

*Business of Law***Attracting Clients Is Like Dating:
Be Visible, and Be Picky**

Attracting law firm clients is a lot like dating. A lawyer needs to stay visible and be selective about the clients he seeks out for relationships.

That is the advice from Dan Lear, a lawyer and technology outreach specialist for Avvo, an online legal services marketplace. “When dating, you don’t want just any companion,” he said in an Oct. 20 webinar. Similarly, he said, lawyers should target their marketing to find clients who are right for them. They shouldn’t accept all cases that walk through their office door, a practice he called “door law.”

“If the dating analysis is apt, it’s really that 20 years ago, in Facebook terms, lawyers and their clients were in a relationship mode. It was exclusive,” Mark A. Cohen, a lawyer and legal business consultant in Washington, told Bloomberg BNA Oct. 21. “There wasn’t the same degree of lateral movement there is today. There was not as much merger mania.” He added, “Today, at best, in Facebook terms, the relationship between most clients and law firms is ‘it’s complicated.’”

Continuing his dating analogy, Lear said having a specific expertise gives a lawyer an advantage in pursuing clients. “Niches lead to riches,” he said. As an example, he cited a niche practice that specializes in “the burgeoning eSports industry,” which charges viewers to watch other people play video games. Another niche practice specializes in foodborne illness law, he said, and another focuses on firearms law.

To attract clients, lawyers must create a strong “online presence,” Lear said. Some websites are more influential than others, so “there are some places you need to be,” including Yelp, LinkedIn, Avvo and Google Plus or Google Business. Lear recommended that lawyers claim their profile on each site and include a photograph whenever possible, because lawyers with head shots receive 17 percent more contacts from consumers. He also mentioned Lawyer.com and Thumbtack as sites lawyers should join.

Monitor Your Online Profiles. To ensure their online presence comes to the attention of potential clients, Lear advised lawyers to search for themselves online to check whether their name and profile information are consistent across web sites. Lawyers with consistent

profiles are more likely to rise to the top of the search results, he said.

Lear also suggested including videos on profiles because they make “your words come alive.” He said 57 percent of legal clients say videos increase their confidence in a lawyer. He described a lawyer who hosts an annual party for clients at which she videos them making positive remarks about her firm.

Of course, establishing an online presence opens the possibility of negative reviews. Lear recommends lawyers respond to these with an online apology because “you’re not actually communicating to the client who left the negative review,” but to potential future clients. “The best defense to a negative review is a good offense,” Lear said. “You can ask clients to leave a positive review.”

Having a strong public presence in general, not just online, “is going to make you more appealing,” according to Ellen Keiley, president of Boston-based EMK Consulting Group, which provides marketing services to professional firms. “You need to get out there. You need to be visible. You need to be writing or speaking. You need to be active in the community,” she told Bloomberg BNA Oct. 21. “I’d want a lawyer who does those things because it shows they’re active. I’d think they’d be advocating for me because they’re an active person.”

Another important factor between a lawyer and a potential client is mindset, Lear said. When dating, people look for compatible mates, and lawyers also should seek clients whose philosophy is compatible with theirs, he said. One important factor is the amount of control a client wants to retain over his or her case. Some clients view the lawyer as their employee and want to retain total control, while others see the lawyer as a savior and want the lawyer to remain in charge. The remainder fall somewhere in between and consider the lawyer to be their collaborator, he said. A lawyer must consider which role he or she is most comfortable with.

Communication style is also important. “We need to reach clients on their level,” he said. Lear recommended getting rid of legalese in online profiles and replying promptly to queries from clients. “Happy clients have lawyers who are responsive,” he said. “How the lawyer sounds on the phone” has “a huge impact” on the client’s impression of him. Instead of returning calls at the end of the day when he’s tired, a lawyer should respond during the day while he is still “fresh,” Lear said. He also warned lawyers not to interrupt their cli-

ents. “Learning to listen to clients effectively is something we can all do better,” he said.

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