

the secret of marketing:

Good Service!

By Steven A. Meyerowitz

Any one of a dozen different marketing tools may help a potential client learn about a law firm, may get a lawyer's foot in the door or may even get a lawyer retained on a particular matter.

But "good service," in the view of Gina Resnick, a vice president of the Washington-based legal consulting firm of Jaffe Associates, "is the integral part of lawyer marketing." Good service is what keeps clients coming back. And good service is what gets clients to give referrals.

As essential as good service is, just what it is is really rather basic.

For instance, the "number-one service complaint" about lawyers is their failure to return phone calls promptly, according to Robert W. Denney, president of the consulting firm of Robert Denney Associates in Wayne. "Promptly" means that day, not a day or two or more after the client first called. Besides being irritating to a client, failure to return phone

calls promptly also can be a direct cause of lost business.

Recently, a partner at a law firm that is one of Denney's clients failed to return three phone calls made by one of the law firm's clients on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday regarding a new lawsuit. That Saturday, the client met a competing lawyer at a dinner party, complained about his lawyer and, according to Denney, was at the competing lawyer's office Monday morning to retain him for the new litigation.

To solve the phone-call problem, Denney suggests first letting clients meet all of the lawyers who are working on a matter. That way, they'll have more than one lawyer to call. He also advocates telling clients who the back-up lawyers are and giving them the names of the lawyers' secretaries so they will know with whom they are speaking. Replacing antiquated switchboard systems is a good way to make sure that messages are never lost.

The whole area of communications between lawyer and client, only part of which involves answering and returning a client's phone call, is important to whether a client believes a lawyer is providing good service.

"We want communication," said Paul D. Neuwirth, the Philadelphia-based

managing partner of the accounting and management consulting firm of Grant Thornton. "We want to know what's happening as it happens and we want to be informed on all developments."

To keep clients informed K. Lawrence Kemp, a partner in the New Kensington law firm of Kemp and Kemp, said that he tries "to send them copies of everything we do and all correspondence we receive."

In addition, lawyers should send clients collateral materials, such as newsletters, court decisions and article reprints, that might be of interest to them. Harriet Irwin, the marketing director of Northern Central Bank in Williamsport, said that she appreciates lawyers who "share legal information or facts with us that we might not have access to but that are important for our industry."

If lawyers do not send out those materials to their clients, they better beware. "Other lawyers will," Resnick said.

Just as important to clients as having lawyers who communicate with them is having lawyers who meet deadlines.

Important deadlines include not only court-imposed deadlines but also include client deadlines—a client may need a

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