



GETTING MORE BUSINESS FROM EXISTING CLIENTS: FIVE EASY STRATEGIES THAT REALLY WORK

Ellen Freedman, CLM
© 2005 Freedman Consulting, Inc.

I am frequently contacted on the hot line by attorneys who want to know how to market. More specifically, they often ask what is the most effective use they can make of their limited time. The answer to this question is very simple, because 80% of new business comes from existing clients, and it only takes 20% of the marketing efforts to develop it. On the other hand, it takes 80% of your marketing efforts to produce totally new clients, and that produces only 20% of new business. They're inversely proportional. Now that's not to say that you shouldn't invest time in developing new business, but when your time is limited you should spend the majority of it where it will be most rewarding in terms of results. Mining your existing clients for additional work is definitely at the top of the list.

There are numerous ways to "mine" existing clients. No one method works best. A multi-faceted approach is most successful. But individual clients will often lend themselves to one approach over another. That is where the personal relationship with clients comes in — you should have some idea which method will work with which clients.

First and foremost, meet with your clients. What you want to find out is the following:

- 1- Of the work they presently send to your firm, what percentage does it represent of all the work of that type they have available?
- 2- Who else is getting the same work from them, and in what percentages?

What you are trying to determine is how much of the client's available work you are getting. Your goal is to get more. In order to do that, you need to find who is getting the same work, and why. Next is to find out what you have to do to make your firm the more appealing option. Perhaps a competitor is getting a greater or fair percentage of the work due to factors you can match or beat, like

- § Faster turnaround time
- § Better responsiveness to telephone calls and email
- § Volume discounts
- § Technological advantages, like real time case management information available to the client 24/7, or compatible word processing software.

- § Special budgeting or reporting on matters
- § An annual no-charge audit of your client's business to keep "up to date" on their needs

Sometimes it's just a matter of actually asking for more of the work in a straightforward manner.

Second in your marketing effort, you want to make sure your client is fully aware of ALL of the types of service your firm can provide, even if they do not have, or do not *think* they have a need for many of the practice areas at the current time. Take or make an opportunity to introduce your client to other partners of your firm which might present the client with a better overall "industry" solution.

Keep in mind that your definitions of practice areas may work at your firm, but your client isn't constrained by the same thinking. From the client's perspective, it makes much more sense to present industry-based teams, which transcend practice areas within the law firm. Remember, you're trying to present your firm to your clients as problem solvers. By presenting an industry-based team, you demonstrate knowledge of the industry, and command confidence in your ability to anticipate and solve problems which the client has and will face.

What you want to find out from your client is:

- 1- What other type of work is currently and regularly being done for the client that your firm is *not* doing?
- 2- Where are their other big legal needs, and who is filling them?
- 3- What does your client foresee as their biggest legal needs in the future?

The object here is to determine whether your firm has the talent to handle work in other areas of practice. This is important information to have from a strategic planning perspective.

If your client currently has a need for a good deal of work in an area in which your firm does *not* provide expertise, you should consider this high on your list of expansion areas. On the other hand, if your firm already has expertise in this area, obtaining some of that work is often easily accomplished. Ask for an introduction to the appropriate person at the client's office who controls that workflow. Build a rapport and introduce that individual to the appropriate partner from your firm so a relationship can be forged.

With respect to your client's anticipated future needs, this incorporates a bit of crystal ball gazing. The best possible result is for you to have done significant industry research, and to suggest to the client what their future challenges will be, and offer your services to help meet those challenges. Oftentimes clients have done better strategic planning than their law firms, and as a result they know what market factors will be



influencing them downstream, and what new challenges they will face. In either case, you should work to position yourself and your firm to help your clients meet those challenges in a PROACTIVE way, to ensure you get the work that flows from them as the future unfolds.

A third strategy involves asking your clients to serve on a focus group, to enable the firm to talk about the future need of legal services, and how the firm should be responding to best serve their needs. This type of activity can really cement relationships with clients, provided you take what they say to heart and haven't wasted their time. And it enables your firm to prepare for the future more proactively in terms of talent, technology and knowledge.

Fourth, you can and should ask your clients to think about who they know in their industry, or any related industry, that your firm might be of service to, and ask them to arrange an introduction. The best referral source you have is a satisfied client. Although few think to provide referrals, they are often more than happy to do so when asked.

Finally, ask your clients if there are any additional value-added services your firm can provide. Spend some time brainstorming with the client to determine what, if anything, you can offer. Try and think in the area of proactive services, like education for their employees, creating guidelines or manuals, or anything else which will create a new need for your services in addition to the transaction itself. You need to try to be creative here, to see if you can actually develop a demand for something related but new. Can you say "ancillary business?" A look at some of the highly successful ventures of law firms shows industry-specific solutions work best, like consulting groups, technology groups and so forth aimed only at providing specific industry solutions.

These are certainly not the *only* strategies to consider. These are merely some of the ones which are highly effective and often overlooked. I have been fortunate to have worked with some attorneys who have been highly successful rainmakers. The strategies above were always used by them to maximize work from existing clients. They can work for you too.

*A version of this article originally appeared in the April 7, 2003 issue of
the Pennsylvania Bar News*

©2005 Freedman Consulting, Inc. The information in this article is protected by U.S. copyright. Visitors may print and download one copy of this article solely for personal and noncommercial use, provided that all hard copies contain all copyright and other applicable notices contained in the article. You may not modify, distribute, copy, broadcast, transmit, publish, transfer or otherwise use any article or material obtained from this site in any other manner except with written permission of the author. The article is for informational use only, and does not constitute legal advice or endorsement of any particular product or vendor.

