
Bylines That Build Business

By Steven A. Meyerowitz

Since the mid-1970s, new client development for many lawyers has meant advertising or hiring public relations firms. Some advisers to law firms are even now suggesting that lawyers build their practices through the use of "interactive client surveys," through which lawyers ask existing clients about the quality of the services they have been receiving and about ways to improve those services.

Many lawyers today, however, are seeking to develop new clients by a more traditional method—writing magazine and newspaper articles on their areas of expertise for non-lawyers.

Lawyers who have written articles primarily addressed to non-lawyers believe that such articles "can be very helpful in promoting legal business," as Albert Momjian, a partner in the Philadelphia firm of Abrahams & Loewenstein, says. Law firm consultants agree. Walter A. Spiro, chairman of the Philadelphia-based public relations firm of Spiro & Associates, believes that writing such articles is a "valuable means of getting new clients." Senior Vice President Joel A. Rose of the marketing firm of Cantor & Company, located in

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Philadelphia, says it's "an excellent idea." Lawyer Robert W. Waeger, a partner in the Harrisburg firm of Skarlatos, Zonarich & Waeger, is even more direct: He says, "It really works."

Articles written by lawyers for non-lawyers can help build a legal practice in two ways. First, these articles get lawyers' names before the public and show potential clients that the authors are, in fact, experts on the field of law addressed in the article. Rose believes that this happens because a potential client who reads an article that a lawyer has written "attaches a certain amount of credibility to it since someone else thought enough to print it."

In addition to that initial benefit derived from the article in its original form, published articles provide a second benefit—they have tremendous reprint value. Rose suggests that lawyers send articles that they have had published to existing clients to show them the diversity of their work, of which existing clients may be unaware, and to reinforce in their clients' minds the high quality of their work.

The reprint value of a publication is illustrated by an article on arson that Waeger wrote and that was turned into a pamphlet. It resulted in new insurance clients for his firm, he says. Waeger and other lawyers in his office also wrote several monthly magazine columns on homeowners insurance and general in-

surance questions for a Harrisburg publication, as a result of which they were retained by several new clients. Regular publication, such as in a monthly column, provides even more value to a lawyer than just an occasional article, believes Ward Bower, of the Altman & Weil legal consulting firm in Ardmore. That's because a series of columns or published articles helps attract new clients both by getting lawyers' names more frequently before the public and by providing more material for use as reprints.

Articles for non-lawyers as a means of client development can be useful to lawyers who specialize in many different fields, including "insurance defense work, real estate, litigation, domestic relations, tax, and family law," Rose says. Computer, health, environmental, and bankruptcy law are also areas that he believes published articles can be of use to attract clients, and articles on sophisticated corporate finance or securities law issues placed in the proper national business or trade publication can attract clients to lawyers who specialize in those fields.

There are many opportunities for lawyers to write articles for non-lawyers. For some lawyers, such as Momjian, who co-authored an article on "The Doctor and His Divorce" for the journal *Philadelphia Medicine* last year, writing articles for non-lawyers results from in-

invitations from editors or publishers of magazines or newspapers who know of a lawyer's specialty and of the lawyer's interest in writing about it.

But lawyers who want to write magazine articles for lay persons as a means of attracting new clients need not wait for an invitation. Rose suggests that a lawyer who knows someone on a county medical society or at an architects' or accountants' association could suggest writing an article for that organization's publication.

The first thing that lawyers should do when they decide to write articles for lay persons is to determine the type of new clients that they want to attract. To do this, they should consider the size, location and nature of a potential client's business. Answers to these questions will help determine the publications in which the lawyers should try to publish. Family law practitioners, for example, must attract a different type of clientele than commercial finance lawyers, and their clients probably read different publications.

After defining the type of client they would like to attract, lawyers should define certain publications that are available as markets for their articles. Lloyd Zane Remick, a partner in the Philadelphia firm of Astor, Weiss & Newman, wrote several pieces on entertainment law that were published in entertainment publications to attract recording artists as clients. Frank J. Benasutti, a partner in Benasutti and Murray in Philadelphia, wrote articles on patents for the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. Of course, the publication in which an article is featured and the topic of the article should be well thought out, since both display the image of the lawyer and the lawyer's firm.

"Carefully consider the audience you're writing for," Bower advises, when trying to select publications for which to write. "A lot of times articles written for trade journals are more valuable than articles written for [magazines of] general distribution." Spiro believes that lawyers should "want to target it to the kind of reader who is a potential prospect of some worth. You don't want it to be a legal service kind of product unless you're after that kind of business."

After determining the type of client to attract and the likely publications that the decision makers read, the lawyer must consider preparation of the article. "Some lawyers are excellent business developers but may not be excellent authors," Rose says. In that case, the best course would be to find "a person available to do the research and prepare the article." Benasutti agrees: "There is no question that a lawyer who wants to write articles to impress laymen would be well advised to put down all the information and take it to someone who knows journalism to rewrite it." Although a lawyer may be particularly adept at convincing or impressing a judge, Benasutti believes that lawyers are not trained to write as journalists write and should seek their assistance.

Lawyers may want to follow that advice since articles for non-lawyers are different from articles written for lawyers. "Articles you write for lawyers have to have cases that the ink is still fresh on," Waeger says. But lay persons would rather just have the points explained to them and don't really care about cases," Waeger adds. Non-lawyers "also like to hear war stories," although lawyers don't, because they have their own stories. Waeger believes that articles written for lay persons must "get down to basics." In his arson article, he used phrases such as "house insurance" and "reconcile checkbooks," which he wouldn't have used if he had been writing for lawyers. Had he, he might have used terms such as "expense vouchers" and things like that."

Spiro believes that presentation to lay persons by lawyers "is not much different from the way legal problems are presented on television, either in live situations or dramatic cases." The legal issues must be simplified, he says.

Writing articles for non-lawyers is a leading way of attracting clients today, and is especially valuable for lawyers who may be unwilling "to get out there and advertise," as Remick says he is, despite the relative freedom to do so as a result of recent U.S. Supreme Court lawyer advertising cases.

But that's not necessarily the only way to develop new clients. Rose advises his

clients that it "is only one of the approaches that should be used," and says that many firms have gone, for example, to "preparing a newsletter to send to clients."

Not all lawyers like to write or have the time to write articles, but even those who don't recognize that it could be valuable. Benasutti, who hasn't written very much for non-lawyers and says that lawyers in his office do not write articles, admits, "I wish they did."

That people who need lawyers call them after reading articles by lawyers is clear. Says John O. Cunningham, the president and chief executive officer of the Penn Central National Bank in Huntingdon, "I've done just that." He saw an article written by a lawyer on certain problems involved in the creation of a trust, and he called and retained that lawyer. And potential clients may prefer to see articles written by lawyers than to see advertising by lawyers. As Cunningham says about article writing by lawyers, "I think it's very professional." ○○