How “Newly Solo” Lawyers Can Get Their First Clients

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We in the legal industry tend to know a lot of lawyers, and as a result of the abysmal job market, many of our colleagues and friends are choosing to branch out and start their own firms. And good for them! But, as they embark on this entrepreneurial journey, inevitably, the question arises, “as a solo attorney starting my own practice, how do I find clients?” While there is obviously no single correct answer to this question, there are some good strategies a new lawyer should implement to start building their book of business. These are some of the most common methods for how solo attorneys get clients.

Networking

“Sigh.” I know, my thoughts exactly. We all know how exhaustinglegal networking can be. But for a lawyer starting their own firm (or frankly any professional entering a new field) this is one of the most important things you can do.

A common mistake lawyers make is to network only with fellow attorneys. While fellow attorneys can be a great source of referrals, it’s also important to build your network outside the legal profession. The real key to networking is to build a network with people *outside* of law, but within your target industry.

For instance, if you are focusing on bicycle accidents in your practice, it would serve you well to take on cycling as a hobby and join a cycling group. Eventually, if you are good, your reputation will spread in your community of cyclists and you will become known as the “go-to lawyer” if a bicycle accident occurs.

If you are unsure how to begin networking, I’d recommend starting to look for events listed on social sites like LinkedIn or Facebook, and sites dedicated to networking like Meetup.com. Keep in mind, networking is a lot like sales – it’s all a numbers game. The more people you have in your rolodex the more likely you are to find new clients.

Also, remember that networking is a longterm approach to gaining new business. Chances are you’re not going to immediately land a new client at each event you attend. Implement what I call, “the slow play” when networking. In other words, don’t try to sell yourself or your services. Just be friendly and kind and build a relationship, and the business will come down the road.

Referrals

For most experienced attorneys,referrals are what keep them in business. Most young attorneys want to get to this level of sustainability quickly, but they may not know the necessary things they must do to get there.

Cultivating quality relationships with both clients and lawyers is the key to building your law practice through referrals. That means you need to go above and beyond the bare minimum. Don't just be an attorney to your clients. Be a friend. Be a counselor. Be a therapist when necessary. And knock your clients' socks off with exceptional customer service.

Doing little things like sending a hand written thank you note when a client signs your retainer, rather than just taking their money, goes a long way. Do the same when another attorney refers a client your way. Show people you care, and that you truly value their business.

Also, never assume that there is such thing as a free lunch. You get what you give. You should be referring clients and friends out to other attorneys at every chance possible, and trying to establish reciprocal referral agreements with other firms. It's not worth taking on a client who isn't right for you just because you could use the income.

Another good way to increase your referrals is to focus on a niche legal field and become known as the specialist. There are plenty of lawyers who do civil litigation or PI, and vying for referrals in those areas of practice is basically a popularity contest.

However, if you are known as the go-to "early stage startup lawyer," the "sexual discrimination defense lawyer," or the "medical marijuana lawyer," then you will become the first person who comes to mind anytime a referral is needed. Specialization is the best way to distinguish yourself from the rest of the field.

Public Appearances

Public speaking is not always the first thing that comes to mind when lawyers brainstorm on how to generate new business, but it can be very effective nonetheless. The key to a good relationship with your clients starts with trust, and the best way to build trust is to establish your credibility in your community.

Share your experiences and knowledge with a local university. Volunteer to talk at your law school about your field. Not only will you gain trust, but also more things to add to your resume and more topics you can discuss with your clients about your involvement in the community.

You may also be surprised that some prospective clients actually come from these speaking events. Maybe your speaking engagement is about a legal topic an audience member has been struggling with. Maybe your name comes up later and they remember you from the event.

Whatever the case may be, if you choose to do public appearances, be sure to always make your contact information easily accessible, and make yourself available for questions after the event. You are sure to make at least a few good connections at each speaking engagement. Public speaking is underutilized as a way for solo attorneys to get clients, but it can be an excellent way to build rapport and grow your business.

Online Marketing

Online marketing for lawyers has become a hot topic and a highly competitive space over the past decade. The reason for this is that more than ever before, people are turning to the internet to seek legal help and find a lawyer.

If you want to have any chance of succeeding in today's legal world, you've got to have a presence online, and you've got to use technology to help grow your law practice. Here are some common ways for how new lawyers get clients through online marketing.

- **Pay-per-click marketing (PPC) –** Google is the number one place people search for lawyers, so advertising there makes sense. It can be very expensive depending on your practice area and location, but also highly effective if you have a good website that converts clients. Make sure you are using services like Google's Local Service Ads and Clio Grow's Marketing Sources reporting to see exactly from where your website traffic is coming.
- **Search engine optimization (SEO) –** This is the process of optimizing your website for organic search results (i.e. showing up on the first page of Google for free). It's the holy grail for many law firms, but it can cost an arm and a leg to hire a top SEO firm to get you there.
- **Blogging and email marketing –** Starting a law firm blog with loads of useful content is a great way to establish credibility with your target clients. You should also collect emails and send out periodic updates to your subscribers to keep your law firm at the top of mind. Oh, and it comes with *major* SEO benefits (see above).
- **Social media –** Facebook and Twitter are great places to share updates from your firm and post the content you create. There are huge benefits to having a good LinkedIn profile as well. Build up your followers and update them frequently. Again, staying top of mind is the goal.

- **Avvo –** Your Avvo rating matters, no matter how arbitrary it may be. You should sign up for a free profile and work to increase your Avvo rating however you can, because prospective clients certainly take it into consideration.
- **Lawyer Lead Gen Programs –** Another expensive option, but one that can deliver some quick client leads if you are desperate. The closure rate isn't great, and the leads are not always the best clients, so approach with caution. TotalAttorneys and LegalZoom attorney services are good places to start.
- **YouTube and Videos –** YouTube is becoming one of the most heavily used search engines on the internet, so you should be there. Creating free video guides is a great way to generate awareness and get people to your website or blog. Using video introductions of yourself and your law firm on your website is also a good idea because it helps clients feel more comfortable about approaching you.

One of the best marketing tactics for solo law firms is having a great, optimized website. If you're looking for tips on how to create the best website for your solo law firm check out our post: The Complete Guide to Solo Attorney Website Design.

Conclusion

Building a law practice from scratch is no easy task. By focusing on the strategies above you can get your law practice on the right track and land your first clients. The key is to just jump in and get started!

Pick a strategy and run with it. It isn't going to happen overnight. But, given enough time, and with a consistent effort, you will surely find success. Clio provides legal management software for firms of all sizes, including solo law firms. Are you ready to let Clio take the non-billable tasks off your hands? Book your demo today.

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