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## Addition by Subtraction: Getting Clients in the New Age

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Law Firm Marketing and Business Development

By Marc Garfinkle | November 11, 2021 at 02:01 PM



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When lawyers discuss practicing law in the wake of this pandemic, many of our words contain the prefix “re.” Whether we weathered the storm or were shipwrecked; whether we lost our jobs or chose to move on; whether we finally struck out on our own or just struck out; whenever we discuss our

plans the “re” words keep popping up. Sometimes the “re” just means we will do it again; sometimes it means we will do it anew. It always means we are looking toward the future.

Countless lawyers are rethinking our missions and reconsidering how we do things. We have, *en masse*, already begun reinventing ourselves, realigning our trajectories, retooling our practices, reassessing our priorities, renewing old relationships, refreshing our websites, reimagining our retirement, or reconstructing a law firm from scratch. In the 21st century, with the tools of mass media and the power of techno-social interaction, it can all be done. And so, that is how most of us will regroup, relaunch and return to orbit. And since the *sine qua non* of lawyers is clients, a return to orbit means the ability to generate a regular and reliable stream of clients.

There are many ways to build or rebuild a clientele. Suggested here are some tried-and-true, but no longer time-honored, ways. Some people say these are old-fashioned, inefficient, costly and time-consuming ways. Perhaps they are. Other readers may find them edgy, savvy, even cool. You judge.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century—with the exception of the “tiny house” phenomenon—bigger is generally better. The 6 oz. coffee is from another era. Television screens the size of parking spaces are commonplace. The idea that good things come in small packages won’t stop today’s grab-bag grabber from invariably choosing the largest bag. Even baseball has determined that while “small ball” still wins games, fans prefer to watch their heroes hit home runs. In basketball, the three-point shot is the fan favorite, but a good “dink and dunk” offense can still win a championship.

Our personal views of marketing reflect our milieu and our generation. Admittedly, this writer responds to “Hey, Boomer” (if the speaker is near my

good ear) and sports an antiquated professional *persona*. Still, having lived through an advertising ban, then newspaper ads, direct mail, radio exposure, cable TV, bulletins, etc., and recognizing more modern spinoffs such as websites and webinars, podcasts, Facebook posts, Twitter things, Instagram or TikTok, not to mention billboards that have no content but a name and “Attorney at Law,” we know that there are better, surer ways, to build or rebuild a clientele.

And so, dear reader, for you alone, I dug deep into my dusty drawer of marketing tips from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and came up with a small handful of golden oldies—the greatest hits in client development from a time gone by. For these to work, you must accept the notion that lawyers don’t need to rely on carpet bombing by mass media to assure that each potential customer knows of our existence. Instead, we can figure out which people, businesses, channels, connections, and colleagues might become regular sources of referrals.

I have often marveled at how many attorneys have achieved great success through beneficial relationships with a single person or law firm or business. Such symbiotic relationships may arise spontaneously, but they are more often the result of one or both parties seeing an advantage in the relationship. These potential connections are everywhere. Think of each as a gift that keeps on giving. Figure out where your clients come from, then go to the most likely sources or portals. Bear in mind there is a good chance your best sources will be your relationships with other attorneys.

When you know who these people are, reach out to them, meet them, take them out to lunch, coffee, a Zoom cocktail. Enjoy their company. Learn about them. Once you believe that your connection is solid enough to allow

you to comfortably broach the subject, and that you have established some credibility as an able attorney, discuss the potential symbiosis. *Ask for their business.* Don't be shy. Explain the advantages of working with you or referring to you others who might benefit from your services. Focus on connecting with hens you can keep, rather than searching for eggs every day. The late Tom Weinstock of Bendit Weinstock often lauded the value of taking someone new out to lunch each week. When you pick up the tab, the other person will be willing to hear what you have to say.

If you strike out, don't be discouraged. Even if the other party has a long-standing relationship with other counsel, say nothing to disparage the other or to discourage that relationship. Instead, try to refer to that party a new client or customer from your circle of contacts. If you do this a few times, you may see a change in the other person's loyalty.

I love thank-you cards. One can build a practice from the ground up simply by sending a thank you note every day to someone. That someone can be an old relationship or a recent acquaintance. For example, if you received particularly good service from a gas-pump jockey, or you want to show appreciation to your local school crossing guard, send a note. Send a copy to the boss or send the note directly to the boss. Next time you are in the area, keeping in mind our professional constraints against solicitation, stop and introduce yourself as the person who wrote the note. Offer your business card. A door may open. If you do this 365 times in a year, your client list will surely grow.

There are many ways to get clients. The new ways are astounding. The old ways still work. Attorneys who want to create or expand their clienteles should consider looking past the growing tangle of electronica and focusing

on the goal—developing loyal, reliable sources of clients. Good luck in this endeavor. If these tips help, send me a thank-you note and take me out to lunch.

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