daunting enough to consider revamping your firm's website, let alone contemplating how to take advantage of other online channels. It's critical to avoid "overwhelm." Just take one small step at a time and keep moving forward. These incremental actions add up to the completion of bigger projects.

Go Mobile

Prospective clients are viewing websites on their smartphones, iPhones, iPads, and other mobile devices. Consequently, it's important that the marketing material you develop be readable on these devices. As you produce new materials, you want to consider how they will translate. For

instance, you may want to have a separate mobile website if your current one does not read well on a mobile device. That being said, if you have not looked at or updated your main website for years, that's the place to start before you create one just for mobile viewing.

There are those who eschew online marketing saying that they market through relationships. While professional services professionals build their business through relationships, these can be initiated and augmented through a variety of means. That is the beauty of an online world. Whether through social media, your website, your blog, or other online vehicle, you have so many more opportunities to get in front of people and start new relationships that you can subsequently nurture offline. However, because prospective clients' attention is being pulled in so many directions at once, you have to communicate consistently with those you know so that you create and maintain top-of-mind awareness.

Building Relationships

Your attorneys are your sales forces, and the ones building relationships. Consequently, be certain your attorneys have the right training and are included in your marketing plan. Even if marketing is only a small portion of what your team is supposed to be doing, everyone still needs to understand that they have a crucial role in developing and holding on to business.

As online marketing opportunities grow, you are being offered more marketing silver bullets than ever. It's easy to attend one seminar or another and come away crazed because you don't yet have a Facebook page or are not yet Tweeting about where you ate lunch. The truth is there is no such thing as a marketing silver bullet. You want to be thinking about the range of marketing tactics from the traditional to new school, considering strategically what makes sense for you and your firm.

Some of the marketing vehicles you have available – Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook – are different and fresh, but you still need to build on a solid foundation of knowing who your market is, understanding what your objectives are, realizing what your communication points are, and being consistent with those messages no matter what vehicles you select. Even with the advent of new options, there really is nothing new in marketing under the sun. It's how you execute on each tactic that makes a difference. For example, if every attorney in your field is blogging, *how* you blog is key. Execution of everything you have available to you is what differentiates you and your firm. If and how you execute your marketing plan is what will build a stronger bottom line for 2012. ■

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LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/sharonberman Email: berman@berbay.com