

Women Lawyers and Marketing

Opportunities for women in law firms today abound and marketing is no different. However, there are several keys to success that are critical to incorporate into your personal game plan. This article will describe the new rules of law firm and lawyer marketing and the keys to your success in capitalizing upon them.

The New Rules of Law Firm Marketing

Old marketing ways are no longer effective which is a golden opportunity for women.

Rule 1: Credibility marketing gets you visibility but direct marketing gets you the business. Credibility marketing involves speaking (seminars, conferences, etc.) and writing (articles, newsletters, white papers, etc.). These tools at one time actually brought in clients. Today they only get you the visibility so that you can be effective in your direct marketing. The best credibility activities are geared to business and industry groups, not civic, community or legal groups.

Direct marketing involves networking at meetings like industry groups (e.g. Indiana Bankers Association, the National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts or NAREIT, and the Securities Industry Association), visit to meet with clients or prospects, and formal bidding contests. These are the activities that actually get you the business. Rarely does the credibility activity do so unless you are the first in your market to be visible for an area such as some firms were with Y2K a few years ago.

Rule 2: Team marketing works; lone cowboy approaches don't. We call it the 90/10 rule. Ninety percent of lawyers in firms are not the historically natural marketers. They have said over the years "if I had wanted to be a salesperson, I would not have gone to law school." Approximately 10 percent of lawyers were the natural marketers, the "rainmakers" who brought in one million dollars-plus in business each year. About five years ago, the rule started to change. The ways that many rainmakers brought in business historically do not work anymore --old boys' networks, social or civic contacts, golf outings, and generally, individual lawyer visits (i.e., the lone cowboy approach). Today, our data on client selection of law firms show that law firms are hired more based on "demonstrated expertise" than on personal loyalty. It was that personal loyalty (often called the Good Old Boy Network) that helped the 10 percent land their business.

Our data shows that every member of the 90 percent has the ability to bring in business, women and men, from the newest associate to the most senior partner. For the 90 percent or the 10 percent to land business today requires visibility as an expert in an area of law and then, the personal relationship building to actually get hired. However, the 90 percent particularly will only be successful in landing significant and profitable business with "team" direct marketing efforts.

Team marketing efforts are critical because the top decision-makers rarely make the decision unilaterally. There are multiple influencers (called in sales training parlance, primary, gatekeeper, user and coach influencers). If one of your firm's "10 percent" tries to land the business the old way using only one contact, the effort frequently backfires and results in the firm receiving little, if any, work. Team marketing does not mean that you send a team of four or more people to meet with these influencers. It means that each person in your firm who knows someone in the company should be strategizing together and then, approaching their individual contacts in an organized way.

Women lawyers are critical in this process for two reasons. First, women are in one or more of the influencer's roles for legal work in almost every company and they more and more often want to hire women lawyers. Second, most companies in this country are seeking a diverse workforce and want to hire outside service

providers that reflect this same diversity. Our interviews of law firm clients indicate that a majority prefer to hire women lawyers over men. Women have never had more **opportunities as lawyers** in our history and it will only continue to improve.

Rule 3: Entertainment is not an effective marketing tool anymore. For years, law firm marketing consisted primarily of golf outings, fishing and hunting trips, ball games and other entertainment. This was a disadvantage for women lawyers in two ways: (1) these were not activities that a majority of women enjoyed, and (2) it put women in uncomfortable situations with primarily male clients or colleagues. Today, entertainment is rapidly declining in marketing usefulness for several reasons:

Many companies have informal or formal policies limiting or discouraging it.

Many busy executives would rather have an evening at home with their family or to work out than out being wine and dined.

For the 90 percent of lawyers, entertainment is not an effective way for them to establish credibility and sell their firm's services.

As a result, lawyers male and female are finding new and better ways to market. This includes networking at trade association meetings, business lunches (with a business purpose, not simply to participate in talk), relationship management visits to all existing clients, and more.

Rule 4: Marketing takes time, persistence and patience. Our data shows that to have an effective marketing program, partners in firms must average 400 non-billable, investment hours on marketing per year. Those who bring in significant amounts of business spend even more. This is an issue for many women lawyers who are already struggling to balance work and personal lives but long-term, it results in more control over your life and your practice, more power within your firm, and more satisfying practices. Women lawyers have an advantage in terms of persistence and patience, since these are both qualities that most women have more than men.

Keys to Women as Rainmakers

Women lawyers have many advantages over men with these "new rules" in operation. These include: More companies are seeking to hire women lawyers today. Even more significantly, more influencers within companies are women or prefer to hire women lawyers. While a majority of CEOs and general counsel are still male. More importantly, a majority of influencers (especially the gatekeepers, users and coaches) are women already. It is the rare situation we see that women are not involved in the hiring of law firms in some way.

The best years for marketing your practice today are between 35 and 50. Ten years ago, it was over 55 years old. This is because most of the influencers of decision-making for legal services are between 35 and 50. This group is more likely to be female and/or inclined to hire women. Also, most women lawyers are in this age group (or rapidly approaching it).

Women are better team players and are more willing to set aside ego and short-term gain to work together to land new clients. Since team marketing is what works, this give women an advantage.

The most important skills in relationship building are active listening and demonstrating understanding of their situation. Studies have shown that women excel at both.

At least for another few years, there are more opportunities for women and minorities to speak, write, serve on association committees or councils, etc. than for men. You can accomplish the goal of increased visibility as an expert as well as direct marketing through these opportunities. While this does take time, women accomplish more in marketing with less time than men as long as these opportunities exist.

Business Plan

Recognizing all of these advantages, one important step for all women lawyers is to have a personal business plan. Every business and profession has proven if you plan, you perform better. Our profession is no different. Our data shows that historically a smaller percentage of women lawyers have had plans than

men. Research about women generally has shown that women are more likely to have personal life goals than professional life goals. While this is likely changing as cultural and other obstacles to women are being removed, it is still evident in many law firms that men plan their career paths more than women. Yet, there is nothing to prevent you from having a personal business plan and from participating in the practice group and office plan implementation in your firm. Again, while it takes time, the effort will pay off more handsomely if you have a plan and work with others on implementing the firm's plans.

Your business plan should include these simple elements:

Two or three simple and realistic goals. These might be to obtain three new clients this year, to give two speeches to targeted audiences, to become better known in your specialty by banker referral sources or to get on the "short list" of approved counsel in your specialty for three companies.

Action steps in the following areas:

-- Professional development. What do you need to do to develop your specialization? What do you need to do to become known in your area?

-- Practice management. What forms or systems do you need to develop to enhance your ability to practice efficiently, sanely, or to differentiate yourself? (These systems take time up front but can save your personal life in the long run).

-- Credibility building. What speeches or articles do you need to do to be seen as an "expert" in your area? What honors or appointments do you need (e.g., American College of Trial Lawyers, bar association posts, certifications or degrees)? Keep in mind that speaking is usually better than writing in terms of the time for marketing versus the payoff.

-- Direct marketing. What clients, prospects or referral sources do you need to be spending time building relationships with? Keep in mind that this is the most important part of your plan in terms of landing business and typically the most neglected.

No plan will be successful unless you include target dates and deadlines. The thought process of developing the plan is a lot of the value but if you want to bring in business, you must hold yourself accountable and actually implement it.

For more information about law firm diversity, see our [Diversity Resources](#).

For more information about diversity, see the following articles:

[Law Firm Diversity: They All Talk the Talk, But It's Harder to Walk the Walk](#)

[Why Upper and Lower Class Attorneys Rarely Succeed in Law Firms: How Race and Class Often Hinder Law Firm Success](#)

Learn more about law firm diversity in this in-depth book:

[Law Firm Diversity: How Race, Gender, Age, Social and Economic Divisions Impact the Hiring, Retention and Advancement of Law Firm Attorneys](#)

Interested in Learning More About Legal Hiring? Read the Definitive Guide:

[How to Hire a Legal Recruiter for Your Law Firm: How Law Firms Recruit Attorneys Using Legal Recruiters](#)

