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MARKETING THE LAW FIRM

JANUARY 2021

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: How to Embrace Virtual Seminars in 5 Easy Steps

By Sharon Meit Abrahams

For years, large firms have offered webinars directly to clients and prospects on the topics they want to promote. Now in 2021 everyone in the legal field has a virtual platform, so firms of all sizes can jump in and offer webinars on topics that highlight their firms' practice areas. During 2020 the Oberman Law Firm, a five-lawyer firm in Georgia was unable to handle all the calls they were receiving from their medical industry clients, so they started doing virtual seminars. Stuart Oberman said he "never knew that webinars for a firm of our size could be utilized and instrumental as a client informational platform, and also as an industry client development and marketing tool." He stressed they, "had to learn very quickly and on the fly," to become, "the go to firm for their clients and specific practice areas." They conducted 16 seminars and ended up with a stellar 2020.

A veteran of legal business development, David Freeman, J.D. the CEO of David Freeman Consulting Group comments, "There are many lawyers who are stuck and don't know how to adapt to the current remote environment. With their go-to approaches of client meetings, lunches and attending conferences off the table for now, they need new ways to connect with clients and prospects. That is where using remote technology can come in." Hosting your own online seminars is a key to success going into 2021.

Create your own virtual programs by following these five steps. Start with:

1. picking a topic; then
2. creating the content; next
3. scheduling it;
4. advertising it; and finally
5. presenting it.

Pick the Topic and Title

Starting with the topic, be sure to pick one that can draw an audience. Even if it is a narrow focus, it will attract a targeted audience. The title needs to be catchy, so it grabs the attention of your preferred attendees. I like to brainstorm a dozen titles, use humor, ask for feedback from others, and pick the one that sounds the most interesting. The power of a title is what sets the theme of your presentation.

Share the Content

For the content, even if it is a CLE approvable topic, be creative on how to deliver it. Many attorneys start with an outline and transform that into a standard slide deck. The more creative presenters might use animation to add interest. For the programs I run, I turn the seminar into an interview. We still have a slide deck, but I draw out the content through conversation. To take another approach consider telling a story. John Livesay, the author of “Better Selling Through Storytelling” advises attorneys to tell a story about a client you have helped in a way that demonstrates empathy and problem-solving skills. Livesay says, “Lawyers who use storytelling have a new tool in their toolbox to become magnetic and memorable. If you want to go from pushy to persuasive, learn how to be a black belt in telling stories.”

Schedule It

Depending on your virtual platform, when you schedule the presentation, decide whether to use meeting mode or webinar mode. In meeting mode, everyone has the ability to be on camera and orally participate. This mode is effective with smaller groups of around 30 people. In webinar mode, the audience will see the speaker and presentation materials. They will not see or hear the participants, but depending on the platform they will be able to chat with other attendees. This mode is most effective if you expect over 80 people to attend. For either mode it is helpful to have a co-host who monitors the audience.

Advertise It

To advertise your online seminar, cast a wide net. Send email invitations to everyone in your contacts, your firm’s contacts, and ask colleagues or referral sources to send it out on your behalf. Be sure to post on social media as well. Think outside the box to determine if there might be others who are interested. I often invite law school alumni by reaching out to alumni offices or inviting members of an industry association by contacting their leadership. Enlist your marketing team or assistant to help track down email addresses.

Now it’s time for the presentation. Live programs offer energy from the room and spontaneity from the participants. “Zoom fatigue” is what every presenter is battling now. It actually takes more energy and work as the presenter to keep the audience engaged in a virtual environment. The speaker needs to use their eyes, face and small body movements in a new way, so practice is important. When I work with individuals, we record a practice presentation a few times, so the presenter grows comfortable with the content and the technology. Speaking of technology, there are technological ways to engage your audience throughout the presentation.

Most virtual platforms have the ability to conduct polling questions and offer a live chat feature. These are excellent tools that grab the attention of the participants. John Remsen, of the Managing Partner Forum (MPF) uses polling in his monthly Covid Seminars in two ways. First, when a participant registers and then during the session. The registration question results are woven into the presentation and the live polling offers immediate insight and live interaction to the topic of discussion. As a regular speaker for MPF, I find his use of polls an excellent way to engage the audience in real time.

Kicking off your program with the chat feature is a simple way to draw in the audience from the start. In some cases, you might have to walk the attendees through how to find and open it, especially if you use a platform less commonly used. After the short instruction, encourage the attendees to practice by asking them an easy question. It does not have to be related to the topic, as it can be where they are attending from or their favorite sports team. As long as they type it in, it did the trick. The key to employing this tool is to use it throughout your presentation by asking questions that are related to the

topic. I offer a copy of the chat responses to the attendees as an incentive for them to reach out to me afterwards.

If you are determined to “wow” your audience, you can work with a virtual event producer like Ken Sky from Ken Sky Unlimited. He explains, “There are resources to enhance virtual presentations to a point where they can be more effective than in person meetings.” Virtual event planning allows you to go the extra mile by adding animated and static pictures, music, applause, and enhanced interactive graphics to engage your audience. Working with a virtual event planner also takes the burden off the speaker so they are free to do the presentation without worrying about the technology.

As a result of the pandemic the doors have been thrown open to individuals and firms of all sizes to offer quality virtual programs to clients as well as prospects. Take advantage of this unique time in our lives to embrace this business development activity.

Dr. Sharon Meit Abrahams, a member of *Marketing the Law Firm*’s Board of Editors, is a legal talent expert who is helping clients pivot their business develop focus to virtual seminars in 2021. For over 25 years Dr. Abrahams has designed and facilitated business development workshops. She can be reached at sharon@legaltalentadvisors.com.

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