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MANAGEMENT

Know Your Niche

Knowing your target audience will help you distinguish yourself from the competition

By Paramjit Mahli

Some frequent frustrations solo practitioners and managing directors of small firms express about legal marketing are: They spend more money, time and energy than they'd like on marketing activities that don't bring the desired results; there is no difference between their firm and the competition; and they're trying to be all things to all people and getting nowhere.

When a solo practitioner or small firm practices a variety of specialties, prospects and referral sources tend to view the lawyer or firm as a generalist. Worse, prospects don't remember any specific areas because the firm does not differentiate itself from competition.

Not knowing the specifics of the niche target market will result in the loss of marketing dollars and time, and can lead to frustration. Most of all, it will leave you disillusioned. You can't be all things to all people. Clients can see when you are spreading yourself too thin.

Target or niche marketing will allow your firm to stand out from the pack.

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Knowing specifics of your target niche will help you institute client management systems, such as client surveys and focus groups, and will help you understand how the niche group likes to work.

Specificity is key. If you are an immigration attorney, *all* illegal immigrants cannot be your target group. You may, for example, focus on restaurant workers, illegal day laborers or English speaking Europeans. If your firm does personal injury, you may narrow it down to medical injuries at birth, day laborers and accidents with public transport.

When you have narrowed your target audience, you know the ins and outs of the target population, including their legal problems. Your marketing material should address their problems.

When done correctly, a couple of things happen. Your marketing is no longer hit or miss, it becomes focused. You know what types of clients you like to work with, where your clients/prospects are, what they read and where they network.

When you have a specific audience, you become known fairly quickly within the target audience's circles. The firm's name becomes synonymous with that group. The more recognized you become as a valuable service provider in that particular target group, the more expertise you develop, allowing you to charge premium rates.

Where do you start? The first thing you should do is get together with other key partners and office managers in the firm — any individuals with important roles — and start at the beginning.

First, decide if this is the particular group you like to work with. If not, why not? When creating a profile of your tar-

get market, respond to the following questions:

1. What are the demographics of your market? What are the measurable statistics of this group, such as age, income or occupation?

2. What are the psychographics of this market? Often overlooked, these are just as important as the demographics. This includes more the internal workings of this group. What are the preferences of this group? Do they watch World Cup? Where do they live? What values do they have?

3. What type of connection do you have with this community? Are you actively involved in this community? Are your friends, family and colleagues members of the community?

4. What professional organizations, clubs, or activities does this target market networks with or belong to? Do you know where they go for help?

5. What newspapers, magazines or Web sites does this group read?

6. What specific legal problems does this group face? Will your product or service help them?

7. What languages are spoken by the group? Knowing the vocabulary of your intended market lends credibility.

8. Who influences this group? What individuals does the group respect? What do these thought leaders advocate? Can you align your services with these thought leaders?

These questions will help you discover and understand your niche market. Once you can answer these questions, your other marketing activities — such as speaking, writing, networking and becoming a source for press — will become easier. ■