

The Difference Between Sales and Marketing: Why Lawyers Need Both

By Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC

As someone who has dedicated their career to helping lawyers attract clients, one of my volunteer activities is to teach marketing and client services at three Midwestern law schools. When looking out at the 3Ls planning to enter private practice after passing the bar, I ask, “How many of you went to law school to become a sales person?” I wish I could adequately describe the looks of horror I see on their faces! No one acknowledges the question and most break eye contact with me. The truth? Lawyers hope with eager anticipation that once they hang their shingle, clients will simply *find* them. It’s the “if I build it, they will come” scenario.

The problem is without the ability to meet people, develop trust and confidence with them, ask the right questions, and convince them to sign your retainer agreement, you simply won’t be successful in private practice. You need to learn basic marketing and sales skills.

The Simple Truth about Sales v. Marketing

Sales is about asking the *right questions*. Marketing is about the *messages you convey* about yourself and your practice. Embarking on a sales initiative without marketing is simply too difficult. No one will know who you are. Investing in marketing without a direct sales strategy is too expensive. Yet, throwing money at marketing and hoping the phone rings is a practice many lawyers have adopted. Let me explain. Marketing is what you do to position yourself. It’s the messages that define you and your firm.

Examples include:

- **Website** – The messages on your website that position your niche areas.
- **Biographies and Profiles** – How you position your experience on your website biography, in your LinkedIn profile, Super Lawyers profile, Avvo and in any other Web-based directories you participate in.

- **Social Media** – Committing to posting and engaging on social media and becoming a “virtual” thought leader in your area(s) of practice.
- **Writing and Speaking** – Submitting proposals to present to groups of prospective clients and referral sources at trade and industry association events, or to write articles for their publications.
- **Client Communications** – The messages you directly communicate to contacts promoting articles and blogs you have written, awards you have won, presentations you have given, webinars you have delivered, etc.
- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** – If you have invested in a website, you need to make sure your clients can find you when they search for the keywords under which you want to be found.

Marketing is about promoting your exceptional reputation as a leader in your practice area(s). It “softens” the marketplace so the right people learn more about who you are. Lawyers who pay attention to marketing attract high-quality clients. And those who understand the nuances of sales become true rainmakers.

Demystifying Sales for Lawyers

Your sales efforts will take place in many different venues, including:

- **Trade Association Meetings** – You are at an industry event populated by prospective clients and referral sources, and have a specific plan of attack for who you want to meet.
- **Targeted Relationship Building** – You have a “sales pipeline” of key contacts you are committed to working with. You are methodically meeting each for coffee, lunch or drinks after work with a goal or desired outcome from each meeting.
- **Contact-Specific Strategies** – Before you meet with a contact, you prepare for the meeting by doing research and determining upfront how you will define

a successful meeting. You do this by focusing on “what’s next.” What is your follow up after the meeting? There always needs to be a next step when trying to land new business or generate new referral sources.

- **LinkedIn Referrals** – You ask one of your LinkedIn contacts for a warm introduction to one of their contacts.
- **Prospective Client Meetings** – You are sitting in your conference room with a prospective client interested in hiring you. You focus on listening and asking great questions, *not* talking about what a great lawyer you are. They will know you are skilled by the questions you ask.
- **Bar Association Events** – Lawyers refer a lot of business to other lawyers. Don’t miss the opportunity to spend time with your legal industry peers and colleagues.

And Finally

Think of sales and marketing the way you would about the relationship between a gas pedal and a clutch. Too much of one or not enough of the other results in a no-go, stalled situation. The same can be said of the interplay between sales and marketing. You need a very subtle combination of both in order to meet your goals! Remember that if your goal is to develop new business, pursuing marketing only is too expensive, while pursuing only sales is too hard without solid marketing messages out there supporting you.



Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC, is the founder and president of Professional Services Marketing, LLC. Terrie serves as a marketing coach to many lawyers across the country struggling with how best to develop their own personal style and successfully attract new business. All of Terrie’s clients have personal marketing plans that balance marketing and sales strategies. You can reach Terrie directly at twheeler@psm-marketing.com or at (320) 358-1000.