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LSI - "Marketing" Forward

By Todd Olivas, CSR

It's a day I'll never forget. There I was, innocently sending out my spam emails to prospective law firms:

"Dear (insert name of law firm here),

"We are the best court reporting agency since sliced bread, please be so kind as to use us for your next 1000 depositions.

"Love, Todd."

Or something to that effect. Shortly after sending the first batch of emails, I got my first cheerful response:

"Take me off your #@%! list!"*

Not long after that dozens of similarly spirited replies flooded in:

"Get lost."

"Not in a million years."

"I know where to find you."

So things were going well. I had started my court reporting agency three months prior and in that time my lack of success was only matched by my stack of hate mail. I immediately threw out my copy of the book, "How to Make Enemies and Annoy People." Aside from my bad marketing tactics, I knew I was a good company. And I needed clients. I needed a different approach. I needed "Marketing Make-Over: Extreme Edition."

And isn't that so often the case? Don't we set out to achieve success with all the best intentions in mind only to hit a brick wall and fail? Or worse yet sometimes – like in my case – actually achieve the exact opposite of the intended results?

Your most important goal as a LSI chapter -- like my goal as an industry vendor - is to succeed. Plain and simple. You want to succeed in serving and educating legal secretaries and legal support staff. I want to succeed in being a court reporting agency that doesn't incite violence.

And you are doing that. There's no doubt about LSI's commitment to "Excellence Through Education." From seminars to handbooks to the Legal Specialization Sections to Certification to this very publication, LSI has a plethora of resources that all combined make it a great and wonderful association.

But your second most important goal is to grow. If you're not growing, you're shrinking. Nothing stays the same. Where are the members? Why isn't LSI's membership base 10,000 strong? Why not 15,000 or 50,000?

The State Bar of California cites there are 200,000 attorneys in California. They're doing something right. Let's do a little rough math. LSI has a current roster of 2500 members, that's a ratio of 80 attorneys per one legal secretary. I know some days it *feels* like you have 80 attorneys, but it's impossible. Where's everybody else?

In 2006 the State Bar of California wrote a survey containing the three primary marketing considerations for their growth:

- 1) *Improve communication with members about what products are available.*
- 2) *Broaden the array of products available.*
- 3) *Increase the perceived value and quality of the products.*

-Taken from http://calbar.ca.gov/calbar/pdfs/reports/2006_State-Bar-Survey.pdf

The same three marketing considerations apply to LSI. I put them in slightly different language, however:

- 1) *Keep all your members in the loop.*
- 2) *Rack your brains to come up with even more cool stuff to learn and do.*
- 3) *Market till the cows come home.*

Keep All Your Members in the Loop

Many organizations suffer from the problem of having a bigger back door than their front door. In other words, there's a lot of energy spent on getting people to show up for events and to join as members. But who's making sure that the members stick around? Who's making sure that everyone who is invited as a guest is getting the opportunity to fill out that application to join on the spot? Who's making sure that current members are being challenged to take the next step of involvement? Maybe it's volunteering to help out? Or running for an officer position?

With 2500 members currently, that's 2500 potential salespeople running around touting the benefits of membership. Each member should be knowledgeable about what's going on – in the loop -- and ready to evangelize to their unconverted friends back at the office. What about instituting what I call the One - One - One Plan? One person converts one friend in one year. Each year the

membership base could double through this form of mentoring and from there the growth is exponential.

There's nothing earth shaking about this, I know. It's simply a matter of getting back to basics. If the State Bar has to remind themselves about doing it, then LSI should do it as well. Keep all your members in the loop!

Rack Your Brains to Come Up With Even More Cool Stuff to Learn and Do

In 67 years, LSI has amassed an impressive list of available materials, resources, Legal Specialization Sections, CCLS, workshops, seminars and conferences. I have no specific list of "cool stuff" that LSI needs to unveil. You certainly already have plenty. But is there something else that can be offered? Perhaps a helpful mantra to start with is this: think like a business. And every business must clearly define the real needs of its customers.

Let's say you own a hardware store. A customer comes in to buy a ¼ drill bit. You show them to the drill bit aisle and help them select the correct one. The customer buys the bit and everyone is happy. What really happened? What was the customer's need that you met? Did you just sell them a ¼ drill bit? No! You sold them the *ability* to make a ¼ hole for their home project. The drill bit was just a tool to facilitate their real need – the ¼ inch hole.

When I provide deposition service for my clients, am I in the court reporting business? No! My clients don't need court reporters. They need transcripts. My CSRs and interpreters are just a way to facilitate their real need – getting that testimony in transcript format so they can win their case.

When you provide educational resources for your members, are you simply in the education business? No! Your members don't need more education. They need more money. Certification and resource materials are simply ways to facilitate their real need – getting better educated so they can perform better at their jobs so they can earn better money so they can spend better quality time with their families.

Don't get me wrong. In no way am I reducing the benefits of membership down to mere mercenary terms. There's a community aspect to membership that should not to be discounted which fulfills a real need – fostering life-enriching experiences with like-minded friends.

Both of these membership benefits – education and experience -- are crucial when racking your brain for new resources. Again, this may be fundamental here, but the State Bar's own recognition of "broadening the array of products" is a good reminder. Every LSI conference, seminar, resource, and product should facilitate one or both of those areas so that the true need of your "customer" – the LSI member – is adequately served.

Market 'Till the Cows Come Home

Unfortunately, every business, association, and every individual has two jobs. You have your primary, visible job. That's the one printed on your business card. Then you also have the job of marketing yourself.

Remember my marketing blitz that involved sending out unsolicited emails? That campaign was a huge success... in gaining the wrath of prospective clients. Not exactly a career path I recommend. The problem was not that I wasn't a good court reporting agency – my day job, so to speak. The problem was I needed to get up to speed – and quickly -- at being marketing savvy.

While I'm still a much better court reporter than marketeer, I have learned quite a bit about increasing my book of business. Maybe some of the following applies to your LSI chapter:

- Set a written goal for membership growth.
- Stick to it.
- Relationships are the key. Remember it's not just about numbers but about people.
- Remember what the real need is that you meet.
- Make sure the back door is smaller than the front door. It's easier to keep a member than it is to get a new one.
- Phones beat email every time. Maybe have phone call committees to keep all the members in the loop.
- "Thank You" notes – the world's least expensive yet highest return investment!
- Make sure your website is pulling its weight.
- Write a blog to gain web traffic.
- Write an article for publication that will be seen by your prospective future members.
- Make a speech at your local paralegal school(s).

Any one of the above bullet points could be the basis for its own article. I've only just scratched the surface of what's possible in marketing your LSI chapter. For now, just remember:

1) Keep all your members in the loop.

This asks the question: "What improvements can be made to better equip our current members?"

2) Rack your brains to come up with even more cool stuff to learn and do.

This asks the question: "What are the real member needs we meet and how can we meet more of them?"

3) Market 'till the cows come home.

This asks the question: "What new ways can we tell the world about Legal Secretaries, Incorporated?"

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