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WASTED TIME AND MONEY

The Top 10 Ways That Firms Squander Precious Marketing Resources

by John L. Remsen, Jr

At the conclusion of a recent presentation I gave to a local bar association, an attorney in the audience asked how law firms are wasting their marketing dollars. "After all," he said, "our firm only has a limited amount of money for marketing, and I want to make sure we are spending it wisely." I was honest, and told him that, in my opinion, many fine firms are squandering their marketing dollars by the bucketful. And it's often in the same familiar ways.

Let me begin with the assertion that, for most lawyers and law firms, effective marketing is all about personal relationships. It's not about brochures, advertising or other marketing gimmicks. It's especially about relationships with *existing* clients and referral sources. Consequently, I almost always recommend that a law firm begin "marketing" by making darn sure its clients are satisfied. If they are, they'll be loyal to the firm and come back when they need legal counsel. Beyond that, they'll tell their friends and business associates about you. Too often, firms get caught up chasing prospective clients, forgetting about solidifying and expanding relationships with the clients they already have.

After ten years of experience marketing legal services, I have developed some strong views on what firms are doing right and wrong. But before writing this article, I thought I'd post that attorney's question to the 1,000-member lawmarketing listserv, a cyber-community of law firm marketing directors and consultants. The responses came back fast and furious and I'd like to share our collective opinions with you.

So here we go - the "Top Ten Ways To Waste Money Marketing Your Practice," in David Lettermanesque ascending order of wastefulness.

#10 - Random Acts of Golf and Lunch

Golf and lunch are fine marketing activities, very conducive to relationship building. But playing golf with an endless array of acquaintances who don't have the ability to hire or refer you is hardly an effective use of your marketing time. Nor is that monthly "skins" match with your brother-in-law and his drinking buddies. The profession's top rainmakers have a plan -- even if only in their heads -- when they go on their boondoggles... er, I mean, marketing ventures. They have determined who they want to get to know better and, from there, they develop a systematic plan to go about building and enhancing relationships with them. The key word is *plan*.

#9 - The "Really Big Show"

Reminiscent of Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland deciding to "put on a show," your firm decides to present the mother of all seminars. Over 300 people spend a half-day listening to you and your partners talk about the latest changes in state law. It was great. Problem is, there was very little follow up. When it comes to seminars and similar events, we suggest that you consider smaller, less formal and more interactive sessions. Think about a seminar *series*, focused on a particular industry, where participants get together repeatedly. This way, the follow-up is built-in.

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655 Sherwood Road NE - Atlanta, GA - 30324
404.885.9100 - FAX: 404.885.9111 - TheRemsenGroup.com

#8 - Other One-Shot Wonders

Come to think of it, forget about any marketing activity that does not include follow-up. All the marketing events that your firm sponsors -- seminars, open houses, holiday parties, and the like -- should be looked upon as relationship building platforms. And personal follow is the key to making them work. All participating attorneys should follow up with at least two or three people at each event, focusing on folks who can help them achieve their objectives.

#7 - Brochures and Newsletters That Cure Insomnia

Good brochures and newsletters have their place among effective marketing tools. But who wants to read mind-numbing tomes about the history of your firm and its 14 practice areas? Not me, and not your prospective clients either. Keep the copy concise and easy-to-read. Use bullet points whenever possible. Hire a talented graphic designer who will produce sharp, attention-grabbing marketing material.

#6 - Invisible Advertising

No doubt, print and broadcast advertising works for attorneys with consumer-oriented practices (like family and personal injury law) and I'd recommend an ad in the Yellow Pages in a heartbeat. But things like traditional "tombstone" ads and "one-time" ads in a newspaper or magazine are practically worthless. Studies show that it takes 7-11 impressions before somebody will recall seeing your ad. Consistency and frequency are essential. Here again, hire a good graphic designer and stay light on copy to make sure your ads are noticed. If you want to advertise, do it right.

#5 - Holiday Chochkes

Ahhh, the holidays. Talk about getting lost in the shuffle! Effective marketing strategies get noticed and stand apart from the crowd. The holidays are far too busy a time for your cards, parties, and gifts to be fully appreciated. However, if you must send holiday cards, by all means, sign them personally!

#4 - Directories, Directories and More Directories!

Over the past ten years, law firm directories have sprouted like cattails in the Everglades. Unfortunately, most have little marketing value. Decision-makers simply don't use them very much. In fact, our friends on the listserv think that only a few directories, such as LawOffice.com, Martindale-Hubbell and Best's (for insurance defense counsel), are worth the money. Bottom line....hold on to your cash.

#3 - Vanity Letterhead

We're talking about the kind that features every lawyer's name on the masthead. Every letter becomes two-pages long, and each time a lawyer joins or leaves the firm the old supply gets chucked and a new supply is ordered. Often, the new letterhead is out of date even before it comes back from the printer! Most firms have abandoned this practice and yours should, too. Consider adding a snappy firm logo and/or a splash of color. Don't worry, it's OK.

#2 - PPPPs (Powerful Partner's Pet Projects)

Our #2 money waster was sent in by Bev Davis, chief operating officer for a well-known Oregon law firm....and you know exactly what she's talking about! The firm's \$5,000 contribution for a table at the "Belles of the Confederacy" Dinner Dance, for example. Powerful Partner Jim thinks it's a great idea. (So happens his wife is on the Board of Directors.) PPPPs are rarely budgeted and are hardly ever consistent with firm-wide marketing objectives. They

tend to consume vast quantities of money and staff time. A firm-wide marketing plan goes a long way toward reducing the number of PPPPs. Show Jim the plan and just say no!

#1 - Consultants Who Don't Know ** About Law Firms**

Law firms are a different kind of beast -- big egos, lots of democracy, convoluted compensation systems and, in many cases, a disdain toward marketing. Yet, I see it happen time and time again. "We hired Sally because we liked the work she did for our big banking client. But she never could manage to implement much of anything around here." When it comes to building consensus for a new idea or getting people to focus on non-billable activities, there is nothing quite like a law firm. It takes someone who's been there to make it happen. If you decide to hire a consultant, hire somebody who has a successful track record working with law firms like yours.

Well, that's it for now. I hope you enjoyed this round-up of marketing blunders. Perhaps you recognized one from your own firm's recent efforts on the list. My objective was to help you think about how you and your firm can more wisely spend your marketing dollars. After all, you have limited resources. My best advice....develop a proactive, firm-wide marketing plan. See you at the 19th hole!

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About the Author

John L. Remsen, Jr. is the principal of The Remsen Group, a Florida-based marketing consulting firm that works exclusively with law firms. He is the Immediate Past President of the Southeastern chapter of the Legal Marketing Association and has served on its national Board of Directors. He can be reached at 954.527.9111 or jremsen@theremsegroup.com.

