



# Marketing

## The Law Firm<sup>®</sup>

Volume 21, Number 6 • October 2007

## THE PLACE TO NETWORK

### Network Your Way To an International Practice

#### *A Roadmap to Global Client Development*

By Christy Burke

In today's Internet age, from strictly a networking standpoint, the world is officially your oyster. Never before has it been so easy for attorneys to communicate with clients and colleagues from all over the world to attract, develop and secure international business.

Web sites, blogs, listservs, social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace and of course e-mail — the mother of all communication tools — all facilitate business development. In addition, for attorneys inclined to develop global clientele, the international playing field abounds with thousands of networking organizations and events. Attorneys have the ability to leverage their contacts, strengths, expertise and language proficiency to establish international clientele and in doing so can benefit with payment in Euros, Yen, Pesos and ultimately dollars that result from their efforts.

Consider how many cities, countries and continents there are in the world. Many of them would benefit from American legal counsel, either personally or professionally. With all these targets, there are seemingly infinite ways to network to generate new business.

Many legal niches already exist in this world, and many more will be carved out by enterprising and innovative attorneys. Perhaps you're an immigration attorney who speaks two languages in addition to English. You can choose to mine clients in specific cities or countries, and build great word-of-mouth to get referrals. Or maybe you're an immigrant yourself with ties to your previous homeland or transplanted communities that will yield interesting opportunities. Even if you only speak English and have never traveled outside of the United States, you are still in luck since English is widely spoken by businesspeople and most expatriates.

The opportunity for international client development is certainly astounding, but where do you begin?

#### **PUMP UP YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE**

Force yourself to take a good look at your firm's Web site. If visiting your URL makes you cringe, it's probably time for a makeover. Having a quality Web site that presents you well impresses people — and it's available 365/24/7 so it's a constant representation of your firm to the world. If your Web site is outdated, what are people going to conclude about your legal services? The Internet is the world's encyclopedia. Like it or not, you will be "Googled" and your Internet mentions will either attract or dissuade clients from seeking you out. Try "Googleing" your name in quotation marks ("John Smith") and see what happens. How do you stack up? Do you appear on the first page, or do you have to scroll through to the tenth page to find your name? Then when you find yourself, are you featured in a flattering professional capacity, or is the link a photo of you at a charity benefit or a family reunion?

Are you listed on free directories like LinkedIn and ZoomInfo? Do you have a Facebook and MySpace page? These free Internet listing opportunities give you Internet-based exposure so when international people are searching the Web for a lawyer, you are more likely to be on their radar.

Social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook are a great way to propagate business for little cost, other than your time and effort. Solo practitioner Evans Legros practices immigration, real estate, matrimonial and entertainment law, often working with clients who reside outside of the U.S. Legros has gotten many clients through MySpace.com, which he says is widely used. According to Legros, "Some of my music clients list me as their legal counsel on their MySpace sites, thereby becoming a conduit for other artists who visit their sites and need counsel in the U.S. Typically, once they arrive in the U.S. with their visa, they will also need an attorney to review contracts and other agreements, so the client relationship extends beyond the immigration process." Legros recently got a new client who is a celebrity choreographer for a noted pop singer who contacted him after visiting a current client's MySpace page. He now handles visas for the majority of the choreographer's staff including road managers, dancers, etc.

---

## **LEVERAGE LANGUAGES, UNDERSTAND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Speaking multiple languages can greatly facilitate networking for new global clients as it enables you to communicate effectively and reduces the “disconnect” that often occurs as cultures collide. Olivera Medenica of Wahab & Medenica LLC speaks English, French and Serbo-Croatian. Her French language ability has been most useful in developing international clients. Medenica says, “Although it’s not absolutely necessary in all cases to speak the client’s language, it is a huge asset in terms of breaking cultural barriers. Even after they retain you, they will most likely feel comfortable speaking their own language.” Medenica says that nearly all of her conference calls with French-speaking clients are in French, not English.

Medenica also notes that understanding the cultural differences is essential to networking. “If you’re working with French people, you have to understand how French people network. They consider it vulgar for an attorney to hand out a business card and openly solicit work when meeting for the first time. They like to create a relationship first and then talk business once a rapport is established.”

To avoid making an embarrassing *faux pas* in your international networking efforts, consider doing some homework about the way that clients like to be approached in your target markets. Talk to your current clients or even personal acquaintances who have done business with these countries to determine how to put your

---

**Christy Burke**, a member of this newsletter’s Board of Editors, is President of Burke & Company LLC ([www.burke-company.com](http://www.burke-company.com)), a New York-based public relations and marketing firm that specializes in serving the legal and technology industries. In addition to providing communications consulting, Christy also organizes corporate retreats and professional development programs for companies large and small. She can be reached at 917-623-5096 or [cburke@burke-company.com](mailto:cburke@burke-company.com).

best foot forward. International business brokers and networking gurus can also be a great help. Many such resources exist either in the form of independent consultants, agencies or trade associations.

Cross-cultural and language challenges can definitely slow down the networking process. This problem can be addressed by retaining a skilled interpreter. Hunton & Williams Partner Kathy Robb recalls an instance where she went to a dinner recently with a group of female Chinese professionals and entrepreneurs who were delegates to a United Nations meeting on sustainability. (Hunton has a Beijing office.) “While every single thing that was said had to go through the interpreter, causing a delay in communication, I was amazed at how well we understood each other,” Robb recalls. “Even humorous remarks were appreciated on both sides. The interpreter, an American who is fluent in Chinese, played a critical role, however, reminding us that entrepreneurialism and capitalism in China are encouraged in a governmental framework very different from ours, and certain terms may carry different assumptions for each of us. So we needed to be sensitive to the nuances in asking questions and developing connections with these female executives.”

Attorneys who are themselves immigrants to the U.S. can use that to their advantage. Adorno & Yoss Partner Francisco Gonzalez was born in Venezuela and speaks English, Spanish, French and Italian. Having been born and educated both in Venezuela and in the U.S., Gonzalez’s bicultural status has been enormously helpful to him in leading the development of Adorno’s South American client base. “Because of our attorneys’ own heritage, we understand first-hand what makes Latin Americans “tick” — their values, their way of doing business — and we can effectively help our clients understand and deal with the intricacies of doing business in the region.”

## **INTERNATIONALLY FOCUSED NETWORKING GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

If you only slightly scratch the surface, you will find an amazing array of networking associations and network-

ing groups that bring attorneys in touch with other lawyers and provide forums or events for client development. American organizations such as the International Bar Association ([www.ibanet.org](http://www.ibanet.org)), International Lawyer Network ([www.internationallawyernet.com](http://www.internationallawyernet.com)), Lawyers Associated Worldwide or “LAW” ([www.lawyer-worldwide.com](http://www.lawyer-worldwide.com)) and the International Lawyers Network ([www.iln.com](http://www.iln.com)) are good places to start. Memberships in elite organizations like Lex Mundi ([www.lexmundi.com](http://www.lexmundi.com)) can be excellent branding tools, since these associations have strict selection criteria, regular reviews of member firms and a stated dedication to including the *crème de la crème* of law firms worldwide.

In addition to these generally focused organizations, there are certainly more specific, vertically-focused groups which specialize in a particular geographic region or practice area. In major U.S. cities, there are often several chambers of commerce. Your prospecting objectives will determine how narrow or broad a focus you will take in attending events or signing up for membership.

Listing yourself in certain membership directories for these groups can be a good source of new business leads, but you can revisit these decisions regularly to determine whether the listing “pulls” for you — meaning that it actually brings in new clients and contacts to your practice.

Under Gonzalez’s leadership, Adorno has strategically developed an international law practice through building formal associations and mutually beneficial relationships. He is Managing Director of the Law Firm of the Americas or LFA ([www.lfalaw.org](http://www.lfalaw.org)), an association of independent law firms servicing clients in the Western hemisphere (the Americas and Europe). The LFA is an effective referral network for law firms committed to international work. For instance, Gonzalez says that Adorno landed a major Chilean manufacturing client through their LFA relationship, and that his firm returned the favor by bringing the Chilean firm in as outside counsel for one of their clients. “This is much more than a theoretical exercise. It is not only an effective revenue genera-

---

tion strategy but it also separates each member from their traditional competitors because it adds a completely new facet to their practice: the ability to serve their clients beyond their geographic borders just like the big firms can.”

Another profitable association for Adorno has been the State Capital Global Law Firm Group or SCGFLG ([www.statecapitallaw.org](http://www.statecapitallaw.org)), which is comprised of independent law firms in all 50 United States and in business markets and financial centers worldwide. As a result of their membership in SCGFLG, Adorno was able to persuade at least two of their Fortune 500 clients to allow them to become their Latin American counsel. A great

example of this is Adorno’s supervision of legal work provided by the SCGFLG in Mexico for their clients. Another interesting example is Adorno’s handling a matter in the U.S. for the Iceland SCGFLG member firm.

### **SMALL WORLD, BIG BUSINESS**

As the world seems to get increasingly smaller, international networking opportunities for attorneys are flourishing. If your firm has been considering making a foray into foreign markets, now is the time to act. Examine your global contact base as it is now and see what assets you do have. Then figure out which markets you want to go after, and network your way in. Whether you do so through the Internet or association

memberships, the business is out there as long as you have the contacts and the skills to propel yourself. Above all else, your ability to develop relationships, gain trust and provide superior legal services will serve you well no matter what your goals are — whether it’s in your own neighborhood or on the other side of the earth.



**The publisher of this newsletter is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, financial, investment advisory or other professional services, and this publication is not meant to constitute legal, accounting, financial, investment advisory or other professional advice. If legal, financial, investment advisory or other professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought.**