

Self-promotion: The secret to success?

Rachel Brushfield assesses the importance of marketing yourself in a slowing economy.

You can be the best lawyer in the world, but if you don't market yourself, you are invisible and limit your potential.

And yet there is much confusion about marketing and what it means. I think of it as a process that can be strategic or tactical. Strategic marketing involves big decisions following research and analysis of which clients you are targeting, what makes you different and what your brand stands for with regards to you, your practice group and your firm. Tactical marketing is the practical implementation of your strategic marketing by producing brochures, for example, or hosting seminars, writing bulletins, attending networking groups and so on. Closely related to both strategic and tactical marketing are networking and new business.

Marketing in a downturn

In a downturn, performance is under the spotlight. Redundancies are both a current and future reality in the profession, and with markets becoming more competitive, there is pressure on costs and a need to justify fees. Tenders and pitches are also becoming more commonplace, and if the offerings of competing firms appear equal, it is the less tangible factors, such as perceptions created from marketing activity, that may influence clients' decisions.

What's more, marketing and in particular certain forms of client entertainment, such as client lunches, can help to generate ideas and build relationships across a firm – motivating you at a time when engagement with the firm is crucial. In fact, with fewer partner positions now available, firms demand well-rounded lawyers, not just with a technical specialist skill, but also emotional intelligence, good people skills and client management abilities as a prerequisite for achieving partner status.

Failure to market yourself, will not only mean that you get paid less, it may also mean that you lose your job. In the US, for instance, 48 per cent of first and second year associates are women, but only 16 per cent of

women lawyers make equity partners¹. Indeed, although there is no hard data measuring the link between ability to market oneself and the speed of promotion to partner and pay received, there is likely to be a strong correlation between the two.

In fact, data provided by the UK's Association of Women Solicitors (AWS) in 2008² showed the average salary in all professions for women at graduate level is ten per cent less than men's for equivalent jobs. Why? Because, men are more likely to demand higher salaries and, in doing so, often get it. One's ability to promote oneself and demand change when you think you deserve it, therefore has a personal as well as a professional impact right from the outset.

Self-promotion explained

So marketing is undoubtedly an important impetus, both to internal success and progression up the career ladder, as well as for attracting new clients and gaining more work from existing clients. For female lawyers, however, self-promotion is often easier said than done. Why? There are a number of different factors affecting women's attitudes to, and ability to effectively carry out, self-promotion.

The National Association of Women Lawyers' (NAWL) November 2008 report *The Third Annual National Survey of Retention and Promotion of Women In Law Firms* identified, asking for business, stating accomplishments, transitioning personal relationships into business relationships, and identifying comfortable venues for business relationships as issues female lawyers admit to struggling with on occasion. All these will affect their potential to win business and do business, and female lawyers need support in overcoming these stumbling blocks

When it comes to marketing women are more likely to help others than sing their own praises. In fact it is commonly believed that women tend to perform worse than men in competitive situations and are more easily harmed by negative assessment. Certainly women are more naturally co-operative and collaborative than men.



Questions to ask yourself about marketing

Here are some questions for you to think about. Plan some time in your diary to do this exercise:

- How do you feel about marketing?
- How clear are you about your personal brand?
- What marketing do you enjoy?
- What marketing do you hate?
- How could you make marketing more enjoyable?
- How do you make time for marketing?
- How could self-promotion help you?
- Who or what could help you to improve your marketing?
- How focused are you on who you are marketing to?
- How clear are you on what you are marketing and how to express it in a way that your target audiences understand?
- Have you translated the features of your service into benefits?
- How could you link your marketing activities with your values?
- How will you measure if your marketing has been successful?

Often, it is assumed men are more comfortable about marketing themselves and their achievements. Certainly many women have a negative view of self-promotion, seeing it as pushy, arrogant and difficult. Ultimately, they believe they must do client work first because this is what is measured on timesheets. The billable hour culture only magnifies this.

The key to tackling such beliefs is to play to your strengths and focus on doing what you do really well, for example, writing an article, or hosting or speaking at an event. This form of marketing begins with focusing on other's needs – your current and target clients' – rather than your own, and thereby matches women's preference to focus on others.

A juggling act

For women lawyers juggling a career and raising children, self-promotion is further hindered by restricted time available for marketing activities. Often already behind from having taken maternity leave, working mothers tend to keep their head down on returning to work and focus on client work in 'survival

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mode', in which self promotion is a luxury time doesn't afford.

Indeed, firms – such as city giants Clifford Chance and Allen & Overy – are increasingly recognising that female lawyers need support with self-promotion and are offering executive coaching programmes specifically to support women. This provides women lawyers with a safe and confidential space and network to create new strategies to succeed in a male culture.

In the US, 97 per cent of law firms have implemented women's initiatives, which provide a combination of programmes tackling professional development such as coaching, networking, mentoring and/or business development (90 per cent of firms include business development as part of their women's initiatives)³.

Even so, and regardless of whether or not you are a working mother, in a billable hours law-firm culture it is easy to put marketing low down on the 'to do' list. But this is a dangerous habit to get into – doing some marketing little and often is wise. So how can you make time for this? You can start by:

- Making a regular time of the day or week for 'marketing time';
- Having a specific place that you go to for marketing tasks;
- Using your diary to have a recurring task with prompts for different marketing activities, for example client research, idea generation, special offers and so on;
- Planning monthly and quarterly reviews;
- Planning time to do those important, but not urgent, tasks like analysing what marketing is working best, which is the least successful and whether you have a clear differentiation and brand in the market place among the clients who you want to target;
- Making an appointment with the person in your firm responsible for marketing and discussing your ideas with them; and,
- Getting a coach or 'marketing mentor' at an early stage of your career and focusing on marketing as a goal – a wise investment with long term benefits.

Measuring marketing

Once you have mastered the art of creating time for self-promotion and marketing, it is worth investing time in measuring what you do, how much promotion you participate in and the results garnered from this so that you can justify any expenditure and make results explicit to your firm. You can do this by:

- Tracking the source of your cases and asking how the client heard about you;
- Recording when you meet associates, time spent with them, the actions that result from this time and how much you refer to each other. Focus on the 20 per cent of your associates who give you the 80 per cent of high-value referrals;
- Remembering to send stocks of your leaflets to trusted associates, ask for theirs and carry them with you;
- Planning time monthly to analyse the split of your billings and sources of businesses, current clients, new clients, internal referrals from your firm, external referrals from an associate, current/former clients and so on; and,
- Keeping an eye on your pipeline of potential work and ensuring the necessary attention is given to marketing – even if you are busy, keep filling your pipeline.

Top tips

- Make time for marketing;
- Take advantage of support in your firm and that offered by any relevant professional associations;
- Ask for help and advice; don't struggle alone;
- Do marketing that fits you and your brand;
- Be focused and specific; what sectors and what client problems are you an expert in;
- Measure and track your marketing;
- Play to your strengths, values and preferences;
- Take responsibility for your own marketing;
- Share your achievements with the firm and create a business case for a pay rise; and,
- Use the threat of redundancy in a positive way to heighten your focus on self-promotion.

Marketing tips

During a slowing economy, it is important to remember that marketing does not have to cost a lot of money. Investing time and thought into promoting yourself will have much more of a long-term impact than throwing money at an expensive self-promotion scheme. Be focused and targeted in what you do, and powerful in how you do it. Below is a list of low cost activities to consider:

- Make time to speak to lawyers in other practice groups in your firm about cross referral opportunities;
- Remember to thank the people who refer to you, either verbally or with a lunch or small gift and to stay in contact with them;
- Contact local newspapers and magazines and offer to write an article;
- Research your current and target clients' needs and demonstrate to them you understand;
- Join a networking group to increase the scale and quality of your marketing. Attend their training courses. The members of your group can become clients, but more importantly you can learn from how they market themselves and meet new contacts through them;
- Ensure you have a clear niche to enable you to stand out in comparison with your competitors;
- Ask your clients to introduce you to their contacts;
- Ask your clients for feedback and testimonials;
- Create client case studies and use them in your marketing, ensuring key facts are kept confidential;
- Spend 30 minutes each day marketing yourself;

- Sign up to an expert-sourcing website such as www.expertsources.co.uk to get contacted by the media for quotes to increase your profile;
- Make sure that you have clear marketing goals so you stay focused;
- Host a seminar with ‘thought leader’ speakers on key client problems and invite your clients to network with each other;
- Ask the advice of people who are naturally good at marketing – copy them but put your own unique stamp on the approach; and,
- Join an communication and leadership skills organisations such as the US-based Toastmasters (visit www.toastmasters.org for more information) to improve your confidence and public speaking ability.

Networking tips

Networking is a vital activity in business and an essential part of marketing and self-promotion, whether you are self-employed or are employed by a firm. It can be stressful for some women, however, as they worry about

- holder, together with their key needs and remember to follow up as soon as possible;
- 5. Ensure you wear something with pockets. Keep a supply of your business cards to give out in one pocket and put received business cards in the other;
- 6. Never eat and drink at the same time. It will give your hands too much to do, make you feel uncomfortable and will make it difficult to shake hands with new contacts;
- 7. Research and prepare key points or questions to ask your target contacts. Take a look at their web site, annual report or recent press coverage. Forewarned is forearmed;
- 8. Networking is an ‘important but non-urgent’ activity. Plan it in your diary regularly to ensure it happens. Set aside specific times of day, days of the week or month to catch up with your contacts;
- 9. Make a note of who your key clients are. Who can provide you with good word-of-mouth referrals? Nurture these clients and ask them to refer you, don’t assume that they will. Neglect them at your peril.



Make marketing your friend, rather than your foe. It can be stimulating, creative yet analytical and enjoyable, all at the same time.

what to say, how to present themselves, how to avoid being too pushy and so on. Here are some simple and easy-to-apply networking tips to help ensure networking becomes an easier and more productive process for you:

1. Listen and learn: People like being asked questions and listened to. This will enable you to find out more about them, so when you respond, it is from an informed position. Don’t worry about what you should say; focus on what to ask others. People love to talk about themselves and be asked their opinion or advice;
2. Think of networking as serving others. Explore what their needs are and how you can help them. Find out the issues and needs of your target audience and become an expert;
3. Set goals for any networking opportunity. Imagine the event is over. What have you done or achieved? Who have you spoken with and what is the next step? Are you information gathering or sourcing relevant business cards to follow up?
4. Utilise business cards received. Write on the back of cards the date and place where you met the card

Make marketing your friend, rather than your foe. It can be stimulating, creative yet analytical and enjoyable, all at the same time. Making marketing work for you is a priority, whatever level you are in your career. It will help you sail through the downturn, coming out ahead of your competitors because of the time and thought you invested. With a high proportion of firms likely to shrink or disappear altogether, the opportunity cost of neglecting marketing is too great to contemplate. [WOMENLEGAL](#)

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