



How Lawyers Can Network Despite Social Distances

By Elizabeth Ortega, Principal of ECO Strategic Communications

The last few months have relocated the practice of law from an arena for highly physical contact sports to a virtual playing field. Almost overnight, travel, in-person meetings and invaluable tete-a-tetes are no more.

Given that we don't know where the pandemic is going next or when it's going to end, doing nothing or attempting to carry on business as usual is not an option. Rather than regret the temporary inability to meet in person, lawyers can leverage technology and set a new standard with reliable tactics. The new, adaptive techniques that lawyers cultivate now will serve them well in a future that does not include health-crisis management.

For years, I've recommended that my lawyer clients "be in the room." Lawyers can still get there by bringing their resources and charisma to safe online settings.



An alternate approach to developing and maintaining an influential network can be pursued and accomplished using technology from anywhere by employing the tried tactics outlined below.

Ask, listen and learn

As rainmakers consider how to best attract referral sources, the inability to meet in person is creating tension. Many would agree there's no replacing an in-person exchange for bonding.

However, relationships are about finding commonalities and in this period of uncertainty, most people are open and ready to connect. Business development and the attorney-client relationship hinge on trust, which has nothing to do with proximity. Clients hire "trusted advisors" based on experience, cogent analysis of the matter at hand, and rapport.

Thus, the most appropriate approach and medium for communication should be carefully selected. If the wish is to connect with contacts (clients, colleagues, friendly competitors, etc.) to touch base and ask how they're doing, it's wise to stick to a telephone conversation.

A traditional phone call allows you to gauge the receiver's tone, inflection and pauses. Yes, a phone is technology. Tried and true. After all, the point is to hear what they have to say. When one is listening attentively, there's no need to "pitch" services. From this simple exchange, key insights, ideas, patterns and creative solutions emerge. When you generously offer useful information, you create a comfortable atmosphere of reciprocity that drives the conversation.

The phone call is not only a conduit for the client to share perceptions, but also for the lawyer to contribute timely information. Essentially, in this informal fact-finding approach, lawyers can connect with client interests, find a fresh perspective and consider new alternatives. The secret lies in understanding the "why" and "how" behind the outreach.

In this scenario, it's better to be heard than seen.

Provide news and analysis of hot-button issues, cases and trends

Most lawyers are accustomed to providing thought leadership to establish brand recognition among target audiences that have the power to refer and engage. Certainly, the time is ripe to maximize digital exposure by disseminating original content. While it's long been part of the marketing mix, this tactic has become a crucial factor in diminishing social isolation.

In your outreach, you have probably learned that people often look to experts, including lawyers, to frame their thinking. Savvy lawyers understand how providing and sharing original content creates cross-marketing opportunities. Traditional and social media have the power to exponentially augment the message and its reach.

In this context, since you are looking to educate and shape public perception based on client and peer feedback, the preferred communication tool is written commentaries published in industry-related digital and print media outlets.

Since everyone engages in some form of social networking, we all spread information through the most potent form of marketing: word of mouth. A robust online and social media presence maintained through consistent postings and outreach is vital to creating and preserving brands.

A good read is hard to miss.

How to deepen our social ties virtually

Many lawyers have succeeded at staying visible by engaging with existing and future connections in a virtual landscape. These lawyers participate in online events where a topical problem is addressed and solutions are vetted.

The very same concept behind popular go-to conferences applies. Traditionally a lawyer presents at an event, followed by a coffee meet-and-greet with a target. Then there's lunch with a group of practitioners from a local firm, rounded off by a client-hosted cocktail reception. The setting is familiar, off-sides anecdotes are generated - remember that party at that club? -- and the magic begins to unfold.

The biggest risk you're taking by engaging in a virtual platform is that an adorable child or pet pops up in the background. The professor explaining South Korean politics live on the BBC when his child makes an impromptu appearance springs to mind. The professor's popularity soared as a result of the heart-warming gaffe. Nowadays we can all relate.

Much like in social outings, lawyers can impart, debate and develop relationships by safe-

ly engaging in virtual setups. Generating business still and always requires flexibility and the opportunity to lead a discussion. The fundamental advantage of the online mode is that you can start a private chat during a well-attended online event without having to face friendly interruptions.

You can't fully replace in-person meetings for building relationships. We remain keen to see each other and, to quote the queen of England, "we will meet again." For now, video calls are providing continuity and efficiency. And while the novelty of social video chats may be wearing off, understanding and appreciating this tool in a business setting is increasing.

Lawyers using technology to strategically hit the pavement.

About the Author

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