

How Lawyers Can Conduct Seminars

By Irwin Pollack, Esquire

Seminars can be highly successful or dismal failures. Although nobody can control all the factors that will attract prospective customers, there are ways to improve the odds of success.

First, identify the target markets and their needs (for example, we've had clients who focus on retirement planning), and select the seminar topic that is important to them. In planning the presentation, determine if partners or additional experts are needed to speak on complicated or multi-faceted topics. For example, a financial planner may want a lawyer to participate on a seminar on estate planning.

Once the topic is established, the next step is to select a date (and time) of the seminar. This is not as easy as it sounds. Think about these issues:

- Are other high-profile events planned** for the date you've considered?
- Typically July and August are not good months** because of Summer vacations.
- Avoid mid-December to early-January** because of the holidays.
- Avoid Mondays**, Friday afternoons, and major holidays.
- Select a time** and venue that will be convenient for the target audience.

Then comes marketing the event. Beyond the lure of "free," consider these strategic points:

- Invitations must be sent out early** enough (I've usually done a two-part mailing – once ten weeks out and another one three weeks out).
- Phone follow-up** within a week of mailing is ideal, but not always possible with the recent do-not-call rules.
- Reconfirm** those who registered to attend.

In planning the logistics of the event, I've always had my "Irwin Favorites," which include:

- Room set-up** (I've preferred classroom style, but the open-shaped U has a more informal feeling).
- Keep the room** under 70 degrees.

Have windows covered and doors closed (you want the focus on you, don't you?).

During the presentation, make sure you emphasize the key points and offer hand-outs at the end – otherwise, attendees will be reading the notes, not listening to you! Most important, make sure it's genuinely an educational event. The people you invited don't want to feel they've been lured into a sales pitch.

Consider Speaking Engagements as Well

Public speaking, like it or not, is essential to your firm's growth. Here are points on how to begin your attempts to get in front of groups (thus increasing your top-of-mind awareness and credibility):

1. Brainstorm those events you or your firm should be speaking at. Firms need to expose their areas of expertise to prospective clients. By speaking at conferences or industry groups, attorneys can increase their visibility and – ultimately – attract new business.
2. If it's not you, designate a speaker for the firm. In many cases, this person should have speaking experience.

Don't wait for an invitation to speak. Actively work on opportunities to get in front of groups. Moreover, you'll accomplish many of the same goals by writing for a company's newsletter. It's clearly one of the best practices for marketing in the mid-2000's.



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