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### ***Law Firms:***

#### ***Tips To Avoid Navel-Gazing and Other Costly Blunders When Growing the Firm***

Washington, DC, September 1, 2005—When lawyers want to win an important case for their client, do they try to sway the jury by showing them a brochure?

“Of course not,” says Hilary Bruggen, President of DC-based Strelmark LLC ([www.strelmark.com](http://www.strelmark.com)), a business development consulting firm that helps attorneys and law firms gain and retain clients through strategic relationship marketing.

“In court, lawyers know that it’s critical to focus on what the jury thinks, wants, and believes to gain a favorable outcome. Yet ironically, when it comes to marketing themselves and their practices, this tactic is often overlooked,” notes Bruggen. “Instead, when pursuing new clients, lawyers focus their attention in the wrong direction—on themselves. This “navel-gazing” approach means they are talking too much about their own firm, credentials, or goals rather than the needs of a potential client.”

Bruggen, the former head of global marketing for the international accounting and consulting firm KPMG, says that the key to establishing a successful pipeline of new business for any professional services firm is in strategic relationship marketing—moving prospects from awareness to credibility to preference and finally to sale. Bruggen’s approach has little to do with marketing departments, blanket branding, or collateral “stuff” and everything to do with the following five tips:

#### **1. Don’t Rely on Collateral Material and Websites To Win New Clients**

Law firms provide a classic example of an industry that has spent a fortune on websites and brochures with the unrealistic belief that these tools will bring in business. The truth is, no prospective client will retain a trusted advisor—particularly an attorney—based on the firm’s marketing materials. Prospects want to first personally meet the lawyer. This is the golden opportunity to build credibility with the potential client and gain their trust. After going through this meet-and-greet process, the prospect determines whether they prefer one lawyer over another and makes the final decision as to whose services they will retain.

#### **2. Recognize The Value of Relational Versus Transactional Marketing**

Law firms generally fail to differentiate between a traditional transactional approach and relationship marketing. Unlike transactional marketing, relationship marketing is based on generating a series of interactions that build interpersonal connections, resulting in new contacts that lead to new clients. Product marketing is transactional: little or no contact, mass distribution, immediate order, product duplication, short-term orientation, sales team emphasis, anonymous servicing, and lack of personalization. Service marketing, however, is all about building relationships: trust, long decision cycle,

knowledge of client's specific needs, customized service, long-term orientation, business development, professional expertise, and sequential interactions.

### **3. Incorporate Relationship Marketing into the Firm's Culture**

One of the greatest fears of young lawyers is that the firm's managing partner will one day walk into their office and ask, 'Okay, so where are your plans for how to grow your practice?'

Law schools fail to incorporate business development training into their programs, despite that law firms require new hires to grow their own practices with little or no guidance. Yet success for the young attorney ultimately depends on how well he or she can develop and follow a strategic relationship marketing approach. The marketing of legal services is far too often left to each individual to sort out and conducted in a haphazard manner with serendipity playing the largest part. Rarely is there a strategic, structured plan for attracting and retaining new clients.

The key is for each lawyer to develop a personalized relationship marketing plan that focuses on key targets and outlines the steps they need to take in order to secure prospects.

### **4. Train Your Lawyers in Relationship Building**

Establishing a positive, trusting relationship with the potential client is crucial to being hired. Yet the marketing activities of most law firms are overly factual, impersonal, and short-term oriented. Little or no attention is paid to building a strong and long-lasting interpersonal connection. Much law firm marketing is copy-cat style, keeping up with or mimicking competitors rather than projecting innovative and unique customized services. The most effective way to gain a new client is to appeal to both their emotional and their logical side. Relationship building requires practicing the art as well as the science of one-to-one marketing.

### **5. People Don't Care What You Do, Only What You Can Do For Them**

The cornerstone of establishing successful relationships is to discover precisely what your client needs and wants. Change your thinking from "Here's what I do," to "What do you need from me?"

- Prospects care about their own issues, position, and company.
- Appreciate what the prospect has accomplished to date and build upon it.
- Don't sell legal services, rather solve problems.
- Make prospects see that your solutions will work for them.
- Don't discuss generic issues; clients want to hear about the specific legal challenges facing them or their firm.

