The One Thing You Must Do in Your Marketing

by Sara Holtz, ClientFocus

If you want your marketing efforts to turn into new business, what one thing *must* you do? Follow up consistently with those people you want to keep as clients and attract as new clients. If you fail to keep in touch with these key people on a regular basis, your business development efforts will likely fall short of your hoped-for results.

The probability that a single marketing effort–like a lunch meeting or a speech–will result in new business is about 5%. That means the likelihood that a single marketing contact will *not* produce results is about 95%. Just as it takes an average of seven to nine significant contacts before a prospect becomes a client, it takes almost that many to acquire new business from people who you've worked with in the past. Marketing, whether to existing clients or new prospects, is a marathon, not a sprint.

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And yet, my experience is that most lawyers give up on their business development efforts long before making these multiple contacts. Even relatively successful marketers tend to give up after about three contacts. They think, "If the client or prospect hasn't hired me for a matter by now, he probably never will." But the truth is, just about when you're ready to throw in the towel pursuing new business, you're probably about halfway to success. And since most lawyers give up too soon, making more than three contacts will immediately help you stand out from your competition.

Following Up Is Not Stalking

When I suggest to my clients that they plan their outreach to include at least seven contacts, the first question they ask is, "How can I keep contacting people that often without appearing to be stalking them?"

My answer: You are only a stalker if they're not happy to hear from you. If you are sharing important information, opportunities, or insights, they will likely view you and your contact in a positive light. Think about the last time someone sent you an e-mail about something you were interested in–whether it was a review of a new book by a favorite author or an update on compliance with new regulatory requirements in your industry. Did you think, "I wish this person would stop sending me stuff like this"? Probably not. You were probably happy to receive it. And that is how your clients and prospects are likely to feel.

Value Is in the Eye of the Beholder

The tricky part is figuring out what a particular prospect or client will find of interest. What one person finds valuable another may view as "junk mail." For example, if a client works for a private equity fund or an energy company, she may be delighted to receive an invitation to a conference on emerging legal issues for private equity investment in the energy industry. On the other hand, send that same invitation to someone who specializes in intellectual property litigation for a media company and that person is likely to hit the delete key immediately. Similarly, an article about the competitive nature of college admissions may intrigue someone who has a son in high school but not someone who has a daughter in preschool.

So, how do you figure out what might interest a particular prospect or client? Obviously, one way is to make an educated guess. If you meet an in-house counsel for a national retailer at a wage-and-hour class action seminar, it's a good guess she would appreciate receiving an article about avoiding wage-and-hour liability in Texas.

But why guess? In every marketing interaction you have–at a one-on-one lunch, at a bar networking event, or during a break at an industry conference–make a point of discovering at least one topic that might interest the people you want to stay in touch with. Are they concerned with staying abreast of the law in a certain area? Are they looking for ways for their in-house legal department to satisfy their CLE ethics requirements? Which basketball team do they root for? Are they always on the hunt for the next "hot" restaurant? Once you figure out what interests them, it is relatively easy to find ways to reach out to them.

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There Are Lots of Ways to Follow Up

Traditionally, lawyers have taken clients or prospects out to lunch or to sporting events, or sent articles or e-alerts, as follow-up tactics. There's nothing wrong with those activities; they help keep you on the client's or prospect's radar screen.

But finding more memorable ways to keep you "top of mind" is limited only by your interests and imagination. Consider these ideas as activities for staying in touch:

- Send a holiday card–but get creative about the holiday. How about a Halloween, Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day, or first day of spring card?
- Mail a handwritten note (very rare these days!) congratulating them on a promotion, an award, or a result in a recent case. People love to be recognized for their good works.

- Congratulate them on their favorite team's victory or commiserate with them about a loss. You can do this in less than a minute via phone, e-mail, or voicemail.
- Offer to introduce them to someone you think they'd like to meet or would profit from meeting. They'll appreciate your efforts to help them.
- Invite them to collaborate with you on a project of mutual interest–perhaps write an article, volunteer for a charity event, or participate in a committee.
- Encourage them to participate in a charity walk or run, and suggest training in tandem. Think of all the time you'll get to spend getting to know each other better.
- Request their feedback on the draft of an article you're writing. People are flattered when they're asked for their opinions.
- Organize a dinner at a conference you attend regularly, and invite both prospects and current clients. This creates the opportunity for your clients to do your marketing for you as they extol the work you've done for them.
- Offer to help with an issue they're facing, whether personal or professional. It might be to brainstorm on how to implement a new compliance program or to do an informational interview for a nephew who is considering law school.
- Share resources (for example, invitations to events, podcasts, websites, blogs). These can relate to personal or professional interests.
- Provide them with a checklist to be used in a situation fraught with legal implications. People appreciate anything that allows them to do their jobs more efficiently.
- Invite them to participate in an activity you think they would enjoy, such as a golf outing, a cooking class, or a museum exhibit.
- Announce where you are speaking. If they can't attend, offer to send them an outline of your presentation and other handouts.
- Invite them to sit at your table at a charity event. Use the event as an opportunity for them to meet some of your satisfied clients.
- Encourage them to attend a CLE program your firm is sponsoring. If they attend, send an e-mail after the program asking for feedback about what they found helpful and their ideas for future programs.
- Include them in a social event you are hosting. Sporting events are good ideas, but why not get a bit more creative? Invite them to a lecture by a prominent public official, a concert (classical or rock), a walking tour, a movie premiere, or a wine tasting.
- Solicit their advice. It can be as simple as a good restaurant in their home city or as complicated as the pros and cons of your child participating in a traveling sports team.
- Suggest they join you for a meal–breakfast, coffee, lunch, drinks, dinner, or dessert. Different people are open to dining at different times during the day, depending on their schedules.
- Invite them to join your fantasy football league. This will give you lots of opportunities to stay in touch during the season.
- Showcase your expertise by offering to do an on-site CLE program for their legal department. Not only do you get to demonstrate your knowledge, but you also get to learn about their concerns.
- Attend a networking event at which they are likely to be present. Make a point of connecting with them when you are there.

- Refer business to them and let them know you did. Nothing cements a relationship better than that!

For those people who you know better, such as past or existing clients, consider these options:

- Recognize a personal milestone–a birthday, a wedding, the birth of a child–by sending a card or a present. It deepens the relationship.
- Comment on recent news about their company. People will be impressed that you stay abreast of new happenings in their firms.
- Compose a laudatory e-mail to their boss acknowledging their contribution to a matter you worked on together. Copy them on the e-mail.
- Ask if you can visit them at their office. You'll learn a lot about their company and them as people. This allows you to come up with even more ways to continue staying in touch.
- Pick up the phone and call. (A call is almost as rare as a handwritten note these days!) Discuss a matter of professional interest or just call to check in.
- Send them a book or an article on a topic you know they'd like. Or send them a book you've read that you think they might enjoy as well.
- Ask them to present a "reverse" seminar to your practice group about their business and the challenges it is facing. People love to talk about what they do.
- Invite them and their children to join you and your family on a kid-friendly outing (e.g., bowling, the circus, the latest Pixar animated movie). Social events bring people together in fun, meaningful ways.

Now Just Do It

Obviously, recognizing the importance of follow-up is crucial, but to actually produce results, you have to do it. Many a well-intentioned marketing initiative has failed to result in new business because the planned-for follow-up didn't happen. Client demands took precedence, time slipped away, and good intentions were forgotten.

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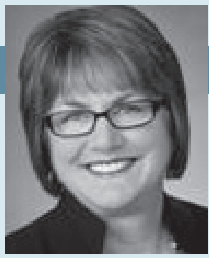
To ensure that your follow-up takes place in a timely and consistent manner, set up a system that reminds you of the following:

- who you are following up with,
- what you plan to do as follow-up, and
- when you plan to do it.

Some people do this by scheduling reminders on their Outlook calendars, others by putting notations on their old-fashioned paper calendars. But regardless of the system you use, treat these scheduled activities with the same degree of commitment and importance as you treat a court appearance or a conference call. Because they deserve it!

Make staying in touch with your clients and prospects the *one thing* you always do, and watch your marketing effectiveness soar.



About Sara Holtz

ClientFocus Founder and CEO Sara Holtz is the author of **Bringin' in the Rain: A Woman Lawyer's Guide to Business Development.** Sara helps successful women lawyers become rainmakers. Since 1995, she has worked with hundreds of partners from the nation's leading law firms to help them grow their practices.

She created the Women Rainmakers Roundtable, which has helped over 400 women partners develop substantial books of business. Sara's articles have appeared in **The American Lawyer, ABA Journal, Law Practice, Litigation**, and other publications.

Before founding ClientFocus, Sara was General Counsel of Nestlé Beverage Company, and was the first woman chairman of the Association of Corporate Counsel. She graduated from Yale College and Harvard Law School.

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