

## **USING SEMINARS TO PROMOTE YOUR PRACTICE**

by: Kenneth J. Landau

Presenting seminars on law related topics is one of the easiest and most inexpensive ways to promote your practice. Seminars also provide you with the opportunity to practice and perfect your communication skills, enhance your credibility as a lawyer and improve the image of the legal profession while educating your audience about why they need and can benefit from your services. Although it is possible for your firm to sponsor seminars, this article will focus primarily on presenting seminars through other organizations.

When you present seminars through other organizations they are implicitly vouching for your credentials, and the importance of the subject matter. You also do not assume the headaches, risks and costs of hosting a program and the sponsor will handle most if not all of the promotion. Organizations such as libraries, continuing education programs, schools, civic, service organizations, business, trade associations and community groups are always looking for valuable, informative and interesting programs for their constituents. If you can simply show them how your topics fit their needs a seminar with you as the speaker, moderator and/or panelist will be scheduled.

### **Getting Started**

The summer is the perfect time to contact these organizations as they plan their meetings or courses for the coming year. To locate possible sponsors, call the telephone numbers listed for programs in "event calendars" in the daily, weekly, trade or business papers. You can also contact local libraries or check with friends, relatives, employees, contacts and clients to inquire about organizations they belong to. Homeowners might be interested in hearing about "Avoiding Problems with Home Improvements", "Refinancing" or "Challenging Your Assessment". Business owners

might be interested in "Protecting Yourself in a Lease", "Protecting Your Ideas" or "Extending Credit and Collecting Debts". The program and topics can be tailored according to your expertise, the areas you wish to promote and the interests or needs of the group. You can suggest "timely" topics based on recent articles in the news or new or future legislative changes.

### **Before The Program**

Once you have scheduled the program, plan your pre-program publicity. Find out how the organization will promote the program. Usually you are welcome to enhance their efforts especially if the program is open to the public. Offer to submit a short article with your photo about the program to their newsletter. If they are interested you can submit a more detailed article on the subject and your expertise before or after the program. You can also mail the flyer to event calendars or along with your press release to local or trade newspapers. Not only will this help to promote the program but you will achieve even more good publicity by spreading the word that you were selected to speak at this program, the potential importance of the legal issues and the effective legal solutions you offer.

Another way to publicize the program, if it is open to the public, is by sending letters or e-mails inviting your clients and contacts to attend. You can offer to provide them with a copy of the materials if they are not able to attend. Even if most of them are not able to attend, the publicity helps to highlight the importance of your message and expertise.

## **The Content**

It is important to learn about the size, demographics, sophistication, background and concerns of the anticipated audience. For the program to succeed, you must tailor your presentation to their needs. If you are talking above or below their level of understanding or concern, you will fail to trigger their interest and the program will not be as worthwhile for you or your audience. For these reasons, the words, themes, images and examples you use are very important in your presentation. Simple charts, illustrations or diagrams can help you to keep it interesting and make the information understandable. You need more than a "PowerPoint" presentation where many speakers merely read the projected outline, word for word, to the audience. A chart, illustration or table you can simply "explain" may help you to better demonstrate your expertise than your reading ability. Rather than bore your audience with long definitions or technical regulations, simply refer them to this information in your handouts.

Usually it is best to keep your points simple and do not overwhelm your audience with too much information. Practice your presentation to a "non-lawyer" audience, perhaps to family, friends or your staff for its "understandability quotient". When you identify potential legal problems, be sure to comment on some of the possible cost-effective legal solutions you offer to each problem.

You may want to alert your audience to administrative remedies and agencies or free or low cost legal services provided by legal aid-type agencies in case they cannot afford a private attorney, or the Bar Association Referral Service which might be in a position to recommend a free or low cost attorney.

Above all, your presentation must be informative and understandable. You must come across as a caring, knowledgeable, approachable advisor and problem solver.

## **Solo vs. Anchor**

If you do not feel comfortable presenting the program on your own, you can

share the podium with someone else from your firm or merely act as the moderator while others give the presentation. When several speakers talk for shorter periods of time, or take turns giving the presentation, the program is usually more interesting. This is similar to the "anchor" format used on television news and talk programs.

### **At the Program**

Your introduction as a speaker is important to start the program on the right note. The audience does not need to hear all of your educational and other credentials especially if you would like them to be awake for the program. However, they should be told your most important credentials as they relate to the topic and the audience.

If you need to learn more about your audience, ask them a few relevant questions and be ready to change your emphasis accordingly. Start your presentation with a dramatic or humorous point to capture the attention of your audience. Briefly explain the topics you will cover. You may want to pause after each topic for questions or comments. Avoid reading your speech and try to keep it conversational, as if you were giving a client an initial consultation in your office.

Handouts are important because they help the audience to remember you. They should be more than a long biography or sales material. They can include an outline of your talk, your website, definitions of key terms, other resources available, charts, checklists, formulas, a summary of important statutes, deadlines or regulations and your firm newsletters or brochures. The more valuable the reference information, the more likely it will be saved.

At the end of the program, if you have not done so already, and if time permits, you can invite the audience to ask their questions. If there are none, and you still have a few minutes left in the program, you may want to have some other points that you are ready to discuss.

Your presentation should avoid a "hard sell" and should be more than an

infomercial for your firm. Convey information that the audience can use in their personal or business affairs while presenting yourself as a “cost-effective”, “problem-solver”. Be sure to emphasize the “preventive” nature of the services you offer and the value of a legal “audit” or preventive check-up.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Under the Code of Professional Responsibility, you must avoid “claims that are false, deceptive or misleading.” See Disciplinary Rule (“DR”) 2-101 (A) (22 NYCRR §1200.6). The Code encourages attorneys to use seminars and other publicity “to educate the public to an awareness of legal needs and to provide information relevant to the selection of the most appropriate counsel.” DR 2-101 (D). Attorneys offering seminars should also review Disciplinary Rule 2-104 (C) (22 NYCRR §1200.9) and DR 2-104 (E). In your introduction and presentation, be careful about using the term “specialist.” DR 2-105 (22 NYCRR §1200.10) describes the circumstances when a lawyer or law firm may publicly identify one or more areas of law in which the lawyer or the law firm practices and when the term “specialist” can be used. Instead of the word “specialist”, you may want to say that you “concentrate in” or “limit your practice to” certain areas of the law

The goal of any seminar is not only to market yourself and your firm, but to help inform the public and try to improve the image of lawyers and remind the public and potential clients that we are indeed a helping profession and can, like other professions, provide value to those in need of our services.

Kenneth J. Landau, Esq. is a partner in the Mineola, Long Island law firm of Shayne, Dachs, Stanisci, Corker & Sauer, LLP, concentrating in the areas of negligence and insurance law. He is a past Dean of the Nassau Academy of Law and the Host of the weekly radio show, “Law You Should Know”, on WHPC 90.3 FM.