

FAMILY LAWYER

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MAGAZINE

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Losing Business One Client at a Time

Embracing technology and marketing can ensure your law practice succeeds in the future.

By Dan Couvrette
Marketing Consultant

I recently read an article about how a series of changes, most of them slow and over the course of 15 years, brought some of the newspaper industry's players to their knees. But the article was also about how the industry and these players could have avoided its current predicament, or at least minimized it, by adapting and being more proactive.

Family law firms are experiencing similar challenges. Some are losing clients because:

1. The internet has dramatically increased the public's access to information on legal issues, resulting in more do-it-yourself divorces.
2. There is increased competition for business and the Internet has had a significant impact on how and why a family lawyer is found and hired.
3. Less people are divorcing. In fact, about 25% less over the past 30 years.
4. More lawyers who did very little family law are taking on such cases to offset business lost in other practice areas due to the economic downturn.

I have been helping family lawyers market their services for over 16 years and have noticed that for the most part they have been reactive rather than proactive to these changes. This is particularly true of more established law firms that have traditionally relied heavily on referrals for their business. In fact, it is these firms who stand to lose business, one client at a time, to new lawyers and law firms who are aware of the need to market their practice, and who take advantage of what technology has to offer.

Are Family Law Firms Adjusting to Change?

In the past three months I have visited over 60 well-established family lawyers in various states including New Mexico, Missouri, Oklahoma, Indianapolis, Ohio, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and South Carolina. I also attended the American Bar Association Family Law Section October meeting in Philadelphia, where I spoke with over 30 family lawyers from across the country. Almost without exception, all of these lawyers expressed how their family law practice has changed. They conveyed how:

- Business is not as robust as it has been, compared to just a few years ago.
- It has become more of a challenge to secure good, quality clients.
- Increasingly, the opposing counsels are lawyers they have never dealt with before, and they wonder

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- how these lawyers managed to get the case.
- Tried and true referral sources are no longer as dependable.

The very fortunate few who found themselves still as busy also acknowledged they were not turning away the quantity of clients they once did.

Do any of these comments ring true for your practice?

When asked what they were doing to adapt to these changes, most shrugged their shoulders and said they had done little to nothing, and expected things would “get back to normal” when the economy picked up. A very small percentage said they were revamping their

websites, connecting more frequently with their referral sources, getting more active on LinkedIn.com, and creating or expanding their Facebook presence. Essentially, embracing technology to make them more effective and help them stay connected with their clients.

Law Practices Growing through the Economic Downturn

Surely the slower economy over the past few years would explain why business has not been as good, right? Well, not necessarily. Among the clients of our marketing agency, we have seen examples of growth that would make a lot of family law firms envious. One client has grown from one lawyer to 15 in less than four years. Another has grown

from three to six lawyers, and another from 12 to 16 lawyers. There are also countless examples of family lawyers striking out on their own after working for other law firms.

Through the years, we have built websites for law firms, promoted their websites through search engines, social media and pay per click campaigns, advised and redirected their advertising budget from the printed Yellow Pages to advertising on targeted websites. We have also shown them how to generate leads and stay in touch with their referral sources in a systematic manner. It has not been an easy task, but they almost always pay off for our clients. Just this week, a client said this to our V.P. of Marketing: I once did tell Dan (many years ago) *“Why would anyone want to advertise on the Internet?” And I have eaten those words as many meals.*

Those family lawyers who are embracing change and asking questions like, “What do I need to do to prepare my law firm for the future?” will likely thrive and take business away from the family law firms who are not adapting. Those lawyers who said to me they will “Wait it out” or “Get around to doing a more effective job of marketing their firm when they have the time and money to do so” will continue to blame the economy for the slowing down of their business. And it will likely get worse.

An Example of Embracing Technology and Marketing

Yesterday a family lawyer contacted our firm for help with marketing her new practice. She is leaving a prominent family law firm to “go out on her own”. She mentioned that her current firm had “no interest in marketing” and how crazy that approach was in this day and age. She did not need to be convinced of the value of marketing, or why, and instead was asking how to best market herself. She contacted our agency after reading an article we wrote on marketing in *Family Lawyer Magazine*. Within one day of contacting us, she retained our agency to:

- **Promote her services** — in Divorce Magazine, Family Lawyer Magazine, on DivorceMagazine.com and on FamilyLawyerMagazine.com.
- **Build her new practice a website** — better than her current employer's ignored five-year-old site.
- **Provide relevant content for her website** — so it can be a meaningful resource for prospective clients. This includes writing the text for her site, including our monthly divorce newsletter and our Divorce Guides, because she understands how this information will benefit her clients and help her stand out while being aware she does not have the time nor the expertise to create this invaluable content.
- **Prepare and email her monthly newsletter** — to professional referral sources and clients.
- **Increase her online presence using social media** — this includes creating her Google+ and Facebook page, updating her LinkedIn page, and showing her how to fully utilize all three.

- **Set her up as an expert guest blogger** — on our divorce-related blog, www.BlogsOnDivorce.com, to enhance her reputation.

This is what one young, single practitioner is doing to take advantage of technology and to market a family law practice she has yet to name.

What about you? When you meet her, or somebody like her, as your opposing counsel you shouldn't need to wonder how she got the case. You'd know they did it by embracing technology and marketing to build their practice, one client at a time. ■



Dan Couvrette is the CEO of Divorce Marketing Group and Publisher of Family Lawyer Magazine and Divorce Magazine. Divorce Marketing Group is a marketing agency dedicated to promoting family lawyers and divorce professionals. His firm's website is www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com.

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By Dan Couvrette

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