



CLEO KIRKLAND  
RECRUITMENT SPECIALIST

# MARKETING ESSENTIALS FOR ASSOCIATES

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It used to be the case that associates wanting to make partner simply had to put their heads down for a required number of years, produce consistently excellent work and wait for their numbers to be called. One could make a fine living as a lawyer's lawyer, grinding away at the billable hour and working for someone else's client. Well, that paradigm is rapidly shifting and the new reality is that associates hoping to achieve partnership, even at the biggest firms, need to learn how to generate business.

Even if partnership is not your goal, all young lawyers can benefit from developing marketing skills early in their career. Within a firm, lawyers with their own clients have more professional independence, respect from their colleagues and clout with management. Good marketers are also able to move in-house, switch firms or leave practice altogether with considerably more ease than their marketing-challenged counterparts. Whatever your career goals, building marketing skills is now a requirement for future success!

At its core, marketing professional services is about building relationships. Lawyers that are natural relationship builders are at a distinct advantage because marketing may not feel like work to them at all. That said, marketing is a skill that can be learned (or improved) and all lawyers need to be somewhat strategic about which professional relationships they focus on and invest in most.

Whether you are a marketing maven or freshman, what follows are some suggestions on how to streamline your efforts and increase your likelihood of success.

## **PROMPTNESS**

The sales cycle can be painfully long and it can take years to generate a new client. The sooner you begin the sooner you will see results. Many associates feel as though they need to spend several years perfecting their legal skills before they can market them properly. However, it is important to remember that the outside world will see you as an expert in your field long before you will feel like one. Furthermore, marketing can not be viewed as conflicting with time spent billing hours and honing your skills. The nuts and bolts of marketing - speaking, writing, community involvement, building rapport, etc. - are just as critical to a successful legal career as analytical abilities or the willingness to work long hours. And just like those harder skills, lawyers who develop good habits around marketing early in their careers are much more likely to have it become second nature. So start now and make it a priority!

## **PLANNING**

The best marketing plans are ones that are specific, measurable and realistic. When selecting marketing targets, a good place to start is determining where business has come from in the past. A good marketing plan should identify the names of current and former clients that may be a source of new business. Those individuals with whom you have a positive history should be your primary focus. You should also identify new opportunities. Give some thought to the kinds of people and industries you are looking to gain access to and places you can go and activities you can get involved in that will achieve that goal. While involvement in the pertinent bar (and other lawyer-only organizations) can be great for profile building, fellow members are more likely to be competitors than clients. So it is also important to look outside those groups and build relationships directly with those in the target industry or business. You should write down your goals, targets and activities, including specific names and dates for completion and look at it once a month and check your progress. Finally, enlist the help of any in-house marketing professionals at your firm and be sure that your efforts are consistent with the goals and plans for your firm or practice group.

## **PREFERENCES**

Speaking, writing articles, participating in an industry organization, playing golf, becoming an active member of your bar association and sending newsletters are all excellent ways to get out and meet the business community. However, there is no “right” way to build relationships and it is neither necessary nor effective to get involved in as many marketing initiatives as possible. Experiment and find out what you do best. Play on your strengths. If you hate golf, you should not be on a golf course. If you are shy, spending time feeling uncomfortable at networking functions will likely do little to help you build relationships. Instead, start by writing articles or doing non-billable favors for existing clients. The idea is to think of and focus on activities that combine your personal interests and skills with your marketing objectives.

## **PERSISTENCE**

Many young lawyers enthusiastically start a marketing initiative and then get frustrated because they do not see instant results. Frustrating as it is, associates must accept that harvesting the fruits of their marketing labour takes time. It also takes persistence. Many legal services are not needed immediately. Most prospective clients will not think to contact you until they have seen your name several times in several places. So keep at it and do not get discouraged!

Whether the goal is partnership, going in-house or leaving practice, every young lawyer should be spending some portion of their time on marketing. These efforts should play to your likes, be consistently applied and performed in a thoughtful, proactive and strategic manner. Staying in your office and doing great work is no longer enough and the associates who realize this early in their careers will be best positioned to find professional satisfaction in the future.