

# Business & Careers



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## Marketing playing vital role in a growing online world

Think about the client or risk failure

SANDRA BEKHOR

The Internet has brought marketing to the forefront for lawyers and other professionals. Social media, blogs, videos, websites...in many ways, everything's changed.

But, on the other hand, is what the Internet brings to the table really that new? Or is it just an extension of the, albeit lighter, marketing efforts lawyers were already making 20 years ago, whether to secure new files, recruit talent or simply generate exposure?

"I prefer building my personal brand by participating on various boards and going to conferences. I make it a point to meet everyone I can and later connect via LinkedIn," says Jason Leung of LeungLaw. "Most importantly though, I usually invite them out to coffee. The quality of a conversation at a cocktail party is rarely the kind you can have one-on-one at a casual cafe. Actually, that's where I've connected with many people who later became clients."

If marketing has always been in the picture, at least to some extent, what's changed?

Today, there's a lot more action, some of it even frenetic. Maybe the real change is that the stakes — time, money, opportunity — are higher. If they want to get ahead, participating firms will need to plan before they act.

"Some lawyers don't feel they have the luxury to ask who their ideal client is. But, the truth is it's a self-fulfilling prophecy," says lawyer coach Paulette Pommells of Creative Choices. "The more time you spend thinking about [your ideal client], the more of them you will attract and the happier you will be. If you're not having this conversation with yourself, you might already be extinct."

If the marketing plan is on its way to becoming vital to the future of the profession, what should lawyers be thinking about as they sit down to contemplate one, possibly for the very first time? A number of lawyers offered their own ideas that have each, in their own way, been doing a bit of experimenting.

Suzana Popovic-Montag stresses the needed to stand out from the clutter.

"If they want to stay current, be relevant and get peoples' attention, lawyers will have to brand themselves in creative ways," says the managing partner of Hull & Hull LLP in Toronto. "Whether through video — which more easily communicates personality — or text, they will need to present as interesting and innovative. People want to connect even before they meet with you."

Take a personal approach to marketing online, says Mitchell Rose of Toronto firm Stancer Gossin Rose LLP.

"I bring the same spirit to online marketing as to offline marketing. For the most part, it's just an extension of how I am in person. LinkedIn and Twitter can be wonderful ways to get to know people.

"But they are long-term commitments," he adds. "It's unrealistic to expect immediate results. Just like networking, it really works better if you intrinsically enjoy meeting new people.

Firms need to adopt an attitude of continuous innovation, advises Andrew Feldstein.

"You can't rest on yesterday's laurels. That gets you started on a downward trajectory," says the Toronto-based family lawyer. "If you're going to do marketing, you have to try things and you have to be prepared that some will be losers. It's hard to say what's working and what isn't. Even if Google Analytics tells you where the traffic is it won't tell you what made the client decide to call."

It's important to connect with what people care about.

"A lot of marketing these days is through content. I have noticed that the more authentic it is, the better it works. When someone really cares about the topic, as opposed to just writing to keep the blog current, it comes across. Those are the posts that get the most circulation," says lawyer Heather Douglas.

And many of them are finding that content and your firm through a mobile device, says Felice Kirsh, partner at estate litigation firm Schnurr Kirsh Schnurr Oelbaum

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# Success: Ongoing engagement is a must

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Tator LLP, so it's important to prioritize the mobile experience.

"We were advised to make our website mobile friendly," she says. "While it may be surprising, some people choose their lawyers while browsing on their phones."

Firms also need to learn to leverage business and marketing principles to shape the business, says Toronto-based litigation lawyer Paul Feldman.

"Clients will become more sophisticated. They will demand more information and a bigger say in how their files are handled. Lawyers may need to change the way they practice — to be more open with clients, let them in, educate them," says Feldman of Feldman Lawyers. "The same goes with billing. Today, it's too uncertain. Clients want a billing structure



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**Paul Feldman**  
Feldman Lawyers

that provides them with certainty,"

And don't forget to think like a client. "If I were a client, I would like my lawyer's website to have an online customer portal," says lawyer Jessica Gagné.

"Ideally, the portal would allow me to access my whole file or at least parts of it online, pay my invoices online and would automatically send me

reminders for important dates. I advertise my hourly rate on my website, something that very few lawyers do. If it's out of someone's price range, they don't need to call."

So, where does that leave us? What are the new marketing dos for law firms?

Traditional activities like speaking and writing to position oneself as an expert or

networking to generate referrals are still, and may always be, winners in a lawyer's marketing toolbox. But to be competitive today, the plan requires high level decision-making before taking action, considerably more engagement on an ongoing basis and a thoughtful strategy to communicate information, vision and values. The next generation of marketing for law firms will integrate the plan at a whole new level. It won't stop at action plans, promotional blurbs and tactics.

The firms that grab hold of these lessons and run with them are the ones that will spell out, in no uncertain terms, what it is that they are great at, why their market should care and which clients are a fit. As a result, they will proactively shape the profile, size and type of the practices they run, rather than have the market decide for them.

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