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Are E-Newsletters a Valuable Tool to Generate New Business?

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The expanding use of the internet by consumers and businesses has had a profound effect on legal marketing. Most firms realize that they need to at least have a presentable website as their “electronic brochure” from a credibility perspective. Other firms obtain a fair amount of business from their internet presence and are constantly seeking methods to improve their success.

One of the on-line tools that firms consider is an e-newsletter. The motivations to do so are varied. You might hear from clients that your competitors are sending e-newsletters to them, so you realize that you need to at least serve your clients as well as the competition with useful information. Or you might want a vehicle to announce the successful results of cases. Some firms use e-newsletters as part of their strategy to increase their search engine rankings.

A typical comment that we hear from attorneys is “Some of our partners think an e-newsletter would be a great idea, while others think no one will read it. Which view is correct?” The answer is that as with other marketing efforts, it doesn’t really matter what we think so much as what the market (clients, prospects and referral sources) thinks. Some people tend to believe that everyone else thinks the way they do. Just because a partner may not personally read newsletters doesn’t mean everyone else is that way. Some newsletter readers will read it in detail, others will scan it, while some will just see who it from and not have the time to read it. All are marketing opportunities in varying degrees.

Here are a few factors to consider in developing a newsletter:

Establish goals from the outset -- How can an e-newsletter be beneficial to your firm’s marketing efforts? Here are some

potential benefits:

- *Build name and practice area awareness*
- *Demonstrate expertise*
- *Encourage repeat business*
- *Expand client base*
- *Establish a referral network*
- *Save time and money (vs. some marketing tools)*
- *Build trust*
- *Help position your firm in targeted markets*
- *Introduce new services*
- *Increase website traffic*

Newsletters can be very helpful to a firm’s success if done correctly. However, due to their visual and textual impact, newsletters can hurt your firm’s image if poorly designed and produced (as with a website).

Keys to success -- There are at least five keys to success for newsletters:

1) *Design it around your goals.* It is important to identify your goals so that the newsletter can achieve them.

2) *Make it look professional, not home-spun.* Follow “Brown’s Rule of Image Building”: Always maintain the same high quality in your image materials as is in your firm’s rendering of services.

3) *Make it informative, not a sales pitch.* Write what your readers want to read, not what you want them to know. They won’t read anything else.

4) *Build and use a worthwhile database.*

5) *Commit to doing it regularly.* Your newsletter should be distributed at least four times a year. Don’t make the all-too-often mistake of sending the one-time “quarterly” newsletter. Outsourcing most of the newsletter details is generally a better way of insuring that it goes out regularly.

Make it part of your firm’s overall marketing strategy -- A newsletter should

be part of the marketing plan, not all of it. For client relations, it should complement programs such as an overall client communications program, client surveys, etc. For new business generation, it should complement targeted marketing programs, involvement in organizations, advertising, etc.

Get help if needed -- In the interest of thinking they will “save money,” some firms will decide they will try to handle the process themselves. Unfortunately, the normal result is a lack of progress – with up to a year passing by before an issue is released!

Be careful in whom you hire. When looking outside for help from web designers or ad agencies, all too often the “designer” needs too much direction and the work product is still unsatisfactory. In the meantime, the firm finds out that deciding what to write, writing the text, and finishing the project is all just too difficult.

It is generally best to hire a firm that specializes in serving law firms to help with your newsletter. That way they will understand what you do and how to market your firm to clients. They should be able to help with content development and editing, design, distribution and internet marketing. Our experience has shown that for many firms this level of service is crucial if you are to publish the newsletter on a frequent basis, while limiting your time involvement.

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