

## **Selling a Good Idea**

### **A case study in how applying fresh eyes can turn the run-of-the-mill into the remarkable.**

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The best ideas are the ones that can be implemented. But the implementation takes a lot of determination and hard work. That's why the odds of realizing a good idea—taking it from concept to execution—vastly increase with a team of motivated and committed collaborators. So, the ability to sell a good idea to your partners is as important as the idea itself. I'll illustrate what I mean with a true story.

#### **The Challenge: Bye-Bye, Infomercial**

I was working with a group of lawyers that wanted to use a seminar to show the legal marketplace their conversancy with a novel issue. On the plus side, the firm, if it moved expeditiously, could scoop other law firms on a litigation issue that had not been “seminared” to death. On the minus side, we acknowledged that program attendees often complain how seminars feel more like law firm infomercials than like value-added credentialing, in part a function of a stage populated exclusively by law firm partners—all from one firm. We also discussed how too many seminars play to an overly narrow audience, a by-product of the sorry state of many firms' mailing lists.

We came to the conclusion that if we could reinvigorate both the nature of the offering and the way we took it to market, we might have something worth the extraordinary effort such a program requires.

Our first step was to ask several clients what they thought would make the difference between a run-of-the-mill program and one that would elicit their attendance. Their answer: Invite clients who had dealt firsthand with the issue to be part of the faculty. Then we asked them what would take the program out of the realm of an infomercial and, instead, communicate objectivity and relevance. Their answer this time: Partner with some other organization whose interest in the issue at hand was different from ours.

Bingo! We realized there was one particular publication that was the ideal partner for this project. Its approach to the topic was one of defined objectivity. Plus, its mailing list (and readership) was exponentially larger than our law firm mailing list. By working collaboratively, we provided the publication with a way of getting up-to-speed on an issue that interested its editors, and in exchange, we received free advertising that reached a much wider audience than we would have attracted on our own.

### **The Outcome: A Template for the Future**

So what was the upshot? The seminar was the most successful one-off program the firm ever mounted.

Here's a recap of the results:

- It provided further bonding among the partners involved and the clients they invited to participate.
- It solidified an excellent relationship between the firm and the publication and set the stage for future collaborations.
- It attracted an audience of 200 people. Since the maximum capacity of the venue was 100, it required the firm to contact the second 100 respondents and schedule an additional offering.

And, while I never encourage my colleagues to think of seminars as leading to immediate engagements, but instead as ways to deepen relationships with existing and prospective clients, the timing and execution were so effective that several attendees approached the firm for help with the issue under discussion.

From my vantage point, all those accomplishments were secondary to the real benefit. By analyzing how our objective might be achieved if we approached a traditional marketing tactic with a fresh eye, we demonstrated that the key to selling good ideas in the partnership was to start with a clean slate, do the necessary homework, adopt a client focus and work as a team. And in a precedent-driven profession, that proved both a challenge and a template for future innovation.