

Your Time to Shine: WHAT CAN YOUR LAW FIRM DO DURING THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES?

By Erin McCartney

The daily routine of a lawyer is demanding. Hours are spent performing legal research, billable work and interacting with clients. For solos and smaller firms, considerable time and energy is also spent on the daily grind of running a business. So it can be difficult to allocate time to non-scalable activities such as firm marketing, updating contact lists, or researching prospective clients.

Due to social distancing, most lawyers are currently working from a home office. Although this adjustment comes with its challenges, we can now bid adieu to onerous commutes and hurried dashes to the court house. At least for the time being, it also means that forms of face-to-face networking are off limits. Now is a great time to focus on the projects that usually get placed on the back burner. *(continued on next page)*

Rachel Keller, Esq.

Atlanta, GA

“Right now, many people are thinking about end of life and healthcare issues, and therefore would like to put a cohesive estate plan in place. Our firm has expanded its use of social media and online marketing in order to catch the eye of those folks that are looking to engage an estate planning firm. However, we are trying to be sensitive of any perception that we are attempting to “profit off the pandemic.” We obviously do not want to come across in that way. However, we do want people to know we are available to help because, due to job and market volatility, people may not be able to afford an estate planning firm right now. To find that balance, we created a short e-book on “estate planning from the couch” and continue to provide helpful tips on ways to use your extra time at home to organize your estate. By sharing these expert tips during this challenging time, we feel we can help our community. In the future, if our readers appreciate and value our expertise and advice, hopefully they will look to us for any future needs.”



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Use this break from the typical hustle and bustle to review firm practices and procedures. Make sure the firm has the right policies in place regarding intake procedures, pleading templates and conflict checking systems. Review of these practices can offer peace of mind that the firm is working with reliable clients, while shielding the firm from potential malpractice claims.

A common complaint alleged against lawyers is failure to communicate effectively with clients. Often clients mistake failure to immediately return phone calls or receive news about their cases for lawyer neglect. Being in quarantine affords time to pick up the phone to update clients on the status of their project or case, even if the matter is in a holding pattern because of court closures or restrictions. Phone calls can demonstrate to clients that their attorney views them as more than just a billable file.

Reassure clients that they can reach the firm no matter where they are by utilizing digital channels. Clients can still get that “face-to-face” feel without actually being there in-person. Virtual coffee, lunch or happy hour meetings conducted via virtual conferences can be a productive and fun option to stay connected with clients, as well as law firm staff. Recently, Attorney Protective hosted a virtual happy hour which included

an interactive mocktail/cocktail contest. Seeing co-workers in their at-home element, with curious little ones occasionally making appearances in the background, was genuinely heartwarming. Working from home humanizes all of us.

Now is also the time to update the firm’s website, social media profiles, and any information that appears in a professional directory. Ensure any external website links are up-to-date and update photos or personnel listings. Commit to increasing the firm’s social media presence by posting two times per week. It can be as simple as posting a link to an interesting article on LinkedIn and Facebook with a message explaining why friends and contacts would like the piece. But, when posting, be sure to post with a purpose. Many lawyers’ inboxes and newsfeeds are on overload right now. Content without value will most likely end up in the spam folder.

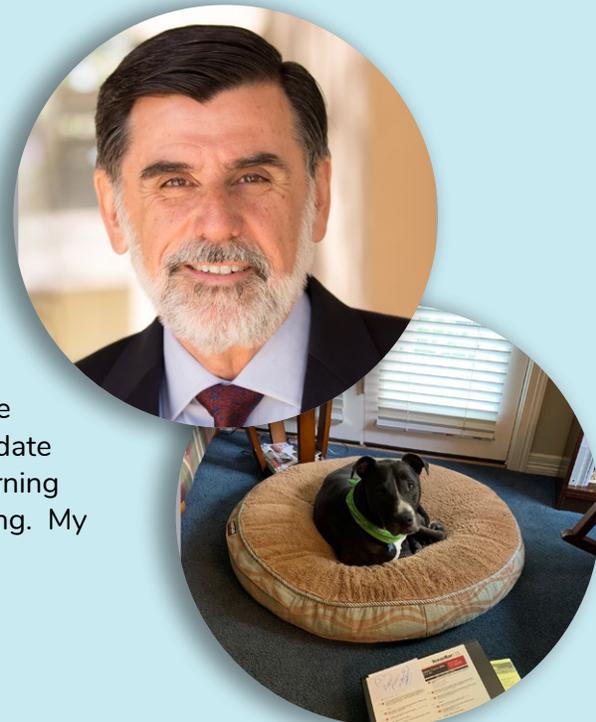
Prospecting new clients is another “to-do” that often gets pushed to the bottom of the list. Target and research a specific individual or company that the firm would like to work with in the upcoming year. Review their current website, biographies of key executives, and social media activities. Make the effort to understand their business. Subscribe to a publication of interest to this prospect and then send articles

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Joseph C. Gagen, Esq.

Austin, TX

My practice area is probate and estate planning. My pending probate matters have not been affected as much as I thought they would be. The local probate court is scheduling hearings using Zoom. I should have my first remote hearing in a few weeks. My estate planning practice has slowed down. With that said, I have had several calls from individuals with health risk factors asking about how they might obtain wills and related documents without having to leave their home. On the bright side, my extra time at my home office has allowed me to: reorganize my research materials and read recent CLE articles sitting on my desk; update my planning forms to reflect recent changes in the federal tax laws concerning retirement savings; and take on three new pro bono matters. One last thing. My dog, Max, has benefitted with multiple daily walks.



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and information useful in their industry. Showing a prospective client that the firm understands their business and is up to date on news that may affect their industry may be what gets the firm on the short list for their future legal needs.

Give back and get involved. Law firms across the country are doing extraordinary things to help out during these difficult times. Don't feel limited to your practice area or the law. More than a dozen firms and legal organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region have raised over \$10,000 for a local food bank. Most state bar websites offer information on ways for lawyers to volunteer in their community, support nonprofits, and offer supplies and contributions. The American Bar Association (ABA) has created a nationwide task force charged with identifying the legal needs arising from the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and mobilizing volunteer lawyers and legal professionals to assist people who need help. The ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct recommend that every lawyer provide at least 50 hours a year of free service to people who are unable to pay. Pro bono work is needed particularly from lawyers with experience in disaster relief, health law, insurance, family law,

employment law, housing, criminal justice, domestic violence, civil rights and social justice. It is a great opportunity to give back.

Due to COVID-19, the way law firms and businesses operate will forever be altered. Although being cooped up at home may seem stifling at times, this could be your firm's time to shine and differentiate itself. Never has there been more of an opportunity to focus on firm organization, policies and procedures, prospecting initiatives and altruistic endeavors. Also take this time to stop (remove mask) and smell the roses (reapply mask). Enjoy and nurture relationships at home. Read a book, cook a meal from scratch or incorporate a new exercise regimen. For those overachievers, the star of Marvel's "Thor" movies is offering free online isolation workout videos. Come out of quarantine looking like the Norse god of thunder-or just binge watch a good Netflix series! Stay well and stay healthy. We will all get through this together.

Andrew Winters, Esq.

Concord, NH

"Our small law firm does mostly litigation. Like everywhere, the courts in New Hampshire are closed except for emergency hearings. Since court appearances are a large part of what we do, our primary focus now is to keep everybody, lawyers and staff alike, employed and busy. This is the ideal time to take to heart Stephen Covey's Seventh Habit - "Sharpening the Saw." This means doing things like rewriting firm policies and procedures, improving our forms and template pleadings, and improving our website and other marketing materials. Of course, this unprecedented shock has caused all of us to reflect deeply on who we are as people and what our real mission in life is. It has given us a newfound appreciation for families, friends, and colleagues. Compared to countless other small businesses, we have much to be grateful for. We will take a financial hit, no doubt, but we will survive and thrive."

