

How writing a book can get you clients

by Correy Stephenson

Published: August 14th, 2009



James B. Reed was looking for a tasteful way to market his small personal injury law firm in Elmira, N.Y. that would still get his name out to the public.

So he decided to write a book.

Dictating on early weekend mornings, Reed, a partner at the Ziff Law Firm, wrote "[The 5 Deadly Mistakes That Can Kill Your Accident Case](#)" and began giving it to potential clients and offering it for free on the firm's website.

"Books to me are an absolutely perfect marketing tool," Reed said. "It's free information – nobody is offended by getting a book."

It was such a success that he wrote a second book – "[The 5 Secrets to Buying Auto Insurance in New York](#)" – and convinced his partners to author their own books.

"The feedback has been incredible," he told Lawyers USA. After an initial printing of 200 copies of the insurance book, he had to print another 1,000 to have enough on hand.

"I was trying to think outside the box of what everyone else was doing" for law firm marketing, he said. And it's worked – Reed estimates that over the last year, he's had at least 10 people come into the office with his books and become clients.

Not only does the book make him an authority in the eyes of potential clients, "people keep books around," Reed said. "That's why this is more effective than a pamphlet or a newsletter or another piece of marketing that people have a tendency to just throw away."

Heather Hutchins, a freelance writer in Chicago who has helped other lawyers write their own books, agreed that writing an informational book has "huge marketing value."

"There's something about a paper and ink book that sets authors apart from everyone else," she explained. "You can write 10 or 15 e-books, but most people will not consider you an expert until you publish an actual book that you can hold in your hand."

Chapter 1: Writing the book

Finding the time to write a book can be daunting, Hutchins said.

She suggested that lawyers cut down on time and costs by collaborating – each partner in a firm contributes a few chapters, for example.

The Charles E. Boyk Law Firm in Toledo, Ohio does just that for their books on various areas of personal injury.

The partners get together and brainstorm possible topics, then agree on an outline for the book, Charles Boyk said. Because one of the partners, Dale Emch, is a former city editor at a Toledo newspaper, he does the majority of the writing, but each attorney contributes to the practice area in which he has specific expertise.

"The books give us credibility and also answer a lot of questions that clients typically ask," Boyk said.

He said the firm has gotten a "large number" of cases because of the books – "we wouldn't have written six of them if it didn't make sense" – and received media coverage as a result.

Their latest book, "[Little Kids, Big Accidents: The Ultimate Guide to Child Injury Cases in Ohio](#)," resulted in an interview with a local TV station as well as an article in a local parenting magazine, Boyk said.

"We aren't looking to get a Pulitzer Prize," he said. "We are trying to communicate in layman's terms how people can help themselves and maximize their recovery if they have been in an accident."

Chapter 2: Publishing and public service

For his first book, Reed used a combination editor/publisher who charged more but provided copy-editing services and did minor stylistic editing. But feeling more confident about the process for his second book, Reed used a cheaper publisher.

For an order of 500 books, the cost was 96 cents each. An order of 1,000 books brought the cost down to 80 cents each, he said.

While the cost has certainly decreased with the rise in self-publishing, it may not work for every firm.

Mischelle Weedman-Davis, the client relations manager for the Davis Law Firm in Seattle, said the firm planned to use its first book ("[The Ten Biggest Mistakes That Can Wreck Your Washington Accident Case](#)") as a marketing tool, but had a very small percentage of books turn into clients.

"We do it now as a public service, giving the books away to people who need information," she said. "No doubt we

do get some cases from [the books], but our real motivation is to educate the public.”

The books haven't been “a marketing nirvana,” she said. Especially for solos and small firms, “there are other ways to spend money on marketing that will get clients in the door more quickly.”

Reed suggested that books can lessen the amount of time a lawyer needs to spend with a client.

“[It] saves me at least half an hour with each person,” he said. “People can take their time reading through the book or can look up a specific question before they have to pick up the phone.”

And if people order the book on the website before coming in, it acts almost as a screening tool, Reed said.

“If people read the book they already know that I am not going to take their case in certain situations, or they will come in with a basic understanding of the process already and they are going to ask more sophisticated questions.”

Chapter 3: Book as marketing tool

Once you have your books in hand, how do you make the most of them?

Reed's firm offers its books free on its website and hands them out at professional seminars. For example, one partner authored a book on motorcycle law and gave it out at a recent meeting.

Reed said he's also had requests from local insurance agencies for his book on insurance, and the firm offers books as reading material in its waiting room to encourage potential clients to read them.

Hutchins suggested that lawyers can use their books to get speaking engagements, and suggests offering to rework a book into a webinar or a CD as part of a seminar.

Lawyers should also blog about a book when it is first published and send a press release to the media, added Hutchins, [who blogs about](#) the process of writing non-fiction.

Even if the press doesn't do a story immediately, a reporter might call at a later date if a story is related to the book's topic or your area of expertise, she noted.

After Reed wrote his first book, he sent a copy to the local paper. A reporter visited and directed people to the firm's website in the story.

Lawyers can also try to actively sell their books, Hutchins, said, by offering them on their own website or on Amazon, and could even set up a book tour with readings at local bookstores.

Questions or comments can be directed to the writer at: correy.stephenson@lawyersusaonline.com