

All in the talk

By Linda Julian

Lawyers tend to have ways with words. Sometimes clever ways. Other times, not the best ways with words to achieve the spectacular business development outcomes of which they dream.

Prospective clients - get them talking

Because few lawyers and other expert professionals have had professional sales training, they frequently mistake telling the prospective client lots about what **they** can do for effective selling. Yet, getting meaningful and frank input from prospective client is vital early on, and throughout the process of converting a prospective client to a client.

Only rarely should your goal for first encounter be to give as much information as possible to the prospective client.

Most often, your goal should be to gain the greatest understanding you can of:

- what the individual or organisation needs
- their business environment and functions
- their objectives
- what might stand in the way of their enlisting your support.

Because it's your prospective client who knows about **their business, their needs,** and **their buying preferences,** you need to get **them** talking about that.

Start selling only after they tell you what they want to buy

It make perfect sense for them to tell you all of this before you start selling any specific service or solution. After all, you don't know what to sell until you know what they need and want to buy !

For a prospective client to spend time and energy telling you about their needs, you'll first need to establish your credibility. That done, it's time to ask questions, probe out their responses, and get your prospective client to invest in bringing you up to speed with their world and their needs.

Your prospective client knows their problem - probably much better than you, and definitely in ways you don't. Your first task is to understand their problem and then show your capabilities and willingness to help.

Talking the right talk

You'll then be positioned to make a productive contribution with:

- anecdotes illustrating your credentials
- ideas
- preliminary suggestions
- reasons to engage your services.

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Evangelism talk

Good, old-fashioned word-of-mouth marketing, now renamed “evangelism marketing”, is being hyped as the tactic of today.

Fact is, it always worked - back then and now.

Talk about you

Many of your best business opportunities comes from word-of-mouth (WOM). If you think back over your best clients, chances are that positive WOM put you in the frame.

When clients actively shop for a new expert professional, their usual first step will be to ask among colleagues and contacts. Even for those who instantly Google search, there’s a high propensity to check out professional reputation with trusted sources via WOM. For clients who embark on organised and formal selection processes, WOM is still a factor.

Chances are, **WOM will have at least some impact on every buying decision by a new client - and that you’ll probably never know the exact content.**

Work on word-of-mouth

Take a few minutes to think through those in your circle who are strong, **business influencers**. Maybe consultants, investment bankers, industry analysts, clients (current, past or prospective). Then, work out those who show evangelistic zeal in converting their contacts to your prospective clients and your prospective clients to real work for you.

WOM evangelists will normally be **active in their industry or professional circles** and regarded as **authorities in their fields**. So, update them with information of value and interest to their contacts.

They’ll be [at least somewhat] **interested in you, your firm, and your news**. So keep them in the loop.

They’ll **pay attention to press coverage** you receive, **professional accolades**, and other recognition. So, make certain they see it.

Your WOM evangelists will already be **telling their contacts about you and what you do**. So, make sure they have current material on hand.

Your WOM sales force will be **in touch with scores of people of interest** to you. So, let them know you’d like to be in touch with those same people.

Those WOM gems will **jealously guard their status as trustworthy sources of information and recommendations**. So, do the right thing: never give them other than 100% correct information, pay warm and courteous attention to their referrals, treat their leads as important and do your finest work for them.

For most expert professionals, word-of-mouth is the most powerful of promotional tools. Use it well.

About the author: *Linda Julian is a director of Julian Midwinter & Associates, strategic practice development consultants to the legal profession. Nearly three decades experience working with legal practices throughout Australia, Asia, and the Pacific, place her in a unique position to advise on strategic marketing and practical business development issues. Her down-to-earth, pragmatic approach to the critical business issues facing the profession, combined with creative ideas and pragmatic advice, make her a popular conference speaker, regular contributor to professional journals, and an in-demand consultant and advisor.*