

How to Develop New Files from Conferences and Seminars

By Chuck Polin & Evan Polin

Over the years, one of the major complaints that we receive from attorneys and marketing directors is that they invest thousands of dollars and countless hours on seminars and conferences that do not lead to new files. We hear horror stories from professionals who attend these events and don't make contacts, don't arrange meetings, and don't produce any new files from these events. Like any other marketing effort, you can maximize your results from seminars and conferences if you learn how to plan and work them correctly. If you commit to developing a plan, investing time and effort to execute your plan, and tracking results you will be rewarded with new files and contacts. Below are a few tips on how to plan for these events, differentiate your practice from your competitors, and develop new business as a direct result of these events.

1. Define your target market.

Many times we talk to attorneys and marketing directors who are disappointed with the results of a conference or seminar. When we ask about the goals they were hoping to achieve at these events, we get a blank stare. We hear statements like "we always participate in that conference" or "all of our competitors are there". Make sure that you have an understanding of whom you want to target and what goals or outcomes you want to accomplish from the conference or seminars you attend.

2. Make a plan.

Let us begin by telling you a story to see if this situation sounds familiar to you. One of our new clients has, for the last five years, been sending three to five attorneys to a trade conference in Las Vegas and has never been able to account for a single new file or any return on their investment of time and expense. This year, we suggested that each attorney target twenty people that they believed would be potential contacts for future files. We suggested that the best time to plan these meetings would be either for breakfast (don't be afraid to set up multiple breakfast meetings each morning), lunch, or cocktails after the conference.

The best way to set up these meetings is via email, three to four weeks in advance. Do not be afraid to email people you have never met before. As a result of implementing these suggestions, the

four attorneys who attended the conference this year made fifteen new contacts and came home from the conference with four new files. You will only see positive results if you are willing to try something different.

3. Develop a talk or seminar based on your expertise.

At conferences and seminars, no one gets as much attention as the speaker. Most conferences and seminars are actively looking for speakers. Develop a seminar and research conferences where your talk would be appropriate. Once you are able to fill this role, participants of

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the conference will be seeking you out. When you are in front of a group to deliver a program you are automatically seen as a content expert. This will give you tremendous credibility.

The key to any talk or seminar is to make it as interactive as possible. Understand that it is not content but, unfortunately, more often it is entertainment value that people remember. How many boring seminars and conferences have you suffered through? How much information did you retain from those seminars? If you keep the audience entertained and you make them feel comfortable with your expertise on a topic, you will develop new files.

4. Follow up, follow up, and follow up.

The biggest mistake that can be made after a conference or seminar is to return to your regular daily activities and not follow up with your new contacts immediately after the event. If you work a conference correctly, you will be making many new contacts and it will be very difficult to remember each person you meet and every conversation you have. After you meet each new contact or complete a meeting, write a note in your PDA or on the back of their business card. Note something that will remind you of what the person looks like, and of what you talked about. When you meet someone at the event, ask permis-

sion to follow up. If you get permission to follow up, ask how and when you should follow up. Do you need to make a call, send information, or check in by email? What will you talk about when you call? You need to plan to complete your follow up activities no later than one week following the event you attended or the talk you provided. If you do not follow up within one week of the event, the potency of the contact will be lost.

5. Measure your ROI (Return on Investment).

Make sure that after you attend an event, you develop a system to track the return on investment for that event. How much did the event cost the firm? How much time did you spend away from the office while attending the event? If you were a speaker, how much time did it take you to prepare? What type of follow up did you do? Now lets measure the amount of new business or new contacts that originated from the event. Did you pick up new files from old clients? Did you develop new relationships? How much were they worth?

Take the time to measure ROI after each event. The results may surprise you. We have worked with clients who, after completing this exercise, sometimes came to surprising conclusions. There were times when the events that were the industry standard lead to no results while smaller conferences or individual talks lead to a tremendous amount of new business.

Using seminars and conferences to find new files and increase contacts can be a great new business development strategy, but you need to develop the skills to make those activities successful. To be successful you may need to step outside of your comfort zone and attempt new strategies and techniques. Start practicing your 30-second commercial and your networking skills. Develop a business action plan. If you do not have a strong comfort level with your skills, seek out a coach who can help you. Like most things in life, these skills will only come with coaching and practice. Successful rainmaker.

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