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## **Strutting Your Stuff: The Advantages Of Seminar Marketing**

*What's the best way to attract new clients? Invite them to listen to you talk — in person!*

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After the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection went public with new “safe fill” regulations a while ago, a number of lawyers in the Pittsburgh office of Babst, Calland, Clements and Zomnir P.C., including Matt Jameson, a shareholder in the firm who concentrates his practice on construction litigation, recognized that the rule could affect almost every large construction project in Pennsylvania. They decided they needed to explain the developments to their clients — and that the situation presented an opportunity to attract new business. Shortly thereafter, Babst, Calland held a seminar on the subject. Jameson says the seminar “generated several calls after the fact” that, indeed, led to additional legal work for the firm.

Jameson is a big believer in seminars as a client development tool. In fact,

Melissa L. Jones, the firm’s marketing director, states that “all groups” of lawyers at Babst, Calland put on seminars.

And they are not alone.

### **Seminar Benefits**

Seminars, which were “the way to go in the 1990s,” remain hot, according to Julie Meyer, the Philadelphia-based marketing director of Dilworth Paxson L.L.P. That makes a great deal of sense. After all, a seminar provides lawyers with the opportunity to strut their stuff for existing clients (reminding them why they hired the lawyers in the first place and subtly suggesting that the initial retention decision was correct) and in front of prospective new clients (to whom the message is, “Look what these people know. I should ask them to help

when our company has a problem.”). In short, Meyer adds, “seminars bring clients and contacts into your office.”

Even the invitation to a seminar can serve a benefit. Stacy Clark, an attorney and marketing advisor to small and mid-size law firms in the Delaware Valley, observes that “the invitation is itself notice to clients and prospective clients that you have expertise in a certain area.” So, if an invitation is done correctly — dignified, yet delivering a clear and exciting message — it alone can be a “great marketing tool,” she says.

### **Avoiding the Pitfalls**

To obtain the maximum marketing value from seminars, law firms and their marketing professionals have to steer clear of the all-too-common pitfalls. One big problem to avoid is choosing the wrong subject to cover in the seminar.

In the view of Jameson of Babst, Calland, broad topics such as a “seminar on commercial law” will not draw a big crowd. By contrast, a seminar “on a discrete area of bankruptcy law, for example, has a better chance of drawing people.” Dilworth’s Julie Meyer agrees, declaring that a seminar should not focus on a firm’s “practice groups” but on particular issues such as Sarbanes-Oxley or privacy. She acknowledges one exception to this rule: Seminars by her firm’s labor and employment lawyers are an effective tool because “people depend on an annual update” and other law firms produce seminars that cover labor and employment issues. In fact, she concedes, her firm probably “would lose clients” if it stopped giving labor and employment law seminars.

A second issue to consider is the speaker or speakers who will be

presenting at the seminar. Clark says that a “seminar really works as a great marketing tool if your speakers are terrific.” The converse is also true: A firm “cannot afford to showcase a bad speaker — no matter how bright he or she is.”

Clark believes that feelings and law firm internal politics aside, firms should put their best speakers — the lawyers who use the least amount of legalese and who have no annoying speaking mannerisms — in front of audiences. However, she says, that does not necessarily mean that a firm should simply refuse to allow lawyers who are not the best public speakers to present at a seminar. Clark points out that “there are lots of great coaches around and attorneys can even have someone in their office or home (such as their spouse) videotape them and give them an honest assessment of their delivery.” She notes that an attorney’s appearance and clothing — Is it too casual or too dressy? Is it too “form fitting”? — can also affect an audience’s impression of the speaker, “which is formed within the first minute of speaking.” What should a firm do if its best lawyer is its worst public speaker? “Get the lawyer some coaching!”

Another tip about speakers: Because seminars may also provide a cross-selling opportunity for a firm, it should consider broadening the range of its speakers at a seminar. For example, Matt Jameson of Babst, Calland says that he often has his firm’s labor lawyers speak at his construction litigation seminars. People “get to see” those lawyers in action and thereafter may call on them for counsel.

If a firm chooses the wrong audience for a seminar, it will be a failure no matter how great the topic and no matter

how wonderful the speakers. As Melissa Jones of Babst, Calland says, “A focused group of 25 of the right people at a seminar is better than an audience of 500 of the wrong people.”

Matt Jameson divides audiences into two groups: lawyers and business people. Lawyers, including in-house counsel and practicing lawyers who are potential (or actual) referral sources, may come to seminars in part to fulfill continuing legal education needs. This can present a danger. Jameson notes that litigators who speak at seminars have to be careful about telling too much to their adversaries or setting forth a position on a legal issue that later may come back to haunt them.

Still, having lawyers attend a seminar can be worthwhile. Julie Meyer of Dilworth observes that general counsel can be a great audience for a seminar, especially if the seminar focuses on “things they are worried about” and the firm’s heavy hitters are speaking, thus tying all of these important issues together.

An audience of business people presents different opportunities to a seminar-producing firm. When the members of this group are decision makers, with the ability to select counsel or influence the company’s choice, the benefits are obvious. It can also be valuable to invite consultants or others involved in the industry on a day-to-day basis. They are likely to serve as referral sources if they are impressed with the firm and its lawyers.

### **Feedback and Follow-Up**

The work associated with putting on a seminar is not close to over after the seminar is completed. Babst, Calland’s marketing director Melissa Jones says

that “one-third” of the work remains. A firm that fails to complete the job will not get the maximum bang for its buck.

For example, after her firm conducts a seminar, Jones lets every lawyer at the firm know who attended the seminar, which allows them to contact anyone they may know. She also puts information about the seminar on the firm’s Web site and encourages presenters to write articles on the subject of the seminar, which Jones also puts on the site.

Jameson personally follows up after a seminar. He says that he calls every person who attended and speaks with them or leaves them a voice mail message to thank them for attending, to let them know they can follow up with him if they have any questions and to ask them to keep the firm in mind if they have issues in the area of law featured in the seminar that may require that they speak with or retain a lawyer.

Consultant Clark advises that the feedback process should be formalized. For instance, Clark says, firms should have an evaluation form for attendees “that asks questions that will generate more business, such as, ‘Would you like a program on this topic at your company?’ ‘Would you like our newsletter?’ and ‘Would you like to be updated on this subject?’”

### **The Future**

Although we live in an age of instant messaging, instant photos and instant Web access, seminars still are quite relevant. Julie Meyer of Dilworth says they may transform from the traditional large seminar to more streamlined events such as “an executive briefing, a 60- or 90-minute breakfast meeting in a firm’s conference room or cocktail parties.”

They may also move from the seminar-sponsoring firm's office to a client's building. As Stacy Clark says, it can be a tremendous opportunity for a firm to present at a corporation, where it goes in for free and has a coordinator on the inside, and where the firm can be guaranteed an audience of 10, 20 or more corporate executives. Clark says it probably could not be more convenient

for a busy businessperson than to have a seminar "20 feet from his or her desk that can answer problems that are on his or her desk." Whether seminars in person give way to "webinars" and teleconferencing, one thing is clear: Providing information to clients and prospective clients is something that will never go out of style.

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