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NAME BUILDING 101

First Among Equals In B2B Marketplace

By **CHRISTINE S. FILIP**

As a tennis coach, my clients were astounded when small but worthy upgrades to their game changed the course of their next match—and sometimes their careers. The same holds true for marketing: make one proven upgrade to your program, and success compounds.

Whether you service public, privately-held or nonprofit clients, the most direct path to marketing results is to affiliate with aggregations of prospects in their industry associations. The caveat is, however, that you must attend regularly *and* take a leadership role—join a committee, participate on a task force or event—so that you become known as a trusted partner. Referrals will happen.

Being a prime competitor through industry association leadership requires a commitment of time and energy at the end of a rigorous day, but usually only once a month as a starting point.

Seasoned leaders, like Raymond A. Garcia and Jane I. Milas of Garcia & Milas in New Haven, demonstrate a top-of-the-game mindset in their dedication to industry associations built around their litigation and transactional practices in real estate and construction, among others. Garcia is

on the Connecticut Building Congress's board of directors and is a member of the Industry Practices Committee. Milas served on the board of the National Women in Construction and is a founding member of the state's Professional Women in Construction organization. These are minute sub-sections of their memberships.

Milas and Garcia recount that their participation in industry associations is a two-way street: they gain more knowledge and insight into broader industry issues and trends than client matters elucidate, and they contribute their expertise to the group.

This last point cannot be overstated from a marketing perspective. When prospective clients choose to work with an attorney, they use two equally important criteria: (1) their knowledge of you as a trustworthy *person*; and (2) your demonstrated professional knowledge. Both criteria turn on time and continuous commitment.

Many lawyers, in particular litigators, have difficulty focusing in on one industry-related group because they handle matters from various types of business. No worries: either focus on one important client whose industry intrigues you and is growth-oriented, or participate in a cross-industry group, such as a regional chamber of commerce (locals may be too limited by the size of the member entities).

While there are numerous online directories of associations and search portals, the fastest way to select a worthwhile group is to ask your clients about their memberships. Every credible industry player has such a group, which they use for information, networking and socializing. Ask your

client if you may attend a meeting with them. Your stated rationale is to learn more about the industry or profession so you can better service the client's work. Attending with your client obviates one potent disincentive—making your way into a crowd of unknowns. Your client can introduce you to other members.

Attend more than one meeting before you join any organization since meetings differ in attendance numbers and interesting content. If the group appears to be one that will both interest you and contains a good number of prospects, then join. As a lawyer, you don't have to join the legislative affairs committee; membership and program committees are equally, if not more, useful. Meeting new members and being integral in handing out speaking engagements are very leveraged positions.

Finally, as you peruse the membership directory of a group, do not be chastened by a long list of lawyers at first blush: most don't attend or participate regularly.

A number of lawyers have started their own networking groups, which involves careful selection to find qualified participants (entity size and sales levels, a true commitment to networking and referral building) and managing the scope of the group's activities. Typically, each member contributes a sum of money to fund the group, the entity is usually a nonprofit, and eventually, the group's management is delegated to an association management firm.

Building a network of referral sources through industry association membership is the hallmark of the most successful practitioners. Take action now. ■

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