Specialization and cross selling within your legal practice

For many small and mid-sized law practices, every dime is crucial. There's no extra money to waste on ineffective marketing techniques and lost clients, it's important to recognize the opportunities that exist within your current legal practice. This includes specialization and cross-selling. By implementing these tactics, you can better service your current clients while working towards increased profits.

The potential benefits of specialization

Practice area specialization happens in various ways. Some attorneys have specific areas of interest even before their first day of Civil Procedure class. For others, specialization happens more organically. One successful case leads to a referral for another case in the same practice area, which leads to another referral. Before you know It, you have become extremely knowledgeable and experienced in one specific area of law.

Specialization can be a good thing for your small to mid-sized small firm, providing your practice with such benefits as:

- Increased efficiency – Lawyers who specialize in particular areas of practice don't have to waste time catching up on current subject matter trends and laws. They are already familiar with the necessary information, so they are better equipped to hit the ground running when a new case walks through the door.
- Increased profits – Less nonbillable catch-up work means more time for billable tasks, which can lead to increased profits for the firm. In addition, marketing can be a lot easier and more affordable for attorneys who have established themselves as the go-to attorneys in a

specific practice area. The referrals and interviews that result also provide you with free name recognition and advertising.
- Quality representation – Specialization often results in a higher quality of representation and service for your clients, which leads me back to increased profits. People appreciate expertise and they are willing to pay more for it. Providing quality specialized services may open the door for increased billing rates.

Specialization within your firm

Don't make the mistake of thinking that your firm can only have one area of specialization. Small and mid-sized firms can benefit from internal attorney and paralegal specialization. Let's say you have five lawyers in your general practice law firm. One has an impressive track record with domestic relations cases. Another has built a strong bankruptcy book of business. Two have built reputations for themselves among the local business community and the last is extremely knowledgeable about wills and estate law.

Use these specializations to benefit the practice as a whole. Assign incoming matters to the lawyers who are most experienced and interested in that area of practice. Besides, why would you have a business law attorney working on a complex divorce matter when a domestic relations attorney is sitting in the next office? Put management tools in place to ensure that work is properly assigned to the appropriate attorney within the firm.

The art of cross-selling your legal services

Once you have established areas of specialization within your law firm, it's time to maximize those efforts by implementing effective cross-selling techniques that can generate profits. First, let's discuss what cross-selling entails. It's often confused with up-selling, but it is a completely different sales method. Up-selling involves selling a higher-end version of a product

to current customers. Cross-selling involves a different product and provides the existing customer with an additional benefit.

It involves asking existing clients about any of their other legal needs, so you can determine whether your firm can provide additional services. For example, a divorcing client may be experiencing serious financial difficulties and find themselves in need of bankruptcy assistance. Once your domestic relations attorney wraps up the divorce proceedings, your bankruptcy lawyer can provide representation for the bankruptcy proceedings.

Cross-selling is one of the most effective and affordable marketing techniques your legal practice can employ. It's common knowledge within the business community that it's easier and less costly to secure new work from an existing client than attracting brand new clients.

Here are some tips for cross-selling within your legal practice:

- **Take advantage of opportunities**. Under some circumstances, the conclusion of one legal service creates an opportunity for another legal service. Did a personal injury client just collect a substantial settlement? Why not offer estate planning services? They may not even be aware that your firm offers representation in this area, so make it known.
- **Promote internal cross-selling**. Offer incentives and/or bonuses to your attorneys for cross-selling services within the firm. Encourage the sharing of matters by communicating the importance of cross-selling and the value in providing clients with exceptional service. Don't forget to maintain records of your internal referrals, so you can track the progress of your efforts.
- **Teach your attorneys**. Don't assume that your lawyers are skilled salespeople. Teach them the basics of sales and provide them with useful techniques. If you aren't confident in your own sales abilities, bring in a coach or consultant for extra support.
- **Organize cross-selling events**. Invite existing clients to regularly scheduled lunch or social events where you inform them about practice areas that may be specifically beneficial to them. You can also use these events to casually introduce the lawyers in your firm to existing clients they are not currently servicing. This way, your recent personal injury client learns about your estate planning services.

- **Just inform your clients**. When representation of a client ends, it can pay to simply inform them about your firm's availability for other legal representation needs. Why not add a standard paragraph to your representation closing letter, letting clients know about other practice areas serviced within the firm? It's cost-effective marketing that could really pay off.

It can be hard to stay competitive in a crowded legal environment, so it's important to maximize the services your practice provides. With practice area specialization and the implementation of cross-selling techniques, you can position your law practice for more work and increased clients.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, The Legal Writing Studio, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to TimeSolv and a variety of other publications.