

RD LEGAL COMMUNIQUE...

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Management, Strategy and Leadership

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THE ABCs OF MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

By Bob Denney

Most lawyers make marketing and business development more complicated than needed. Developing new business – and keeping clients – isn't rocket science. In fact, it's as simple as ABC.

Ask good questions. When you first meet a possible client, begin by asking open-ended questions such as: "Tell me about yourself and your business (or practice)." "What do you want to accomplish with this project (or matter or case)?" "What are your expectations?"

Be a problem solver, not a problem maker.

Communicate. Tell prospective clients how you would approach their matter – and what it will cost. Keep existing clients informed. "Shower them with information" is still a good rule.

Delegate. Assign as much of the work as you can to qualified junior lawyers, paralegals, support staff or non-lawyer entities to reduce the fee. Explain to the client why you are doing this and that you will be reviewing everything and will be responsible, no matter who does the work.

Educate clients and prospects on how you can help them. People don't want to be sold legal services. They want to be provided with information and answers.

Focus your practice on certain areas or industries or certain types of clients. Don't try to be all things to all people.

Get out of the office. Visit clients, referral sources and prospective clients. If they're located too far away to visit, don't send an e mail. Call them.

Help your clients in their businesses or with their problems. Introduce them to other people who can be of service to them – sources of capital, accountants, potential customers.

Identify other services clients need.

Jury isn't only a group of people encountered in the courtroom. Your clients are the toughest jury you will ever face. Make sure their verdict is in your favor.

Know your clients' business. You can't help them unless you do.

Listen to your clients and prospects. And hear what they tell you

Market as if your practice depended on it. It just might.

Never fail to promptly return clients' phone calls or respond to their e mails, no matter how trivial they may seem to you.

Omit the term "billing partner" from your vocabulary. Clients hate that term. Instead, use the term "responsible partner" or "responsible attorney" because that's what clients want you to be.

Pactice marketing and business development every day.

Quality work and service are defined by the client, not you. Be sure your clients feel you are delivering both.

Request feedback. Ask your clients what you can do to improve your service. Then do it.

Sweat the details. It's often the little things, even typos in a letter or memo, that shake clients' trust and cause them to question your ability.

Treat every clients as if he or she were your only client.

Under-promise. Then over-deliver. Don't just meet deadlines. Beat them.

Value is when the client feels the work you did or the result you obtained was worth the fees they paid – or more. Deliver it.

Word-of-mouth is still the best form of marketing. Do everything you possibly can to ensure that your clients are spreading the good word about you and your work.

X-ray your procedures, office operations and client service regularly to make certain you are as efficient and attentive as you should be – and as your clients expect.

Yes is a very important word. Don't be afraid to use it but also have the courage to say "No". The magic words to a client are "Yes, if . . ." or "No, but . . ."

Zeal makes all the difference between you and your competition. Maintain it for your practice and for your clients. Your energy and enthusiasm will distinguish you from other lawyers.

So the next time you can't think of what you should be doing to grow your practice, remember your ABCs. Successful marketing and business development are just that simple.

Bob Denney has been providing strategic management and business development counsel to law firms and companies throughout the United States and parts of Canada for 40 years.