

Promoting your profile: show and tell

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Ari Kaplan

Self-promotion at conferences is the best way to remain relevant in a recession, says Ari Kaplan.

There is no shortage of news about law firms reducing staff. In fact, The Lawyer is currently reporting that the total number of redundancies in the UK stands at nearly 3,000 and growing steadily. For those who still have their jobs, experiencing survivor's guilt is not an option. Instead, you must be proactive and creative in your approach to remain essential.

Naturally, make it a point to exceed expectations in your billable work, but once you do get out of your office and try to realise your business development potential. Business-oriented newspapers often list conventions – start by identifying shows on its calendar. Whether you are planning to attend the motorcycle show or the tourism fair, find events that are consistent with your interests so that you will meet people that share your passions.

The upcoming Governance of New Technologies: The Transformation of Medicine, IT and IP conference in Edinburgh is an excellent example. In many ways, you belong at these trade shows and can easily strike up random conversations to test your ability to clearly describe what you do in a virtually risk-free environment – the crowds at these events tend to be populated by entrepreneurs, technophiles, other lawyers, and journalists.

If you couldn't care less about meeting people, attend these events to become a trend-spotter taking key information back to your office. By being the person who knows the most about technology, you will become a valuable resource for the partners and sometimes even the clients. People at the firm will come to rely on your knowledge and experience.

When evaluating potential opportunities, bear in mind that while business may be slow in one part of the world, it is thriving in another. Despite the staff cuts in the UK, major firms are continuing to expand abroad. The Lawyer recently reported that Clyde & Co, Denton Wilde Sapte, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Linklaters and Pinsent Masons recently sent associates and partners to the Middle East.

In order to gauge the potential of other markets, try to attend a conference outside of your traditional geographic location. There may be an expense associated with such a trip, but you will exponentially increase your chances of meeting people in those cities and influencing your career progression.

Most professionals are unlikely to make a trip for an initial meeting, but they are quite happy to extend a trip they are already taking to meet with a prospect. List the prospects you would like to see in the city to which you are traveling and contact each one of them in advance.

Ironically, those with whom you would like to connect are less inclined to make time for someone locally, but are often willing to add an out of town individual to their schedule. Create that opportunity and you will be rewarded with an interesting contact in the present and perhaps something greater in the future. There is a trade conference in Dubai, Franchising Middle East, on 2-4 March 2009 – consider testing the theory there.

It is a myth that great business developers are born with natural instincts for engaging people in discussion and sharing information. They are just more effective at placing themselves in situations where they can generate influence.

Ari Kaplan is a lawyer in the US and the author of The Opportunity Maker: Strategies for Inspiring Your Legal Career Through Creative Networking and Business Development.

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