

# Marketing Keys To Your Best Year Ever

By Dustin A. Cole

Get your new year started with a bang—and set yourself up for your best revenues ever.

Marketing doesn't have to be expensive, difficult or complex, and it can be done successfully in a highly ethical, respectful manner.

Yellow pages ads, television spots, or private referral services are not only expensive, they tend to compromise your reputation—and the worst part is that they're not very effective. They may bring inquiries, but the vast majority will be "D" and "E" clients. In contrast, the best new business always comes from personal referrals; clients who come to you because they were referred by someone they trust, who in turn likes and trusts you. And your referrals will increase when you focus on developing stronger personal relationships with a larger group of good referral sources.

In short, the most effective marketing is the most ethical, the most cost-effective, and potentially the most enjoyable!

Here are nine excerpts from the Attorneys Master Class workshop "14 Fundamentals of a Million-Dollar Practice" that provide a quick look at the fundamentals of successful referral marketing. Follow them seriously and consistently and the tips can help you have a great year, this year and every year to come.

## 1 Do You REALLY Know Who's Referring You Business? (Identify your referral sources)

For most attorneys, marketing is an occasional, informal process. Very few have ever created a list of important referral sources for regular reference. Many attorneys do not even have a system for capturing the names of new client referral sources, and only a very few capture referral source names when an inquiry does not turn into a client.

Effective marketing demands that you develop a list of those who refer you business, and use it consistently to maintain contact, relationship, and awareness with them.

Once you've compiled a comprehensive list from your current and past files, you can decide which sources have high potential for new business (and therefore should be contacted more frequently), and those who have low potential (and can be contacted less frequently).

A list is also the beginning of a database, which allows you to leverage your marketing effectiveness by capturing relevant personal and professional information: assistant's name, spouse and children's names, hobbies, interests, and especially, notes from past conversations. Such a database allows you to be extremely effective in developing and maintaining strong referral relationships.

## 2 Stop What's Stopping You (Get into action—no excuses)

For most attorneys, marketing is "when I have time" rather than a regular activity. As a result, it inevitably ends up on the bottom of the priority list. The first rule of marketing is "BE IN ACTION!" Without a commitment to a certain number of contacts with referral sources each week, all other skills in the marketing toolbox are irrelevant. Prioritize marketing at or near the top of your list. Commit to a minimum level of three to four contacts a week—even if it's an e-mail that takes two minutes. Don't let a week pass that you haven't done SOME type of marketing. It's no longer optional—it's essential to a secure future.

## 3 Avoid "Marketing By Wandering Around" (Focus your marketing)

More than just action, *focused* action is a keystone of effective marketing. Rather than "marketing by wandering around" and hoping to encounter potential clients, the attorney should be developing trust relationships with referral sources who work with many people who could be "A" or "B" clients. Referral marketing leverages your time and effectiveness because you've built a team of people who are helping you locate new business.

Rank your list of referral sources and potential referral sources. Focus on building or maintaining "A" relationships with referral sources who can refer you "A" and "B" clients.

## 4 You Schmooze, You Lose (It's all about relationship, not sales)

If you believe that personal referral marketing is about "schmoozing" people, you'll be frustrated and disappointed. No one enjoys—or

trusts—insincere, manipulative people. Referrals are made out of “know, like, and trust”—from sincere “friend” relationships—and not from sales, coercion, or pressure. Focus on building genuine trust relationships with referral sources and let go of the need to sell yourself. Discussions about “business” will come up naturally, or sometimes not at all. Just remember, it’s about the relationship.

Also, understand that fruitful relationships don’t develop overnight. They are a long-term process that may take months or years to mature, but once they do, they will continue to support you for years to come.

### **Thank You, Thank You, Thank You** *(Acknowledge your referrers early and often)*

One of the most frequent complaints attorneys who refer business to other attorneys make is “I never know what happens to them.” Build a system to thank and acknowledge those who are supporting you at every opportunity. When your office receives an inquiry call, one of the first questions that should be asked is “who should we thank for referring you to us?”

Every referral—even a phone call from a prospect who was turned away or didn’t choose to work with you—should be quickly acknowledged and thanked with a note, call, or e-mail. When a client is accepted and a file opened, a handwritten note should be automatically generated and sent to let the referrer know you’re working with the client, and again thanking him or her. Finally, at the close of every file, a note, call, or e-mail should go to the referrer, informing him or her that the matter has been concluded, and once again thanking him or her for their trust and confidence in referring clients to you. This level of communication creates high trust levels and great appreciation—resulting in even more referrals.

### **Expand Your World** *(Use existing referral sources to develop new ones)*

The definition of an “A” level referral relationship is someone who knows, likes, and trusts you, and wants to support you. So why not ask some of your “A” level relationships to introduce you to their colleagues who may have clients, colleagues, or friends who might need your help? Have them take you and the other person to lunch and introduce you. Let them do the talking. They will convey their trust in you to the other person, and you can begin the process of establishing another fruitful referral relationship in a highly positive way.

### **Put Some FUN Into It!** *(Marketing that’s no fun doesn’t get done)*

Hate to go to those boring meetings to troll for business? Then stop—because it rarely works. If you dislike it, it will show, and your efforts will be largely wasted. Worse, you will avoid whenever possible any marketing activity you dislike. Shift your activities to reflect your interests and hobbies and personal passions. Listen and learn about interests you share with your referral sources, and instead of

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stiff lunches or cocktail parties, go boating or running or golfing with them. Do what you enjoy and invite others to participate.

If you are involved in an uninteresting organization because it’s important to your referral marketing, take your interests into it. Chair a committee for a charity, civic, or social event that is meaningful to you, and you will attract others in the organization who share your interests, and have the potential to become “A” referral sources. The organization, the charity, and you will all benefit.

Marketing doesn’t have to be unpleasant. It can actually be a joy. And when it is, it not only works better, it contributes considerably to your enjoyment of your practice.

### **Enlist Your Team** *(Leverage your marketing)*

Just as in the legal work, there is much that you can delegate, and many systems you can create, which will allow your team to support your marketing efforts. If you have sharp, people-oriented assistants, give them your referral list and have them start scheduling lunches for you on a regular basis.

Collect information on referral source birthdays, anniversaries, and special events, and create a system that has your staff generating cards and notes for you to sign. Paralegals and legal assistants have their own associations, and your staff can be connecting with staff from other firms, helping you generate new business. Your marketing effectiveness can be multiplied many times by the thoughtful use of staff and the development of marketing support systems.

### **Row, Row, Row Your Boat!** *(Not just ACTION, but CONSISTENT action gets results)*

Consistent contact over time with your referral sources creates a continuing high level of awareness and contributes mightily to building a trust relationship. Once-a-year holiday cards and lunches do little, but personal contact with your best referral sources at least four times a year, plus occasional notes, cards, and e-mails, builds trust and referrals.

Consistency of another sort is even more important. “Yo-yo” marketing—a lot when work is slow, then none for months because you’re busy—is highly ineffective. Relationships cool, and you risk creating an image of periodic desperation, which is definitely not a trust-builder. Make marketing a priority in busy times as well as slow ones. Commit to at least five marketing contacts a week—lunches, dinners, notes, e-mails, or just friendly check-in calls—and your practice will grow consistently over time. ♦

*Dustin Cole is president of Attorneys Master Class, an organization that helps attorneys and teams build marketing and productivity skills for increased revenues. Cole specializes in working with partners seeking to expand their practices, and with departments and practice groups to increase teamwork and revenues. For more information visit [www.attorneysmasterclass.com](http://www.attorneysmasterclass.com).*