

DAILY REPORT

AT ISSUE

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Use speeches to build business

A STRONG STRATEGY behind a presentation at an industry conference can turn listeners into clients

I KNOW A PATENT LAWYER who gets a speaking gig or two every year at industry conferences. He does it for—as he terms it—“business development purposes.” When asked how much business the speeches produce, he said. “I don’t know that I’ve ever gotten anything directly.”

Unfortunately, that’s common. But many lawyers do get clients by speaking at conferences. They do it by leveraging the opportunities in three ways: using the speeches tactically to accomplish larger business development strategies, working the event effectively, and making their presentations interactive.

Unfortunately, lawyers often speak at functions without knowing which clients they’re courting. The patent lawyer I mentioned couldn’t name one client he wanted. He just had a vague sense that speaking develops business.

He apparently subscribed to the “blind pig” school of business development. Even a blind pig will find an occasional acorn. And this patent lawyer might well stumble into the occasional client. But for consistently productive speeches, you need a strategy.

I like the strategic approach of two real estate lawyers who sought my help on a presentation on multi-use development. They were concluding work on a major multi-use project and wanted to leverage their expertise. They had a clear strategy: speak to real estate developers and establish a national reputation. Those lawyers had a plan to grow their practice.

Work the event for maximum effect

Next, maximize your conference connections. Beforehand, get an attendee list with e-mail addresses for follow-up. If you learn that a general counsel for a target company is attending, find her at the conference.

Even better, call her in advance and seek her input. “I saw that you’re attending my program and I want to make it as relevant as possible,” you could say. “Tell me what you’re most interested in.”

Invite your prospects and clients to attend. We worked with an intellectual property lawyer who planned to speak in New York City. Working the telephone, he invited several in-house lawyers from the New York City area. Of the 10 he invited, one came. But even those that declined appreciated the invitation.

After the event, call attendees that are good prospects. “I enjoyed meeting you at the event,” you could say. “I’d like to meet and learn more about your business.” One of the best business developers I know meets with clients or prospects daily. Conference presentations are a great chance to get meetings.

Make your presentations interactive

Most conference presentations stink. Make your presentation interesting and fun by turning it from a dull lecture to an interactive conversation. If you have one hour, do not speak for an hour. Do you like listening to hour-long speeches? Me neither. Instead, give the audience a simple legal hypothetical and discuss their conclusions.

We worked with a labor lawyer that distributed excerpts from a poorly drafted non-compete agreement. After distributing key sections of the agreement on a one-page handout, she broke participants into small groups and discussed how to improve the language. The audience learned more because they were engaged by the lively discussion.

More importantly, the interaction allowed participants to begin relationships with the speaker. Properly leveraged, those relationships could turn into business. ☎