

## Grow Your Practice Series:

July 2007

### 101 Ways to Effectively Market Your Law Firm

#### No. 53: Improve the Responses to Your Client Survey by Making It User Friendly

This is the third part of a series on collecting feedback from former clients. In May we covered all the benefits of surveying your former clients, and in June we addressed what types of questions to ask as well as what to specifically ask about. In this month's issue, we take you through the nuts and bolts of putting together a client satisfaction survey that is easy to respond to.

If you missed the May issue of **Attorney@law** in which we addressed the benefits of surveying your former clients, please locate and read that article. If you missed the June issue of **Attorney@law** that included a sample Client Satisfaction Survey, you should refer back to that issue. The next step is to design a survey that is attractive, affordable and will produce responses from your former clients. The last thing you want or need is to design a client survey, mail it out, and receive no responses or very few responses.



**Key Success Factors:** A survey that no one returns is useless. In fact, it's worse than useless; it's counterproductive. Here is what makes a survey work.

◆ **Attractive:** The actual finished printed piece has to be professional and attractive. It does not have to be four-color and loaded with glossy photos like a glamour magazine, but it also cannot look like it was run off on your copier. It needs to have a businesslike appearance without being too imposing. Like many things in life, love and law, it is a delicate balance. Lots of white space will give it a fresh, uncrowded look.

◆ **Easy-to-Answer Questions:** The sample client survey we included with the June **Attorney@law** included simple questions with simple answers that did not require a lot of thought. Recipients can easily answer the questions with a pen or pencil in a few minutes. Unlike the new SAT, there are no essays.

◆ **Easy-to-Return Piece:** The final step in the process is to make sure the surveys are returned to your law firm. A fax-in response form is fine for businesses, since virtually every business has a fax machine these days. Most individuals, however, do not own a fax machine, so that is not an option. A survey that can be easily mailed back can be used by everyone, so that is clearly what you want.

◆ **No Stamp or Postage Required:** You do not want your former client to complete the survey and get it ready to mail, but not have a stamp handy. He or she leaves it on his desk, or on the dashboard of her car, or sitting on his refrigerator, and somehow it never gets mailed.

**Pre-Paid Postage:** There are two ways to provide a client survey that does not require postage.

◆ **Business Reply Mail:** You can purchase a Business Reply permit, and print the appropriate indicia on your survey mailer. When your client drops it in the mail, it comes back to your local post office, your account is charged for the postage, and you receive the survey. The problem is that it costs \$175 a year for your Business Reply permit, and you pay over \$1.00 to get each piece returned back to you. However, you only pay for those items that are returned.

◆ **Pre-Stamp the Surveys:** The other option is to simply put a stamp on the return panel on each survey before it is mailed out. For lower volumes (less than a hundred surveys a year), this actually is cheaper, even if some recipients do not return the survey and the stamp goes to waste.

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◆ **Our Recommendation:** If you handle hundreds of clients of year, investing in a Business Reply permit and printing the appropriate indicia on your survey makes sense. If, however, you are only going to mail out a few dozen surveys a year, we suggest simply affixing a First Class stamp to the return panel of the survey. In fact, we suggest using commemorative stamps as they make the piece that much more interesting and attractive. Unless, of course, it's the new **Tort Reform** commemorative stamp (just kidding).

**The One-Sheet, Self-Mailer Client Satisfaction Survey:** We recommend printing your survey on 8½x11 card stock. Design the piece with three panels on the back so it can be folded with the outbound panel showing when you mail it to clients. Once the client completes the survey, he or she refolds the piece so the return panel with your address is showing. The client staples or tapes the survey closed and drops it in the mail. The return address panel has either Business Reply Mail indicia on it so it will be charged to your account and returned to you, or it is already stamped so it comes back to your office. In either case, all the client has to do is drop it in the mail. To quote Sonny Corleone, "Badda Bing." Your client receives the survey, opens it, completes it, closes it, seals it, and drops it in the mail. No muss. No fuss.

**How Easy Can We Make It?** To make it even easier, we included in the e-letter version of **Attorney@law** a sample of what the back side of the mailer we are recommending looks like. We added fold-lines to show you where the piece folds. To send out the mailer, fold it so the panel at the top is on the outside. Once the client has completed the survey, he or she folds it back up so the panel at the bottom is on the outside. Should your client fold it wrong and drop it in the mail, it will either be returned to you postage due (so you get it back anyway), or it will be re-delivered to your client, who will realized what he or she did when he receives it back, so she will then refold it correctly and mail you the survey.

**Color Schemes:** This sample is in color, but that is not necessary. The entire survey can be simply black ink on white stock. A good artist and printer can often use shades of grey to make the piece richer without adding the cost of printing in more than one color. Another option is to simply produce them desktop on a high resolution inkjet or laser printer, and for most law firms that really makes the most sense.

**You Need to "Tab" the Mailer:** If you use a self-folding mailer as we recommend, you will need to purchase tabs. These are available from any office supply store. Ask for **Avery** Item 5732.

**Pre-Scored Forms:** If you decide to produce your survey desktop, you can purchase pre-scored 8½x11 stock from **PaperDirect** ([www.paperdirect.com](http://www.paperdirect.com)). They offer what they call tri-fold templates which are pre-printed, pre-scored sheets that are shipped flat so you can run them through your inkjet or laser printer and then fold them before you mail them. For the type of format we are suggesting, they are perfect. We strongly recommend that you order them on the heavier 38 lb. stock as they will travel through the mail much better and arrive in much better condition.

**Next Month:** Once you start to get back surveys from your former clients, what do you do with the data? Keep an eye out for the August issue of **Attorney@law**.



## Managing Your Practice: A Key to Reducing Employee Turnover Is to Make Sure New Employees Get Off to a Good Start



There's an old expression that—unlike many old expressions that have become woefully outdated—is very, very true: "You get one chance to make a first impression." This term is usually applied to sales, and how a salesperson (or anyone selling or promoting anything, such as legal services) has one opportunity to make a good first impression. Make a good first impression, and the relationship just seems to take off. Get off to a bad start, however, and it takes forever to get things on track. In fact, sometimes relationships that get off to a bad start never recover from that initial negative experience!

**Where Do Things Go Wrong?** It happens all the time. You interview a person for a position at your firm, and everyone thinks the candidate is just great. You check out his or her credentials and references, and maybe even put the employee through some pre-employment tests (we covered that in the June **Attorney@law**). You hire the employee, and things just do not work out. What went wrong? And since that is not a rhetorical question, here is what most likely went wrong.

**1. The Job Was Not Exactly as Described:** In putting together this article, our staff quickly came up with two incidents in their careers where employees did not work out because they did not really understand the job. In one, the company hired a marketing director, but the marketing director never understood that she would be making field sales calls. In the other, a professional services firm hired an accounts receivables manager who did not realize that most of the receivables were seriously past due and in many cases were uncollectible. These are somewhat extreme examples, so let's look at a more common one. You hire a new receptionist, but once she is hired, she learns that she not only has to make the coffee for the office, but she has to collect and wash all the coffee cups at the end of the day. Not a big deal, but she should have known that when she was interviewed for the position.

**2. The Employee Was Never Really Oriented to the Job:** If you need an employee who can hit the ground running Day One and work without any supervision or orientation, that should be made clear during the interview. If, however, you are going to provide training and orientation for the position, that should also be made clear before the employee is hired. Many employees start a new job, do not receive the orientation they need, fumble, are sometimes too embarrassed to ask questions, and they end up either leaving or being let go.

**3. The Employee Does Not Fit In:** Many employees end up leaving, or become so unhappy that they become unsatisfactory employees and are let go, simply because they never fit in with the group or the law firm's corporate culture. This may seem silly to some of us, and a not-too-important touchy-feely issue, but many employees just need to feel comfortable, appreciated and part of the team before they can become really productive employees.



**Getting New Employees Off to a Good Start:** Now that you know the reasons why many new employees do not work out, here are three guidelines for getting new employees off to the kind of positive start that leads to a productive employee and long-term employment.

**1. Make the New Employee Feel Welcome:** Something as simple as having the new employee's business cards printed and having the new employee's e-mail account set up when he or she arrives for his first day of work goes a long way toward getting things off to a good start. Have someone take the new employee around and introduce him to everyone, then spend some time each day for the new employee's first week on the job making sure he knows where everything is. Stop by and ask how she is doing. Making positive comments about the new employee builds confidence and makes the new employee feel better about his new employer.



**2. Provide Immediate Feedback, Both Positive and Negative:** Here is a situation we have seen occur again and again. A new employee arrives late for work on his second day on the job. The manager lets it go. The next week that employee arrives late twice, but nothing is said. Finally, the employee has been on the job for six weeks, and the manager wants to know why he is always late? The issue should have been addressed—in a positive and non-judgmental way, of course—the first time he is late. "George, it is important that you be here on time every morning" is all that needs to be said. Similarly, find the new employee doing something right, and compliment her on it, even if it is somewhat minor. Positive comments solicit more positive behavior. That concept is a valid, faithful and reliable as the Law of Gravity.

**3. Make Mid-Course Corrections, as Necessary:** This is especially important when you create a new position, either as you expand or downsize. It is totally reasonable (and a good practice) to tell an employee in a new position that he will essentially "invent" the job.

We know of a very successful law firm that has a Director of Client Services. The woman in that position does an excellent job, but she and her boss, the senior partner at the firm, re-defined and re-structured the job three times before they got it right. Now no one at the firm can understand how they got by without her! *And her boss tells us that he does not know how he would ever be able to replace her!*

**Downhill Racer:** No, not the movie. An employee's first day on the job can be his best day, and everything can just go down hill from there. Or the employee's first day on the job can be the start of a "beautiful friendship" (to steal a line from Humphrey Bogart and Claude Rains). The good news, Mr. Attorney-at-Law, is you get to decide which.

## Report from the AAJ: Answers to the Questions We Were Most Often Asked

We just got back from the **American Association for Justice** Annual Convention in Chicago where a few hundred trial attorneys visited our booth. Many of them asked the same questions, so since **LawMax** is an **AAJ** sponsor (you've probably seen the "Friends of Justice" logo at our website) here are the most commonly asked questions, and answers to those questions.

### 1. What Is My Risk? (or What Liabilities Do I Assume) When a Client Receives an Advance against a Pending Lawsuit?

The only obligation you, the attorney, assumes is to pay off the advance plus the accumulated risk premium once the case has settled and the proceeds of the settlement are disbursed to the appropriate parties. This only occurs, of course, if you reach an out-of-court settlement or you win the case at trial. Should you lose the case at trial or abandon the case, you and the client owe nothing.

**2. Aren't Lawsuit Advances Expensive?** If the alternative is having your client's car repossessed because he can't make the payments, or be evicted from her apartment because she cannot pay the rent, or—worse yet—lose his home because he cannot make his mortgage payments (and lose the equity he has in his home), or have her gas and electric turned off, then it is not expensive, considering the highly unattractive alternatives. If a client can secure money elsewhere cheaper, we recommend taking advantage of that source of funds. But for the client in immediate need of cash who is facing unattractive alternatives, a lawsuit advance is an expensive, but affordable and reasonable, option.



**3. Once LawMax Grants an Advance to a Plaintiff, Who Runs the Case?** We suspect this question comes from attorneys who've watched "Erin Brockovitch" a few too many times. There can be only one captian, so you, Mr. or Ms. Attorney, run the case. We are neither backseat drivers nor Monday morning quarterbacks. If you say it's time to settle out of court, we will back you 100%. If you go to trial, and you go to trial and lose, you will never hear a word of criticism from us. You only get paid, and we only get paid back, if you win the case or reach a settlement. The last thing you need is yet someone else telling you what to do. You try the case. It's your client, and your case. We provided funding in the first place because we believe in the case and in your ability to receive fair compensation for your client.

If you have questions about legal finance that were not answered, call us at **866-LAWMAX-8** or e-mail your questions to [marketing@fundmycase.com](mailto:marketing@fundmycase.com), and we will answer them for you.

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