

Rainmaking

Building Your Reputation: Promoting Services with Articles and Presentations

SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN | In response to marketplace and client demands, lawyers are increasingly promoting niche services. Defining your expertise in a particular practice area helps you target clients and highlight your distinctive strengths. Here are pointers on how to proceed.

To begin, you want to identify where you should focus your reputation-building efforts. Newer fields of practice, where you are likely to be one of only a few experts, are worth considering first. Ask yourself the following:

- Which of your skills or current service areas are distinctive?
- Which areas are feeders to high-quality, high-paying work?
- Which are vulnerable to economic cycles or encroachment from nonlawyers?
- Which services will see the greatest demand in the next three years?

Now evaluate which market segments offer the greatest opportunity for you, and also where you already have a track record. Analyze your

existing client base and identify clusters of categories into which your clients fall. Along with geography, you might consider:

- Industry segments—in real estate, for example, the categories might be commercial, residential, institutional construction or development; in high-technology they might be software, hardware, nanotech, biotech or medical devices.
- Client types and demographics—for example, public or private businesses, tax-exempt organizations, professional firms, blue-collar employees, legal or illegal immigrants, and so forth.

Once you've identified niches to focus on, there are a number of ways you can increase your visibility. These include writing and publishing articles; giving speeches and presentations; blogging; becoming an expert source for the media; getting involved in business, professional and trade associations; and engaging in civic leadership.

This installment of Rainmaking focuses on the first two strategies. We'll cover the other four in columns to come.

Articles: What to Write About and Where to Publish

Getting published can help you gain name recognition and enhance your credibility in a niche area. Consider recent cases or hot issues on which you have worked, which you have analyzed substantively or about which you have spoken, particularly those involving creative initiatives and unusual clients.

Writing about more scholarly topics is typically only useful if your goal is to build your reputation among other lawyers (so they will refer work to you). Practical subjects and articles are more appropriate for clients, prospects and nonlawyer referral sources.

Depending on your personal branding or business development goals, you should submit to a publication or online site that is read by your clients, prospects and referral sources. Only publish in your local or regional legal publication if you have a distinctive specialty to offer. These steps can help you find the right publication:

- Ask sources in this niche which industry and general publications they read and find useful.
- Familiarize yourself with these publications and Web sites, especially with what types of articles they run, and on what range of topics.
- Research the publications produced by related trade and business organizations.



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How to Get the Most Impact from Your Piece

Write succinctly and accessibly—nobody wants to read an article that's half footnotes. Try to make the reader interested enough to call you on the phone. Have someone else read your draft and consider coauthoring with a likely client or referral source—even if you do most of the work, this will engender much goodwill.

Draft an outline and an introductory paragraph first and float them to the editors of the publications you've researched. Pitch topics as how-tos or "10 Steps to Better XXX," and use catchy titles and provide practical, do-it-yourself tips. If the subject particularly interests the editor, explore the feasibility of a regular column or series of articles.

Occasionally, writing an article on a hot topic for a leading publication can immediately result in new business inquiries. Most times, however, your article will provide greater value after the day of publication, when you can use it in a number of ways to further communicate your expertise. So once an article has run, obtain the publisher's permission and get it reprinted properly, being sure to appropriately credit the original publication source on all copies. Distribute copies to all the lawyers in your firm and send reprints with a note or e-mail to clients and prospects. Add a link to your Web site bio and practice group description to allow visitors to go to your article. You might also edit the article for the firm's client newsletters or e-bulletins, or rewrite it in more detail and then submit the revision to other journals.

Speeches and Presentations: Topics and Target Audiences

When clients are asked to rank the effectiveness of lawyers' marketing

activities, speeches and seminars often top the list, as they offer prospective clients both general education and a chance to gauge your personal expertise and style. Speaking publicly is not something most relish, but given the right audience and topic, it can be a very effective way to communicate your particular skills.

As with articles, select a topic that's timely and fresh, of which you have deep knowledge and distinct experience. Find a new or unique angle that defines the issue in the audience's terms, something that either solves a problem or presents an opportunity. Talk with clients and others in advance of speaking and ask them what most interests them about the topic.

Depending on your target market and business development goals, you should select an occasion for your speech that fulfills the following:

- It has targeted clients, prospects or referral sources in the audience, including decision makers or influencers—for example, business conferences, community-hosted programs or a seminar hosted by a referral source.
- It is sponsored by a reputable organization that's recognizable to other groups or prospects when listed on your bio.

If you are active in a trade association you've selected based on your branding strategy, seek out a speaking opportunity there. Ask clients and referral sources what conferences and programs they attend to find information or fulfill continuing education requirements.

How to Improve Your Presentation's Effectiveness

When giving a speech, think about

what your audience would find interesting, not just what you want to "sell" or lecture on. Practice in advance, and adjust your presentation to the audience's size and personality. Be aware and change gears if listeners seem bored midstream. Use the right blend of handouts and overheads and always include your name, firm name and address on every page.

Leave ample room for audience interaction as well, not just a five-minute question-and-answer period at the end. And get feedback—if the organization in question doesn't use a short feedback form, ask them to distribute one that you prepare. Ask for copies of the completed evaluations.

To get more leverage out of a presentation, offer it to multiple organizations. Or conduct the program just for clients, focusing on one-on-one interaction. Convert your speech into an article for your firm newsletter or for another publication.

Webinars and Beyond

Like online alerts and newsletters, webinars provide an opportunity for quick long-distance interactivity, delivering program content directly to each participant's desktop. Participants can answer real-time surveys that are immediately converted into seminar content, or they can archive a seminar for viewing at a more convenient time. In addition, podcasts—although they don't offer a live or interactive component—are also an effective way to get information to a target audience, via voice recordings that can be downloaded to a PDA, iPod or similar device.

Which brings us to blogging, and the modern art of promoting yourself as an expert for the media—topics that we will take up in the next installment of Rainmaking. ^{LP}