

Grow Your Practice Series:

August 2006

101 Ways to Effectively Market Your Law Firm

No. 15: Excellent Customer Service Will Generate Client Referrals



The best marketing is word-of-mouth. World-class customer service generates new clients via referrals from your current clients who were impressed with the service, support and professionalism of your law firm. Satisfied clients tell others about the excellent value and service they received from their legal services provider. And referrals from clients are more valuable than any type of conventional advertising or promotion you can do!

Just Exactly What Is “Customer Service”? Like so many other terms we hear today, “customer service” is both overused and misused. It is the sum of all the interactions you have with prospects and clients. Most people think of excellent customer service as answering the phone promptly and professionally, being polite and courteous, returning phone calls, and saying “please” and “thank you” a lot. These are minor factors. Truly world-class customer service is much, much more!

Three Key Factors: There are three key factors that set world-class customer service apart from simply being professional and courteous.

1. Excellent Customer Service Is Pro-Active. Never Re-Active! Like most of us, clients hate surprises. Your client is told she will be sent a package of documents overnight on Thursday so it will arrive Friday morning, and it does not arrive. She calls your office at 1:00 pm Friday afternoon in a confrontational mood, asking where it is. Such an event is not consistent with world-class customer service!

Let’s re-think this. You promised to get something out to a client on Thursday, but you got held up in court and you missed the **FedEx** pick up, so it did not go out. Okay, these things happen. The next step is to call the client (or have someone from your office call), explain what happened, and inform the client that it will go out Friday. Not great news, but far better than an angry call on Friday afternoon!

The key factor here is that calling the client and telling her that the documents did not go out is pro-active. Waiting for the client to call the next day, and then explaining what happened, is re-active and it creates a totally negative, confrontational situation that could have been totally avoided. Being reactive is never consistent with world-class customer service!



2. Put the Client in Charge: Let’s stay with the documents that did not go out on Thursday. You or someone on your staff calls the client, and explains what happened, and rather than just informing the client that it will go out Friday, you offer the client some options. That turns a negative, re-active interaction into a positive, pro-active customer service opportunity!

You ask the client if she would like Saturday delivery of the documents, or will regular Monday delivery be okay? The client explains that no one will be in the office Saturday, so don’t send it out for Saturday delivery. You then ask if it would be helpful to have it delivered on Saturday to the client’s home so she can review it over the weekend. No thanks, she responds, because she will be away for the weekend, so Monday delivery at her office is fine.

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By giving the client options, you put her in charge. She is no longer the victim who did not get the documents she was promised on Friday. Instead, you and your client are working with each other to come up with a reasonable solution to a problem. Don't be surprised if your client ends the phone call with a "thanks for calling." You called her to tell her that you dropped the ball, and she ends the call by thanking you! That's world-class customer service. And that's a client who refers you to her suppliers, customers, colleagues, friends and associates!



3. Accident Prevention: Your client gets back from lunch on Monday, she still does not have the documents you promised her, so she calls your office, but now she is screaming and totally out of control. She was supposed to have those documents, Friday, then she was going to have them Monday, and she still does not have them! What the hell is the matter with you people?

We just created a negative, re-active situation that could have been completely avoided. You check your records, find the tracking number for the overnight letter, contact **FedEx**, and discover that the documents were actually delivered at 10:20 that morning, and they are somewhere in the client's facility!

Parallel Universe Time: Monday morning you sent an e-mail to your client with the **FedEx** tracking number for the overnight letter you sent out Friday. When your client gets back from lunch, and the documents you promised her are not on her desk, she does NOT call your office because she knows you shipped them out Friday. She either visits the **FedEx** website or calls **FedEx** to see where they are, or she calls her receiving department or mail room to find out where they are. No negative and re-active exchange between you and your client!

World-class customer service is pro-actively making every prospect and client interaction a positive event. That generates clients who tell others how professional, courteous, helpful, knowledgeable and valuable you are!

Keeping an Eye on Your Competitors Can Be Very Valuable



As a trial attorney, you compete with all the other trial attorneys in town. That's why the **ATLA** educational programs include sessions on advertising and marketing. While your and your firm's reputation in the legal community is important, and referrals from clients is the best single source of new clients, you still must compete with the other attorneys and law firms for new clients. So what should your relationship be with the other law firms in town?

Competitive Dos and Don'ts: There is really just one **Do** and really just one **Don't** regarding the relationship you should have with the guys across town.

- ◆ **The Do:** Always refer clients to another attorney if you are not the best fit for that client. If the client really needs an expert in intellectual property, and that's not your strong suit, you are probably better off referring the prospective client to an attorney better suited to what that client needs.
- ◆ **The Don't:** Do not ever bad-mouth another attorney or law firm. Regardless of how poor their reputation may be, saying anything that even comes across as negative about another member of the bar reflects poorly on you and your firm. Should a current client or prospective client ask about another attorney or law firm, it's okay to say that they are very fine criminal attorneys, but your specialty is personal injury. That is a valid statement and also a positive comment about your fellow bar members.

Learn from Your Competition: If there is a law firm or several law firms that seem to be doing better than you are, take a look at what they are doing. While you do not want to simply copy their marketing, you can certainly learn from what they are doing to promote their practice that is apparently working for them and producing results.

- ◆ **Visit Their Website:** You should periodically visit the websites of the firms with which you compete. What are they doing at their sites that may be enabling them to communicate more effectively what they do? How do they set themselves apart from the other attorneys in town? What are they saying at their sites that gets prospective clients to call or visit them?
- ◆ **Look at Their Other Advertising:** Take a look at the Yellow Page ads of the other trial attorneys in your area, and compare it to your ad. Where else are they advertising, such as in the newspaper, on radio or TV, or in local directories? How are they doing a better job than you are of getting out their name and legal capabilities?
- ◆ **Use a Mystery Shopper:** Retailers such as stores, banks and restaurants hire "mystery shoppers" to visit their outlets and report back on the level of service they received, if their questions were



answered, and how knowledgeable and courteous the staff was at each of their and their competitors' locations. Find a friend whose voice your staff will not recognize, give him or her a list of questions to ask, have your friend call your office (but not tell you when he or she will call) and the offices of the competing law firms in town. Then have your friend report back on the results, ranking each law office's staff in terms of friendliness, helpfulness, courtesy, professionalism, and the ability to answer basic questions.



Thank Goodness for the Competition! While we hate to have to compete with anyone for a new client, our competitors can teach us what works and what does not work, and they certainly keep us on our toes!

Legal Finance Is Not Just for Individual Plaintiffs

When most trial attorneys hear about lawsuit finance, they think of personal injury, wrongful death, medical malpractice or similar plaintiffs who took advantage of a cash advance against the projected proceeds of their settlements, often to replace lost income while they waited for their cases to settle or go to trial. For many moderate-income plaintiffs, legal finance or litigation financing is a lifesaver that covers their living expenses while they await the proceeds of their claim.

It is not, however, only individual plaintiffs who use litigation financing. Small businesses are increasing taking advantage of lawsuit funding to receive critical working capital while their cases wind through the legal system. Just as individual plaintiffs often face financial stress while waiting for the resolution of their cases, many small businesses involved in commercial litigation face financial pressures as well. They lost their inventory in a fire, their building or property was damaged and is not useful, or some other catastrophe has befallen them that resulted in the lawsuit.

A cash advance against the projected proceeds of a pending commercial lawsuit is often the difference between a small business actually staying in business or closing its doors and laying off its staff. When it eventually wins the lawsuit or reaches an out-of-court settlement, there is no ongoing business to go back to, no staff to run the business, and customers who have been forced to go elsewhere! For a small business in commercial litigation, an advance against the proceeds of its lawsuit may be the only asset it has, and the only way it can survive to be in business when it finally has its day in court!



To learn more about legal finance, visit www.fundmycase.com or call **1-866-LAWMAX-8** (866-529-6298)

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Where Do You Need Help with Your Marketing? It's Worth \$100 and 256MB to Us!

The **LawMax Network** is developing a two-day marketing conference for attorneys, and we need your input as we develop the curriculum for our conference concept. We anticipate offering the conference three or four times a year at locations around the country.

There is an almost unlimited number of topics we can cover, so your input as to what you would like to see covered at a law firm marketing conference is valuable information, as well as suggestions for locations for the event and the best times to offer it.

Go to www.fundmycase.com/en/marketingsurvey.php4 to complete our simple survey form. To show our appreciation for participating in our survey, we will send you a coupon giving you or anyone from your practice \$100 off the registration fee at our conference, as well as very useful gift: A combination pen and 256MB memory stick to help you stay organized.