

Credibility Boost

You can make speaking and writing pay off more directly if you incorporate them into an overall career development and marketing strategy. By Karen Kaplowitz

You want to be a rainmaker. Where do speaking and writing fit in your game plan?

Speaking and writing take a lot of time and rarely lead directly to new business. So why do them?

The answer is you can make speaking and writing pay off more directly if you incorporate these activities into an overall career development and marketing strategy that allows you to leverage the value of your speaking and writing.

The real value of speaking and writing is to help you build your credibility with your clients. That is why you take the time to do them. In order to attract new clients and expand business from existing clients, you need to establish, and re-establish, your credibility as an expert who can get the job done.

Being recognized as an expert by your legal peers is one key way to establish your credibility. If your peers attend professional meetings at which you are speaking – alone or on a panel – or demonstrating your talents, and if your peers are reading your articles, that is a powerful endorsement that the legal community values you and your expertise.

But your clients may not attend the professional meetings at which you speak or read the professional publications in which you appear. To make sure that your clients and prospects know that your peers hold you in high esteem, you have to let them know.

Let's start with speaking engagements. If you are a featured speaker at a legal meeting of some kind, here are a few ways to engage your clients and prospects. Invite them to attend the meeting with you as your guests. If they come, they get to see you in action. If they don't come, they know that you are an expert on the subject involved. In some cases, they may send colleagues in their law department or company whom you get to meet, as well.

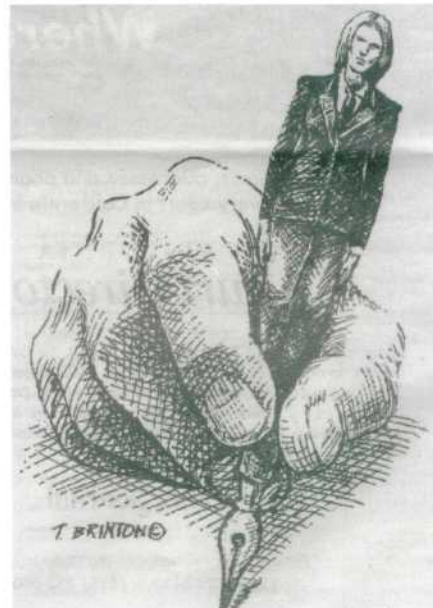
If your clients and prospects cannot attend, you should send them materials from the meetings: copies of your handouts, program materials, or summaries or insights from the meeting. You also might share with them what other speakers had to say. Including other speakers' insights indicates your purpose is to provide value, not just to be self-serving.

When possible, invite a client or prospect whom you know is interested or knowledgeable on the topic to speak along with you. Opportunities to work with your clients and prospects on a common project can create different kinds of bonds from those developed during a typical assignment, show your client the value you place on his or her judgment, and create an opportunity for your client or prospect to showcase his or her own talents.

If that is not feasible, you also can ask the client for suggestions on your approach or for pertinent information. All of these contacts give you the opportunity to bring to your client's attention the fact that you have been invited to speak at a professional forum, which builds your credibility with the client.

With respect to articles or other publications, you should send your clients and prospects reprints of the articles you write. One of your objectives in any marketing activity is to stay in front of your clients and prospects. You are probably aware of the "recency effect." When people have problems, the first people they think of to help them are often the people they have been in contact with most recently. You want that person to be you. You cannot always be in touch personally with your clients and prospects, so the opportunity to send out an article you have written has real value.

If possible, ask clients or prospects to co-write the pieces you write. You are also free to refer to them, directly or indirectly as appropriate, in your material. Your client and prospects often appreciate the visibility. When you quote a client, be mindful of getting consent where necessary and be mindful of whether the client would appreciate the attention. We handle many matters that may be public but that our clients don't want to publicize.



You also may want to write and speak for other reasons, like staying connected to other practitioners or having the opportunity to research the most current case law or legal strategies. To the extent you are focused on generating business, however, you should try to write on subjects that are relevant to your clients. You also want to write in a manner that is understandable to clients and prospects. The writing you do for marketing purposes does not have to be scholarly in nature; in fact, writing that is very scholarly and not understandable by nonlawyers, or nonexperts, is not as useful. If you do more scholarly work, you should distribute it to your clients but with less expectation that they will read the work.

In addition to sending your material to your clients directly, you also should feature your writing and speaking engagements on your Web site or sites and in literature about your work and firm.

If you have an overall strategic plan, inviting a group of clients and prospects to attend meetings with you should be easy. As part of your plan, you should have a list of key clients and prospects. You can draft a single letter and instruct your secretary to send it to your "list." You can personalize each letter with a "P.S."

Being strategic in selecting writing and speaking engagements. If you can speak on panels or perform demonstrations on platforms with other well-known lawyers and judges, that is helpful in boosting your credibility.

You can do the same thing with reprints of your writings. To make it efficient, you can draft one letter to send to all your clients and prospects and, again, personalize it. The cover note should explain why you are sending the article. If you have chosen to write about an important subject, like the significance of new decisions or legislation, you can explain that in the cover letter. If there is special significance to a specific client or prospect, you can note that in a footnote.

Be sure to let other lawyers in your firm know, too. That is good internal marketing. Ideally, if you have identified clients of the firm to whom you would like to cross-sell your services, the lawyers who have the primary client relationship should send out your article to those clients. If you have met the clients, you can send out the article yourself with a note that says it is at your colleague's suggestion, and copy the message to your colleague.

Always send your article with a note from someone. Getting articles, or even newsletters, without a personal note defeats the purpose of using the literature to stay connected.

Be strategic in selecting writing and speaking engagements, too. If you can speak on panels or perform demonstrations on platforms with other well-known lawyers and judges, that is helpful in boosting your credibility. Writing for prestigious publications is good and may be better than writing for publications with a broader circulation. Your primary aim is to influence your own clients and prospects, not the general readership. Any business you get from other people is a bonus.

When selecting organizations in which to become active, you should identify ones where you have access to the leadership, through colleagues in your firm or otherwise, who can help you get on key committees and programs.

Here are a few tips on the strategy of obtaining speaking and writing engagements. When you join a bar group or other professional association, always volunteer to join the program committee and/or the publication committee. Then plan events at which you can be a speaker or moderator. You also can be strategic in whom you put on the program.

You want to include clients or prospects if you have that opportunity. Your clients will appreciate the opportunity for visibility in the community and the opportunity to show their colleagues in their own companies that they enjoy professional esteem. If you are planning the program, you can ensure that the program gets sufficient publicity to attract a good attendance. Your organization will appreciate your efforts, too.

If you can do so, write and speak directly to business organizations that draw prospective clients. Opportunities to address your ultimate client are valuable. If possible, invite clients and prospects to join you at the meeting. In any case, let your clients and prospect know you have spoken at a business forum, and send them your reprints.

When selecting organizations in which to become active, you should identify ones where you have access to the leadership, through colleagues in your firm or otherwise, who can help you get on key committees and programs. You also may want to diversify in terms of geographic scope. Including a national or statewide organization shows your clients and prospects that you have a national or statewide reputation, each of which again boosts your credibility.

Most lawyers who are intent on being rainmakers focus in writing and speaking as important parts of their marketing plans. But you leave too much to chance when you do nothing more than write and speak. Instead of hoping that the right clients or prospects happen to read your articles or hear your speeches, you can take more control by using your speaking and writing engagements to stay in touch with your clients, create opportunities to work on programs with your clients, and create credibility with them.

You invest too much energy and time in speaking and writing not to use the products of your labors effectively. If you get into the habit of using your speaking and writing engagements to stay connected with your client base and prospects, you have learned the art of leveraging.

Karen Kaplowitz is president of the New Ellis Group, a business development consulting firm for law firms and other service providers. She was the marketing partner at Alschuler Grossman & Pines (now Alschuler Grossman Stein & Kahan) until 1998 and is a former president of the Association of Business Trial Lawyers.