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## Why Some Rainmakers Won't Be Altering Their Tactics During the 'Great Lockdown' Recession

A new group of highly efficient rainmakers has emerged. They've adopted the professional client development tactics of top management consulting firms and now accomplish 99% of their offline networking and selling virtually, not in person.

By **Craig Levinson** | May 08, 2020



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The COVID-19 pandemic has made this an extremely uneasy time for many lawyers and law firms. Rainmakers are not only losing significant legal work; they're also losing the methods they've traditionally employed to replace it. Most lawyers get nearly all of their business in person (e.g., lunches, networking events, pitch meetings). With those avenues suddenly gone, many rainmakers are perplexed about how they'll maintain their books of business during this crisis. With South Florida comprising nearly 60% of the COVID-19 cases in the state, the governor has said that South Florida will reopen more slowly than will the

rest of the state and that social distancing rules may stay in effect for another year or longer. South Florida law firms can't afford for their competitors to gain a head start on state, national and international legal work.

Recently, however, a new group of highly efficient rainmakers has emerged. They've adopted the professional client development tactics of top management consulting firms and now accomplish 99% of their *offline* networking and selling virtually, not in person. They exponentially grow incredibly targeted networks of prospects and referral sources and get hired by relatively new contacts within those networks—all without leaving their chairs. With only a small percentage of lawyers using these tactics, however, most firms will need their lawyers to embrace these virtual approaches to keep pace with, and eventually surpass, the competition.

Here is the step-by-step process these rainmakers are successfully utilizing from their desks (or kitchen tables):

**Informational Networking:** Most lawyers overlook the true value of article writing, which can solve their No. 1 client development obstacle: Lawyers generally have no reasons to call on contacts that don't come off like indirect sales pitches (because that's what they are). Progressive rainmakers successfully leverage the article-research and writing process to speak to existing contacts and meet new ones. If they want to target executives from the Big Box Stores, they procure a relevant article opportunity in a Real Estate media outlet. This provides them with a perfectly valid reason/excuse to call any contact in the retail space for background information, quotes, or feedback.

**Consistent Referrals:** If a lawyer calls an AGC she knows at Staples and remains in information mode (as opposed to sales mode) throughout the call, that AGC will feel comfortable referring that lawyer, for information gathering purposes, to two or three new targeted contacts who are all future prospects or referral sources.

**Implicit Recommendations:** The Staples AGC indirectly vouches for the lawyer, because credibility dictates that one peer won't refer someone who would waste the other peer's time.

Lawyers who continually replicate this process exponentially grow a network, from their desks, that, by design, contains an incredibly targeted group of new prospects and referral sources. At one of my South Florida clients, I had a hungry lawyer who "met" 150 new Real Estate contacts before we ever submitted his article.

**Virtual Panels:** Moderating live panels has always been risky. They're expensive. Geography and scheduling conflicts prevent lawyers from securing the highest profile panelists. And with weather issues, competing panels, and conference organizers marketing events poorly, the size of the audience is a crapshoot. With virtual panels, where all the Q&A is done over the phone or via email, all of those problems go away. Now, one can procure the biggest and best panelist names ("shows who you swim with"); almost all the variables are removed from the equation, and, if each panelist is equally motivated to market and distribute the Virtual Panel reprint, it can be read by thousands, not by hundreds.

**Uncovering Leads:** With either of these tactics, a lawyer's thesis should discuss a business (not a legal) problem, how the lawyer sees it evolving, and how it will need to be handled. The goal is to be contrarian without being controversial. When many people strongly disagree with a person's viewpoint, that generally means another group at the opposite end of the opinion spectrum staunchly agrees with his or her stance. As lawyers reveal their hypotheses during their informational calls, they quickly discover the group of contacts that already agrees with them. Since those individuals recognize the problem and concur with the offered solution, they become qualified leads or prospects.

**Revelation and Alignment:** Professional sales tactics work because traditional pitching behavior, which has become so counter-productive in professional services, is replaced by “creating the conditions for the prospect to buy.” Even though a prospect recognizes a problem, it’s still likely to land in the “Should Handle Someday” file—because most corporate “pain” is an abstraction. Sophisticated rainmakers arrange a follow-up call and use a specific set of questions to help a prospect express the concrete monetary, operational, and personal impacts of not addressing that problem. If those impacts are too high, the prospect will come to an epiphany that it belongs in the “must handle now” pile and the company needs to act.

Although that feels like victory, the prospect’s company is not yet a client. Since there’s almost always additional stakeholders in significant company decisions, the lawyer usually must iterate that questioning process twice more—once, over the phone, with both the prospect and the stakeholder internally “championing” that issue, and finally, via video conference, with the entire stakeholder group—to help align them all behind the decision to act.

While most rainmakers were steadfastly resisting any tactical changes, a small group of lawyers who adopted virtual strategies succeeded wildly. In the “Great Lockdown” recession, that history is bound to repeat itself. Rainmakers will merely use video conferencing to replicate in-person client development. A few progressive law firm leaders, however, will recognize this unique opportunity in time to embrace virtual tactics and provide their firms with overwhelming competitive advantages.

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