Market Your Solo Practice with Free Tips and Brief Consultations

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By **Janet Falk** | April 24, 2020

Try before you buy.
Take a car for a test drive.

Many solo attorneys and other professional service providers offer a free tip sheet, quiz, report or even a brief consultation on their website and digital advertisements. They also promote action-oriented tips on social media.

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Perhaps you display an offer for an informative and attractively designed giveaway, with your name and that of your law firm, plus your website URL, phone and email address. Now, website visitors requesting the information can get answers to some basic questions about their situation, plus they may easily contact you at a future date. In addition, the giveaway may be shared with other members of that person’s family, as well as co-workers and individuals in their circle of contacts.

When you require an email address for download of the item, you collect the data for future follow-up.

Finally, this tip sheet or a free consultation will help you distinguish yourself from others with a similar practice, who may not provide the same helpful materials and preliminary discussions.

Here’s how some solo attorneys use giveaways and free briefings as a promotional strategy on social media platforms, like LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as on their websites.

William Denver represents insurance policyholders. “One of my favorite tools for social media posts is the to do list for filing a claim when a major event (such as Hurricane Sandy) hits.” These proven best practices clearly show that Denver is highly knowledgeable about the nuances of insurance policy claims. They also have the added benefit of simplifying the information-gathering stage of a client’s claim, which makes it easier for Denver to advise and shepherd the client through the lengthy process. His practice, The Denver Law Firm www.thedenverlawfirm.net (http://www.thedenverlawfirm.net), is in Red Bank.

Recently, Louis Russo developed a COVID-19 Financial Relief Programs chart that details the funding sources and their respective requirements for federal, New Jersey and New York programs. This timely and informative summary is invaluable to small business owners and their advisers regarding these emergency resources.

Russo often posts materials on LinkedIn and other social media platforms. “During the holiday season, I distributed the 12 Days of Contracting Tips on LinkedIn, each day releasing a tip on how to draft and negotiate contracts efficiently to avoid disputes.” He has a commercial litigation and contracts practice, Russo Law www.russolaw-llc.com (http://www.russolaw-llc.com), with offices in Wyckoff and New York City.

Similarly, Ayesha Hamilton has been posting COVID-19-related fact sheets and information on employment issues on LinkedIn. As a result, she says, “I have seen a significant uptick in profile views on LinkedIn,” which may lead to future inquiries for her practice of business and employment law, Hamilton Law Firm www.ahlawpc.com (http://www.ahlawpc.com), located in West Windsor.

Leona Krasner, with a matrimonial practice in Jersey City and New York City, has a Steps of the Divorce Process guide that she promotes with an ad on Facebook. Prospective clients click a link in the ad to request the guide by submitting their email address. They receive a downloadable PDF with five clearly defined steps, and are invited to contact her at Krasner Law www.lkrasner.com (http://www.lkrasner.com) for more information. Krasner then follows up on these requests with a reply email.

When it comes to creating effective printed and social media materials, Judie Saunders, with a practice in civil and criminal litigation, at The Law Offices of Judie Saunders www.jsaunderslawfirm.com (http://www.jsaunderslawfirm.com), with offices in Red Bank and New York City, notes the value of a well- designed piece. According to Saunders, “Attractive content is important and can be achieved with the help of a (graphic) designer” or using the software program Canva.”

Hamilton hired “a [graphic] designer who created the master template for me; I just go in and edit the text. This keeps costs down and allows me the freedom to edit, share and send to clients on my schedule.”

Some attorneys enthusiastically endorse offering a free consultation, while others are more mindful of reserving their time. Kim Yonta, with a practice in criminal defense at Yonta Law www.yontalawnj.com (http://www.yontalawnj.com) in New Brunswick, arranges a 30-minute appointment. “Usually in my free initial consultation, I give the potential client a copy of the law that was violated and I consult on the violation for up to 30 minutes. My clients want to know that I will be handling the case myself,” not paralegals or other attorneys.

Marnita Robertson agrees with the value of a free consultation. “The session is typically 30 minutes and usually by phone, because it provides the ability to respond to the client’s questions in real time while establishing a personal connection. The consultation provides an opportunity to listen to and understand the potential client’s issue, and also demonstrate your knowledge of the client’s issues. The primary importance of the consultation is the beginning of the relationship with the client.” Robertson’s practice of data privacy and technology transactions, Robertson Law www.mvrobertsonlaw.com (http://www.mvrobertsonlaw.com), is in Fort Lee.

Given the fast pace of activity arising from the COVID-19 situation, some solo attorneys may decide to provide a special free service. Russo says, “I am offering to review force majeure and termination clauses at no charge in contracts to help individuals and businesses develop a strategy for minimizing COVID-19 losses in these turbulent times ahead.”

Ordinarily, Hamilton does not offer a free consult. However, “During this time of emergency, I have been doing free telephone consultations to answer quick questions” on employment matters, she comments.

When it comes to free consultations, many solo attorneys agree that it is important to distinguish between potential clients who are serious about the matter at hand and those who are merely hunting for free advice and no future relationship. Rajeh Saadeh, who practices in Somerville at The Law Office of Rajeh A. Saadeh www.rajehsaadeh.com (http://www.rajehsaadeh.com), monitors his time accordingly. “If I were to give free consultations for my real estate litigation practice or divorce and family law, I would do nothing but free consultations all day long. For the sake of productivity and ensuring that prospective clients who are truly interested in proceeding with representation get my time and attention, I have to charge a reasonable consultation fee, which is ultimately credited to the retainer (thereby making the consultation free anyway).”

Denver has a similar approach to screening clients. “I do not offer a free in-person consultation. I prefer to talk to potential clients on the phone at the initial intake stage. During that call, I will assess whether the case is right for my firm, and, if not, I will refer it out. If the case is a good fit, we discuss terms of retention. If the client wants an in-person meeting and a deeper look at their case, then I charge a flat fee of two hours of billable time. This prevents me from wasting time on ‘browsers’ or those who are looking for free advice, and makes sure my clients are serious and engaged when they meet with me.”

Whether you decide to market your solo practice by offering free materials on your website, tips on social media or free consultations, keep in mind that it is the first step in connecting with the client and sets the stage for future contact with you. That initial impression may make all the difference for the prospect who wants a test drive before selecting you, and not another attorney, who was not as forthcoming with a consult or background information.

According to Robertson, “A free consultation is one of your most important selling tools as a lawyer. It gives you the opportunity to establish the relationship with the client, while demonstrating your knowledge about the client’s issue. The balancing act is in providing enough information, but not resolving the client’s issue for free. If the free consultation is done correctly, then it establishes trust with the client that you are the right professional to address the client’s legal needs.”

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