

# Law Firm Marketing

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## The Art of Networking Made Simple

Learning to effectively network can make all the difference in the world when it comes to finding or attracting new business. For most it is not something that comes naturally and that's OK. In this column I will spell out some simple and proven methods to allow you to become not only more comfortable with networking, and also more effective.

### Be Yourself

The first myth I would like to dispel is that you have to be great at small talk — not true. In fact it's the furthest thing from the truth. People are not interested in small talk. They are interested in learning about your story and looking for ways to collaborate and interact. So the first tip is: know your story. I am not talking about the elevator pitch, I am talking about what makes you unique and interesting to other people upon first meeting them? What are some commonalities that will allow others to see themselves in you? What are some of your interests, hobbies, recent travel stories?

### Be strategic

Only attend events where your target audience will be. And choose events that provide you with the opportunity to meet people of influence — people who have the power and influence to hire you.

### Preparation before the event

Find out who's going to be there. Ask the organizers to share the attendee list with you. They likely don't get asked this very much. If they don't share it with you before the event, ask to see it at the event when you arrive and register. Identify ahead of time those people you want to meet. Ask the people at the registration desk if they know/can introduce you to specific people.

Know what you want to learn about them. Think about who is going to be there and prepare your questions for them ahead of time. What do you want to know about them? What questions can you ask that will help with your market research?

### Mingling

If networking is new to you, and you are still a little apprehensive about meeting people in a large/group setting, here are a few tactics guaranteed to ease you into it.

### Think of yourself as a host.

When you entertain people in your own home, you introduce them to each other and put them at ease — try this approach.

Look for people who are standing alone — they are likely just as uncomfortable about

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networking as you are. Join them and start a conversation. Meet the presenters and/or organizers of the event so you can expand your resource and knowledge network. These people are likely very connected and may be able to introduce you to people of influence. They may also be able to provide you with opportunities to present at future events to raise your profile.

The conversation — find out everything you can about them, don't talk about yourself and how great you and your firm are. Communication is 90 per cent listening. And remember practicing law and offering or selling your services starts with being able to find the need. You can't find the need if you are talking about yourself.

By asking them the right questions, you will do more to impress them than with any possible answer you might give them. One of the best questions to start with is "What brings you here today?" You'll be amazed at how much more information you'll learn by asking this question rather than "What do you do?"

### **The exit**

When you do not want to/ intend to follow up with the person: Hand them your business card and say "It was a pleasure speaking with you — enjoy the conference/meeting."

When you do want to follow up with the person: Hand them your business card, and say "It was a pleasure speaking with you, I'd like to be in touch to continue our conversation. When's a good time to follow up with you?" Then you have their permission to follow up.

Networking can be tough for some lawyers. Taking a strategic approach to networking can make your efforts to mingle and connect more useful and effective.

### **Choosing your seat** (where applicable)

Sit at a table where you do not know anyone and introduce yourself with your business card.

This is often done quickly because the event is about to start. Use a segue piece that's comfortable for you, i.e. "We're going to be spending

some time together this morning, I think it would be a good idea to get to know each other a little bit." When others reciprocate, you'll know immediately who you should be talking to first. This works regardless of which table you choose. Review the cards and prioritize who you want to speak with at the first break.

If there is a seminar/ presentation component Ask a question. Give yourself a 30 second infomercial at every event by doing your homework and preparing an intelligent question that relates to the topic of discussion and speaks about something that you are doing to help your clients. Introduce your question with your name and your story. It will show everyone in that room that you care about your clients enough to attend these events. This will help you build your profile by getting your name and your firm name out there. Everyone in that audience will know who you are. You'll start to have people come up to you following the event. They'll be coming to you. You won't have to go looking for them. The next time you have an event to attend where there may be some people of interest, try at least a couple of these tips and see how much easier networking can be.



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