

Speak Up to Boost Your Marketing Profile

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Over the last 15 years my colleagues and I have coached nearly 1,000 attorneys to improve their performance in business development and client retention. We always begin the process by surveying the participants to determine their business development "persona" and to identify specific challenges they may have. We also ask what they would like to learn and which area of business development particularly appeals to them.

One of the most frequent responses is frustration about making better use of a speaking engagement. Typically, attorneys have commented, "I have given many speeches but haven't generated any business. What am I doing wrong?"

There is no substitute for a skilled presenter or speaker who can convey a complex idea simply and succinctly. Trade groups, Chambers of Commerce, industry conferences and other organizations are frequently in need of a speaker to motivate and educate their members. It is important to remember that your role is to inform, not to sell your services. Demonstrate your expertise on a specific topic and you will be remembered. Push too hard to sign a new client and you will be dismissed.

FIFTEEN WAYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Below are 15 ways to help you maximize the business development opportunities created by speaking or presenting a seminar. Most are simply common sense - but not common practice. Incorporating the suggestions and make them part of your personal marketing plan and you will soon see an improved return on the time investment you are making.

1. Choose a target wisely. Many attorneys like to speak to other attorneys, which is a good way to build referrals. However, you must break out of the "lawyer loop." Speak directly to business decision makers in order to spread the word about how your expertise will attract new clients. Look for speaking opportunities in front of industry groups who serve a market niche where you have competency, experience and a desire to expand your client base.

2. Choose topic which are... topical! What might seem to be an exciting subject to an attorney might come across as boring to a business audience. Choose to speak on current issues which are specific to a particular industry or affect a broad swath of the business community. An excellent source for topics is your clients. Use an upcoming speaking engagement as an opportunity to reach out to clients and ask what challenges they are facing in their business. It is a perfect way to make a relevant contact, and to let clients know that their opinion is valued. More importantly, any problem or issue they share presents a chance for you to help resolve the situation.

3. Prepare thoroughly. Don't think you are smart enough to speak extemporaneously. Winston Churchill, one of history's greatest speakers, spent days preparing a speech so that it appeared to be "off the cuff." Draft and redraft your speech until it is concise and to the point. Rehearse it alone, and again with a colleague who is willing to identify any flaws.

4. Don't lean too heavily on PowerPoint. A PowerPoint slide show should be an outline of your words and background for your presentation. Nobody wants to hear you drone on by reading what appears on the screen. Stick to the "six-by-six" rule: no more than six bullet points per page, and no more than six words per bullet point.

5. Publicize your speech ahead of time. When you secure a speaking engagement post it to your firm's website and your LinkedIn page, with a link to the event or trade group. Do your part to help build the audience by inviting colleagues, clients and business associates. Circulate the information (date, time, event, topic) internally at your firm. If it is a high profile engagement (such as a national convention) you may wish to send out a press release in advance.

6. Get the attendee list. Most organizations keep a list of those who attend their meetings, trade shows and conferences. Ask for a copy of this list, in advance if possible. Try to get the email addresses of attendees. You can use this list ahead of the speech to drum up interest, and later to follow up after the event.

7. Record your speech. If possible, have someone “tape” your speech using a high-resolution video recorder or smart phone. At the very least do a voice recording. You can use these audio and video clips later to gain additional traction for your work.

8. Leave time for questions. If you have a 45-minute window for your speech, only use 30 minutes. Leave the last 15 minutes open for questions from the audience. This will provide you another opportunity to impress them with your knowledge.

9. Stick around. Don’t be in a hurry to rush off after the speech. Many people are reluctant to ask questions openly, but may be more comfortable approaching you quietly after the room has emptied. Another proven method of connecting with audience members is to offer to send additional information on your topic to anyone who leaves behind a business card. Ask them to circle their name if they would like a follow up phone call. That personal touch results in a surprising number of contact opportunities.

10. Bring business cards. A no brainer, right? You would be surprised how many people simply overlook this time-tested and still effective marketing tool.

11. Publicize your speech after it has been delivered. Post a short summary of the speech on your firm’s website and your LinkedIn page. Add it to your attorney profile page. Include an audio or video file if the speech was recorded. (Note: Don’t keep speeches or articles that are more than five years old on your website bio page.)

12. Follow up with the audience. If you were able to obtain the attendee list, be sure to send out a thank you email. Summarize your presentation again and invite questions or comments.

13. Repurpose your speech. Turn your talking points into an article, white paper, client alert or blog post to get more mileage out of the research and preparation you have done.

14. Go the panel route. Even if you are selected as a featured speaker or solo presenter, there are opportunities to get in front of a roomful of potential clients. Offer to moderate a panel discussion or serve as one of the panelists. You’ll need to prepare just as thoroughly and will get to know the others participating ahead of time.

15. Be patient. Building a reputation as a good speaker takes time and practice. Don’t assume one speech is going to make you famous or have clients beating down your door. Like all forms of marketing, public speaking requires repetition and persistence. Get back on stage as often as possible.

Peter Johnson is founder and principal of Law Practice Consultants, LLC of Newton, MA. Law Practice Consultants, LLC offers consulting, coaching and training services that help law firms respond to the challenges of today’s highly competitive legal marketplace. For more information visit www.lawpracticeconsultants.com.