

The promotion of your practice

by Rob Knowsley LLB*

Many articles advising solicitors how to market their practices have appeared in legal and marketing publications in recent years.

Typically such articles talk about procedures; assessment of the firm's current position and a determination of the needs of the market place, development of the client base, cross-selling and other equally important aspects of promotion.

What most of them don't discuss however is the crucial importance of the willingness of the owners of a business to do that one little thing that makes the difference between wishing to have business or preparing to get business and actually getting it.

That one little piece of activity involves simply asking for the business. In view of the very large number of solicitors who appear to be quite capable of doing all the research and preparing all the documentation without raising the courage to ask for the business, we have to ask ourselves why this might be so.

The first issue is probably the natural human fear of rejection. How much does the subconscious concern about being rejected affect the willingness of a solicitor to ask for work?

Second, very few solicitors actually allocate the time -- time to train themselves how to ask for work and time to pick up the telephone or make a personal visit and ask for business. They always seem to have plenty to do to fill in the day, and day after day, week after week, month after month goes by without any concerted effort to ask any particular clients for more work or prospective clients for some work.

Third, many solicitors have not yet fully discarded the "touting shackles", perhaps subconsciously awaiting the rap over the knuckles every

time they actively engage in a promotional activity.

People with this particular inhibition need to remind themselves that good solicitors have always promoted themselves. In the past they used different methods but they promoted hard and quite effectively.

On a day to day basis, what, therefore, should be done?

All of the marketing articles referred to above provide good background information on how to get ready to market, identifying possible targets, products, etc.

As I have indicated, I believe the main problems solicitors have with marketing commence after that point with fear, lack of confidence and procrastination.

What is required is for a short list of targets to be made and a simple technique (telephone or personally call) to enable the solicitor to project the products with confidence to the target.

For example, in the small business area there is no reason why a "legal audit" document can't be used as an introductory tool with a simple, effective "line of patter" such as..."we've had a lot of very happy clients who have been through our new legal audit procedure with us in their office. I'd like to take 10 minutes or so at your office *at my expense* for me to explain to you how it works. When would be the best day for you?"

If it's made obvious that there is no cost involved at this point there are very few people who are genuine potential users of your legal services who can easily resist this type of approach.

Once in the client's premises you have the legal audit procedure to work through, and provided you are confident and have a reasonable delivery

manner you will definitely pick up some work from most of the presentations you make.

Having made the list of targets and supplementary information above, you should choose the time of day that combines when you believe you are at your most effective as a sales person with the time that you are most likely to find your targets available and receptive.

A little bit of experimentation will not hurt in this area.

You should then rule out in your diary, say, half an hour every day at a set time to carry out this activity, and you should instruct all relevant staff not to make appointments for you during this time, and not to interrupt you.

Your desk should be clear of all other likely distractions and you should have in front of you all possible information about the client or prospective client, which you should read thoroughly beforehand.

When you are properly prepared, all you have to do is exactly what most solicitors don't do. That is, pick up the phone and make the call.

Remember that even a rejection can produce a good deal of information to assist you get work later.

Be positive, conversational and keep your ears open. Remember that one of the so-called rules of selling is that 80 per cent of sales come after the fifth contact, the "Rule of 5."

When you become fully aware of how few solicitors are picking up the phone and making the calls you will realise how much you have the market to yourself.

Good luck with your "prospecting" and don't forget to carry, and use, high quality cards and brochures on every occasion.

**This article was written by Rob Knowsley, a Sydney Solicitor and Managing Director of Knowsley Management Systems. KMS is a Sydney-based specialist legal practice management consultancy which has been operating principally in NSW for the last three years. The firm offers a unique style of hands-on management which acknowledges that most solicitors have a basic understanding of what they are supposed to be doing to run their practice well but very little training in how to go about implementing the changes required. The firm focuses on the development of human resources. KMS simply aims to make its clients more effective in delivering client services and creating reasonable profits.*