Marketing, Management, and Mentorship

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Program materials

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Auditing Your Marketing Activities

Auditing your firm's marketing activities allows you to examine all marketing and communication efforts to evaluate their effectiveness and alignment with the firm's overall objectives

Define Your Goals and Objectives

One of the early items in the audit is to ensure that your marketing activities align with the firm's overall strategic goals. This will help measure the success of marketing activities against defined benchmarks.

- Review the firm's strategic plan.
- Identify specific marketing goals, such as increasing client acquisition, improving brand awareness, or expanding into new practice areas.
- Use data to understand the objectives (e.g., a 20% increase in website traffic, ten new clients per quarter).

Marketing Audits may not sound exciting but they do offer deep insight into where you are spending time and resources.

Evaluate Current Marketing Strategies

By evaluating your marketing strategies, you are likely to reveal areas needing improvement or adjustment, identify strategies with the best return on investment (ROI), and determine the effectiveness of current marketing tactics.

- Analyze all current marketing channels (e.g., digital marketing, print advertising, networking events).
- Assess the performance of each strategy using key metrics (e.g., conversion rates, engagement levels and open files).
- Compare the outcomes with industry benchmarks and best practices.

Assess Marketing Budgets and ROI

Marketing budgets are often reviewed as an area to reduce costs. As part of the audit, you will want to identify any overspending or underspending areas, reallocate resources as needed, and ensure the marketing budget is used efficiently.

- Review the annual marketing budget and expenditures.
- Calculate the ROI and the effectiveness of each spend.

Analyze Target Audience and Client Segments

Identifying new potential client segments can help ensure marketing efforts reach the right audience. This will help to enhance the relevance of marketing messages.

- Review client demographics, psychographics, and behaviour patterns.
- Conduct client surveys and interviews to gather insights.
- Use data analytics to identify trends and preferences among different client segments.

Review Marketing Materials and Communications

Nothing can limit the reputation of your marketing team more quickly than having outdated or ineffective materials that hinder the firm's brand image and credibility. Ensuring consistency and professionalism in all marketing communications is critical to any audit.

- Audit all marketing materials, including brochures, business cards, website content, and social media profiles.
- Check for consistency in branding, messaging, and design.
- Update or redesign materials as necessary to reflect current standards and trends.

Evaluate Digital Presence and Online Reputation

Your initial goals online are to enhance and protect the firm's reputation, maximize visibility, and engage potential clients through digital channels.

- Audit the firm's website for SEO, usability, and content quality.
- Analyze social media profiles and engagement metrics.
- Monitor online reviews and ratings, responding to feedback as appropriate.

Assess Participation in Legal Directories and Awards

Directory and award sites can enhance the firm's credibility and visibility in the legal community. Lawyers want to refer clients to other credible lawyers. Although typically not the way new clients find you, these platforms may help with referrals and provide additional networking opportunities.

- Review the firm's listings in legal directories (e.g., Lexpert, Chambers, Best Lawyers).
- Assess the benefits of participating in industry awards and recognitions vs the time involved in getting ranked.
- Ensure current information accurately reflects the firm's expertise and achievements.

Examine Competitor Strategies

An in-depth understanding of your competition identifies competitive advantages and areas for improvement, helps benchmark the firm's performance against peers, and reveals market trends and emerging opportunities. Keeping a close eye on firms that will happily take over your clients would be best.

- Conduct a SWOT analysis of key competitors, including newcomers to the space.
- Analyze competitors' marketing materials, websites, and social media.
- Identify unique selling points (USPs) and successful tactics used by competitors.

A thorough marketing audit ensures your firm can optimize its marketing strategies, enhance its competitive position, and ultimately achieve its business objectives more effectively.

Audits should be integrated into your firm's annual planning process to ensure continuous improvement and sustained success.

Review Internal Processes and Team Performance

None of this is possible without your marketing team. As a leader, you want to ensure the marketing team operates efficiently and effectively and identify skill gaps or training needs.

- Evaluate the roles and responsibilities of the marketing team.
- Assess the effectiveness of internal communication and project management tools.
- Conduct performance reviews and provide feedback and training as needed.

Create an Action Plan

All of this great work to complete the audit is excellent. Still, you must create an action plan that provides a roadmap for implementing improvements and achieving goals that align the marketing team's efforts with the firm's strategic direction.

- Summarize the findings from the marketing audit.
- Work with your executive partner to develop a detailed action plan with specific, time-bound tasks.
- Assign responsibilities and establish metrics to measure progress.

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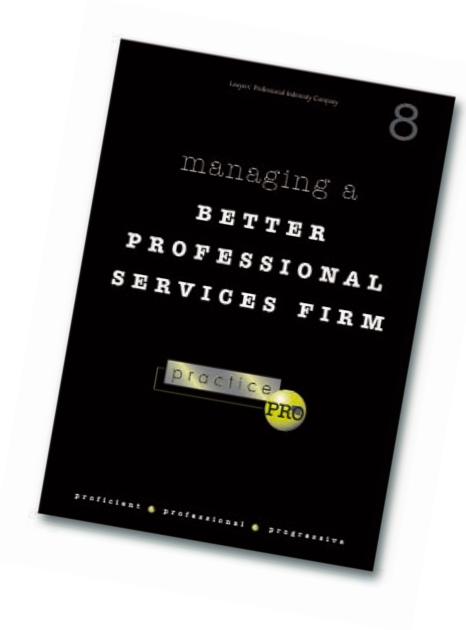
In this issue:

Managing a better professional services firm



The articles on marketing and yellow pages advertising are excerpted from **managing a better professional services firm**, the eighth in the **managing** series of booklets from practicePRO. These booklets provide practical tips to help lawyers better manage the risk in law practice, and adapt to the changing environment and capitalize on the opportunities that this change presents. A copy of this newest booklet from practicePRO is included with this issue of LAWPRO Magazine.

Marketing plan ABCs[1]

Slow times, tough times, times when you really do have time on your hands: That's when the need for a sound marketing plan to promote your firm really hits home. But if you're waiting for just such a time to tackle your marketing project, think again.

Marketing yourself and your practice is a long-term proposition: Good marketing pays off over the long haul. It is critical that you spend some time marketing every month, especially when business is good. Good marketing efforts require a steady investment of your time.

Your individual marketing plan does not need to be lengthy or complex. You need to write down goals for yourself and your firm – benchmarks against which you can measure success. Set some target dates for completing various goals and projects. For most lawyers a six-month marketing plan might be as simple as:

Each week:

- I will take at least one person who has referred cases to me in the past, or one potential client, to lunch.
- I will send a letter of appreciation to every client whose file I close. I will include an outline of all my other practice areas and a client satisfaction survey.
- I will send a thank you note to someone who did something nice or beyond the call of duty for me.
- I will record on Friday all of my marketing efforts that week so I can see how I am doing.

Each month:

- I will attend at least one civic, church or community meeting.
- I will try to meet at least five new people.
- I will make a telephone call to an old friend whom I haven't talked to in a while and just chat.
- I will send someone that I know who received some good press, a copy of the newspaper article with a congratulatory note.
- I will attend my county bar monthly meeting and sit with some lawyers whom I do not know that well.

During the next four months:

- I will schedule a public speaking engagement or seminar. (I might even send the local newspaper a press release in advance).
- I will read a book on either marketing or law practice management.
- I will schedule time for myself to review my marketing efforts during the last four months.
- My spouse/partner and I will host a small dinner party for some people that we don't often see.
- I will spend some time touring a client's place of business at no charge to the client.
- I'll present a CLE program or do some other volunteer work for my local bar association.

At the end of six months:

- I will sit down and review everything I have done and recorded during the last six months on my marketing plan. I will note any areas of great success or failure, try to think of new ideas for marketing, and revise my old six-month marketing into a new plan for the next six months.

Make sure your plan reflects your individual strengths and your unique situation. If you feel that you are a great public speaker, then make speaking engagements. If most of your business comes from referrals from other lawyers, attend local bar meetings, serve on bar committees and attend bar social events can result in business. If your practice focuses in a narrow area, such as entertainment law, you need to be in places where people who may need those legal services congregate.

For an excellent outline of the steps necessary to create a detailed marketing plan for a firm, see *The Attorney's Guide to Marketing Your Practice, Second Edition*, edited by James A. Durham and Deborah McMurray and published in 2004 by the ABA Law Practice Management Section.

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1 Portions of this section came from Marketing Magic for Lawyers, by Jim Calloway, originally published in the Oklahoma Bar Journal, Vol. 71, No. 26, September 9, 2000.

Improve management with mindset

HANDOUT: 3 mindset shifts for improved performance, relationships and wellness, in your law practice.

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Manage the team

A partner mindset facilitates feedback

Giving constructive or critical feedback can be challenging even for experienced leaders. Nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news or risk dampening someone's confidence.

Reframe the conversation in your mind, so you can be direct, but encouraging:

- Ask yourself if your feedback is clear, balanced and usable. Is it fair? Is it timely?
- Ask your direct reports about their career aspirations. Establish goals that get them where they want to go, at a realistic pace.
- Provide the support and resources needed.

Tip #1

Shift to a partnership mindset so you can **give your team the valuable feedback they need to succeed in their roles,** without holding back, hesitating or diluting critical content.

Manage the manager

A growth mindset cultivates win-win

It can be challenging to accelerate your career if you're not given the right opportunities. Or if you're not presented with favourable circumstances to ask for what you need.

Reframe the conversation in your mind, so you can be a problem solver:

- Ask yourself how your supervisor measures their own success. How can you help them meet those targets? Offer your support.
- Ask yourself what your supervisor needs to be reassured that your work is on track. Organize it and provide it, proactively.

Tip #2

Shift to a growth mindset so you can give your supervisor the specific type of support they need to succeed in their role, **increasing your value and profile in the process.**

Manage boundaries

Set expectations and follow through

It can be challenging to say 'no', to clients and colleagues, whether the request is big or small.

Reframe the conversation in your mind, so you can be true to your intentions:

- Ask yourself where you have run into scope creep in the past and what would help clarify limits for yourself and your clients.
- Update policies. Communicate clearly when onboarding clients.
- Ask yourself about your values and goals that relate to your work. Respond to requests based on alignment and capacity.

Tip #3

Shift to an intentional mindset so you can find the right words to **say 'yes' when you want to take something on and 'no' when you don't,** without losing sleep over possible consequences or damaging relationships.

Speaker
Biography

19 years of **helping lawyers and other professionals realize their potential by pursuing the right possibilities for them**.

As a tireless advocate of best marketing and management practices, Sandra regularly speaks for professional bodies, including the Toronto Lawyers Association, Ontario Bar Association and Peel Law Association.

Sandra is an Entrepreneur-in-Residence at York University's accelerator program ELLA and contributor of a chapter on marketing plans to the 2nd edition of 'LinkedIn Marketing Techniques for Law and Professional Practices', published by the American Bar Association.

Sandra is also host of 'Get in the Driver's Seat', a podcast focused on stories about leadership moments in professional practice.

Build the law practice you actually want.
Book a consult to learn how you can power up performance, relationships and wellness, with practice management coaching.

WORKING TOGETHER REMOTELY

A real life conversation about managing teams through the "New Normal"

The COVID pandemic forced the legal sector to leap forward decades in a matter of days. More change happened than many people thought possible but there has also been huge amount of stress. How will we work in the "Next Normal?"

LAWPRO's Juda Strawczynski (JS) was joined by Hong Dao (HD) of the Oregon Professional Liability Fund, Karen Dunn Skinner (KS), co-founder of Gimbal Canada, and Kirsti Mathers McHenry (KM) of Mathers McHenry & Co, to talk about how the pandemic has changed the way we manage our teams and what the "Next Normal" might look like for Ontario law firms.

The following are edited highlights from that conversation.

HOW are law firms working together and serving clients in the current environment?

KS: We've been working for years trying to get lawyers to change and think differently about the way they practice. But seeing the shift that people were able to make last year was phenomenal and bodes well for how we can change the way our profession functions and delivers client services going forward. Right now, there is movement in the larger firms to shift some people back to the office, but not everyone. We are seeing firms focus on how they can build hybrid models. They are structuring it so they have a certain proportion of the workforce that rotates through at any one time to maintain social distancing. But I feel like we're going to see a boomerang, where people are excited to get back to the office and see their colleagues again. However, the inconveniences we've all forgotten about may suddenly raise their heads once they do.

HD: With even the small firms, non-essentials are going back on a voluntary basis. No-one is forcing them to return to the office, but some employees do anyway. The separation of work and life may make it easier for them to do their work in the office and then go back home. For the solos though, a lot of them feel more comfortable working at home in the remote environment. I got a few phone calls from lawyers and associates where they foresee a two-tiered system where there are people who come in the office more often and may get more projects. They wonder if their workload will increase just because they are there. There is a concern that there will be an unfairness to that system. That's something that management will have to consider if they go to a more permanent hybrid plan.

KM: There's a substantial portion of the workforce that is really happy working from home and is going to be resistant to changing. On the other hand, some people literally never want to work at their home again. Some demographic differences play into that. You've got empty nesters, people who are single, people who perhaps paid a lot of money to live close to the office and have less space. As we start to think about the next normal, we need to reconcile these divergent experiences and bring them together in a principled way to get to a fully functioning model that works for each firm. It's not going to be one-size-fits all.

One of the "hidden wins" from this experience has been humanizing the firms. When I was starting out in a big law firm, I wouldn't have talked about my family life, I certainly wouldn't have wanted my kid wandering around in the background. I think we've all become much more forgiving and accepting of the fact that we are all human beings, we have these lives, and these lives are important to us.

Karen Dunn Skinner
Co-founder of Gimbal Canada

HOW can leaders manage their teams remotely in a work-from-home setting?

KM: We've implemented a workshop meeting every week where the lawyers can come if they've got a bit of a challenging file where they can collaborate with the group and they can use each other's expertise. And I think that part is great for the files, but it also knits together the team. It reminds people that they're not alone, that there are other people doing the same work and that they can count on. Training is also a great way to bring people together. It might seem like people are too busy or overwhelmed right now, but training gives everyone a shared experience and a point of conversation as something they've done together. Being deliberate about finding opportunities to bring people together to work as a team, and not just socialize, is important if you're going to build a cohesive team in this moment.

KS: We happen to use online whiteboard tools like Miro quite a bit. I think it's a really great solution and putting two or three people on a project that you might otherwise have put one person on pre-COVID, just to get people thinking together, is a hugely valuable experience for them.

JS: What you're both talking about, about empathy and about collaboration, it works on the staff level, but if you're a sole practitioner, these tips work for your client collaboration as well. If you can show a client the map of a journey, and show them a visual that takes them through each step, it improves the client relationship and reducing risks of misunderstandings along the way.

HD: I've heard from associates complaining about having to submit weekly reports to their superiors, but then no-one follows up afterward. That lack of communication is a breakdown, and it makes it hard to build necessary trust. Its important to have that one-on-one communication.

KM: As well, share with your team what information you are looking at to make decisions about the next normal or the normal after that. This hopefully avoids situations where you are planning a return to the office but you find out that six of your staff have houses in Windsor now, and how is that going to work? Tell your team what models you're entertaining and not entertaining.

KM: It is a good idea for firms to take some time right now and wrap their heads around an end-state and think about what's on the table and what's not, in terms of the model that might be in use for your firm going forward. I think surveys can be really helpful, certainly in a larger organization. There are interesting things that can come up when you see ten people's responses to a question all at once. Interviews also have their place and allow you to dive deep into what people are thinking. Cohorting may be an attractive model for your organization, but it's important to get clear about the purpose.

I think this is a great time for people to do something like after-action reviews. Think about what you did Pre-COVID: What worked well, what didn't work well, and why. What do you want to keep and what do you no longer need to keep? And then do the same thing for this period during COVID, and have, essentially, an after-action review of your pandemic work habits.

Karen Dunn Skinner
Co-founder of Gimbal Canada

HOW can firms maintain or shift their values and culture in a remote setting?

HD: A lot of people think that culture is confined to a physical space, like it's the company picnic, but it's not. You can think about culture as how an organization makes decisions, and how employees feel about their experience at work. Do they like their job? Do they feel safe, not physically but psychologically? Do they feel valued? Do they look forward to waking up and going to work? Culture affects engagement, motivation, and productivity, and when you don't intentionally create a positive culture, the culture tends to be toxic. Firm's talk about their Mission, Vision, and Values, but I think a lot of values are directed towards clients, and not to employees. Now is a good time for firms to rethink their values and set values that build a foundation for their interaction with employees as well.

KM: Every time you have a change, every time you buy a new piece of technology or hire a new person, you're saying something about your values and culture. It's about how you practice, how you live, how you treat each other. It's not hard to discover your values if you pay attention and you look back at some of the decisions you made recently. What were the animating factors? Why did you do what you did? As soon as you can answer that question, you have some insight into what your values are.

WHAT tools and processes can empower firms to thrive in the "Next Normal"?

KS: You have processes in your firm, even if they're not written down, you have them. But what you need to do at this point is capture a lot of those processes that you know are happening but are stuck inside people's heads. When you have a process that is stuck inside your head, you can't empower anyone else to do it. We have an approach that we teach people, which is: Just start by tracking what you do. Pick one thing that you do regularly, and the next time you have to do it, think about the steps involved. Then the next step is record all of that information. Just write it down. Then third, test it by following your own instructions. Can you follow your process? Then tweak what needs to be improved. Finally, teach the process to someone else.

KM: The challenge is getting buy-in from people who are not process nerds. It's difficult, but you do it by showing them that you make their life better. Start with a process within the firm that is painful or irritating. Listen to people when they complain about a piece of their work, and then fix it for them. And if you can show them that this kind of initiative can make their life better, they will become your champions who are now telling other people about these process improvement techniques.

You can really grind people down by taking great people with great ideas and making them run through really stupid processes that are just not effective. So even though it feels like a massive investment of time, you can make everyone's life better.

KS: Often, many team members aren't even asked for their ideas on how to make processes better. Perhaps they've created work-arounds for some broken processes, but no one has ever asked them how they can make it better. So, when we do a process mapping exercise, where we look at improving a process, we say to each member of the team: "what are you doing now, and how would you do it if you could do it differently?" And when the ideas are coming from the people who are stuck grinding away in that process, the changes come from the ground up. All you have to do as a leader is support them and give them the tools, they will come up with the process improvements for you. Then it is their idea, they own it, and they're much more likely to buy into it.

JS: We could spend like days talking about process and how you can reimagine your firm. Each person knows their clients and colleagues best and that will determine how a practice will evolve in the new normal.

To watch the full CPD discussion which is eligible for 1.5 hours of LSO professionalism and LAWPRO's risk management credit visit the practicepro.ca CPD page. ■


FIND A
MENTOR

Ontario programs

Association of French Speaking Jurists of Ontario (AJEFO)

Mandate: The Association of French Speaking Jurists of Ontario facilitates equal access to justice in French for everyone everywhere in Ontario.
Mentorship Program Details: Mentor relationships are facilitated by the organization and have a 5-month duration, from February-June. One-on-one meetings occur every 1-2 months, at a minimum.
Eligibility: Membership cost: $110-$185 ($55 for retired or unemployed lawyers).
Availability: Applications open from August – September.

Canadian Association of Black Lawyers (CABL)

Mandate: To bring together law professionals and other interested members of the community from across Canada.
Mentorship Program Details: One-year mentoring relationship with one-on-one meetings at least once every quarter.
Eligibility: Open to CABL members in good standing. Membership costs $75 - $150 per year.

Canadian Defense Lawyers

Mandate: A national organization representing the interests of civil defence lawyers.
Mentorship Program Details: CDL encourages informal mentoring relationships where senior members develop new lawyers through education and collegiality.
Eligibility: Membership cost is $60 to $170 annually.

Durham Regional Law Association (DRLA)

Mandate: To support, in both a print and digital capacity, the citation research, reference and educational needs of our member lawyers and visiting counsel throughout Durham Region and beyond.
Mentorship Program Details: DRLA's Mentorship Committee matches interested mentors with mentees.
Eligibility: Membership requires an annual fee of $50 – $125. Mentors must have at least 10 years of practice.

Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers (FACL)

Mandate: FACL is a diverse coalition of Asian Canadian legal professionals who promote equity, justice, and opportunity for Asian Canadian legal professionals and the broader community.
Mentorship Program Details: FACL organizes a variety of networking and social events, including an annual "Speed Mentoring" a-thon.
Eligibility: Membership requires $50 annual fee.

Global Lawyers Canada

Mandate: Global Lawyers of Canada exists to provide Internationally Trained Lawyers (ITLs) with a voice and a community, and to celebrate the strengths that ITLs bring to Canada's legal community.
Mentorship Program Details: In lieu of a one-on-one mentorship program, GLC Ontario has launched a Small Group Program that places licensing candidates and practicing lawyers into groups of 4 to 5 individuals.
Eligibility: GLC's mentorship program supports NCA students or ITLs who are looking to secure and/or complete articles.

Medico-Legal Society of Toronto

Mandate: To promote medical, legal, and scientific knowledge, cooperation, and understanding between the legal and medical professions.
Mentorship Program Details: Matches senior lawyers and physicians with those in their first 10 years of practice. Mentees do not need to be members of the Society in order to participate. Mentees can be paired with either a lawyer or medical professional.
Eligibility: Mentees do not need to be members of the Society to participate. Mentors must pay a $260 annual membership fee (or $130 for 6 months).

National Committee on Accreditation Network (NCA Network)

Mandate: Promotes professional connections with NCA alumni who now have successful legal practices and foster meaningful mentor relationships for NCA students.
Mentorship Program Details: The NCA Mentor program aims to connect Mentees, who are usually law students or NCA Students with Mentors, who have completed the NCA process. Due to the volume of Mentee applications the NCA Network has shifted towards monthly Coffee Chats via Zoom with Mentors.
Eligibility: NCA Network is open to all students and lawyers living in Canada pursuing or who have an international degree and will be based in Toronto, Ontario.

Ontario Bar Association (OBA)

Mandate: Provides professional development, networking, and information to members of the legal profession.
Mentorship Program Details: Mentorship administered through self-serve "Mentorloop" software. Mentors and mentees upload personal information to an online profile. Users can then request a connection with other OBA members present within the mentoring program.
Eligibility: OBA membership requires annual fee of $345.38 – $714.16 for practising lawyers

Ontario Trial Lawyers Association (OTLA)

Mandate: Professional association for plaintiff lawyers and staff.
Mentorship Program Details: The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association has established a mentorship program that offers guidance and assistance on various issues, including those that relate to their practice, general advice on handling their matters, and work / life balance. OTLA's mentoring program will allow mentees to choose from a list of OTLA members offering mentorship on different topics. The intent is an informal matching of mentors and mentees on a one-time basis, although more long-term mentoring relationships may naturally develop.
Eligibility: Membership requires annual fee of $275 – $695 for lawyers, and $215 for law clerks and paralegals.

South Bar Association of Toronto (SABA)

Mandate: The South Asian Bar Association of Toronto is the GTA's is dedicated to promoting the objectives of South Asian members of the legal profession. Members of SABA include lawyers that self-identify as South Asian or are of South Asian origin, and lawyers that advocate on issues of relevance to the South Asian community.
Mentorship Program Details: The SABA Toronto Mentor Match Program for Lawyers is a mentorship program that aims to pair new lawyers with senior lawyers who can help provide guidance and support to lawyers entering the profession or a new area of practice.
Eligibility: All mentors and mentees must be SABA Toronto members and lawyers of good standing in Ontario. Mentees can be any year of call. Mentors must be at least 5th year calls. Interested members can learn more about the mentorship program by emailing *sabatoronto@gmail.com*

South Asian Women in the Law

Mandate: To provide targeted and concrete mentorship opportunities for self-identifying South Asian women.
Mentoring Program Details: The program pairs racialized licensees with Mentors in the legal profession who share similar identity factors to afford them access to a richer mentorship relationship. This mentoring relationship provides for a safe space for Mentees to discuss potential barriers they may face in their career development, and acquire advice on how to overcome them, and essentially step into their power.
Eligibility: There is no membership fee. This is a free, volunteer based program for self-identifying South Asian women.

The Advocates Society (TAS)

Mandate: To help advocates become leaders inside and outside the courtroom.
Mentoring Program Details: One-on-one and group mentoring is available to members who "opt-in" through their TAS profile and matches are made through the online Mentoring Portal.
Eligibility: Membership requires annual fee of $160 – $490.

Waterloo Region Law Association

Mandate: Law association serving the Waterloo region.
Mentoring Program Details: Formal mentoring program available through the female lawyers practice group: "Female Engagement and Mentorship for Practitioners of Waterloo Region" (FEMPOWR). The program matches young female practitioners with senior female practitioners for mentorship.
Eligibility: Lawyers and paralegal in good standing of any Law Society. Membership requires an annual fee of $180.80.

Welland County Law Association

Mandate: Law association serving Welland County.
Mentoring Program Details: Multiple wine and cheese and mentoring "speed dating" events hosted each year to facilitate mentoring relationships between members. Since COVID, virtual "reverse mentoring" relationships have been facilitated where younger members assist senior members in setting up virtual practises and remote workplaces.
Eligibility: The association serves lawyers from Welland, Fonthill, Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Thorold and Ridgeway.

Women in Canadian Criminal Defence (WiCCD)

Mandate: WiCCD is Canada's first national advocacy organization solely for women—those who identify as female or as gender non-conforming—working in criminal defence.
Mentoring Program Details: WiCCD pairs senior lawyers with junior lawyers and articling or law student members for 4-month terms (Jan–Apr, May–Aug, or Sept–Dec). WiCCD aims to pair mentors with three or fewer mentees in geographical proximity and with shared practice-related interests.
Eligibility: WiCCD membership is free but limited to those identifying as female or gender non-conforming. Mentors must be 7+ years at the bar and mentees must be 6 or fewer years from call.

Women's Law Association of Ontario (WLAO)

Mandate: The Women's Law Association of Ontario is dedicated to empowering women in the legal profession by providing a collective voice and advocating for equality, diversity and change.
Mentoring Program Details: WLAO facilitates mentoring relationships between interested mentors and protégées who are members.
Eligibility: Membership requires annual fee of $50 - $150.

Women's Legal Mentorship Program (WLMP)

Mandate: To dismantle the systemic barriers facing all self-identified women (which includes LGBTQI2S+, non-binary, gender diverse and BIPOC self-identified womxn) within the Canadian legal profession through integrative intersectional feminist mentorship, equity and leadership.
Mentoring Program Details: The mentorship program allows members to create their own customized professional mentorship experience using a private virtual mentoring community, smaller mentoring circles for formal and informal mentoring experiences, and access to professional development virtual events.
Eligibility: There is no membership fee.

Working Group on Lawyers and Real Estate

Mandate: To enhance the role of the lawyer in real estate transactions in order to promote the public's protection.
Mentoring Program Details: The initiative uses a survey "question/answer" format where real-estate practice-management questions are put to members of the bar who provide comments in response using SimpleSurvey software.
Eligibility: Participation and use of the resource is free and available to all lawyers.

York Region Law Association

Mandate: A community focused professional organization of lawyers serving the York Region of Ontario.
Mentoring Program Details: Association matches interested junior members looking for legal mentors with senior members.
Eligibility: Membership requires annual fee of $96.05 – $127.13.

Independent but engaged: Support networks for solos

There are plenty of good reasons for choosing sole practice, or for transitioning into sole practice after practising with a firm. You may have chosen to practise in a small community; you may have opened a sole practice because you couldn't find the right fit with a firm in your chosen area of practice; or you may be a person with a naturally independent work style and a desire to be your own boss. Whatever a lawyer's reasons, sole practice is a choice that can be profitable and personally rewarding.

Practising solo, however, presents special challenges. From a risk management perspective, it can be more challenging, because lawyers who practise alone lack colleagues close at hand with whom to discuss tricky legal issues. From a business perspective, it means that you alone are responsible for bringing in business; and business development activities take up precious time that you would otherwise spend doing the work that earns you money. Finally, from the perspective of life satisfaction and mental health, sole practice can be isolating.

With a small investment of time and energy, lawyers who practise alone can mitigate all of these risks by building a support network.

Make connecting with peers a priority

When you are trying to build a new business, it can be tempting to spend your days holed up in your office, working hard at "marketing" during the gaps between client matters. But making the effort to introduce yourself within the broader legal community will make marketing easier in the long run, and will ensure that you don't fall prey to the pitfalls of isolation.

Conversely, if your practice is well-established, you may feel that you are "too busy" to interact with your peers. This can be a mistake, because if you let your relationships with other lawyers fade away, it can be harder to find help when you need it – for example, if a health or family crisis forces you to take unexpected time off.

Meet your "senior partners"

Perhaps the most important category of connections new sole practitioners can make are with lawyers who have many years of experience. These lawyers are likely to be especially valuable to you as mentors.

Because successful and established lawyers are busy, it may take some effort to cultivate relationships with them; but lawyers who take the time to seek out mentors are often pleasantly surprised at their senior colleagues' willingness to help. One way to build relationships with potential mentors is to make referrals, either of an entire client matter, or, where possible, an issue related to a client's matter that is outside your current comfort zone, but is something you'd like to learn to do. For example, if you draft wills but have never dealt with the intergenerational transfer of a farming business, you might refer the file to a more experienced lawyer, but ask for the opportunity to review the finished will (with the client's consent, of course) and to speak with the other lawyer about the issues.

You may also be able to gain a mentor by making yourself available as a backup to another sole practitioner – for example, by agreeing to file documents and receive courier packages when the lawyer is away, or to appear on his or her behalf to seek an adjournment should a last-minute conflict come up.

The benefits of mentoring flow in the other direction too: if you have been in practice a long time, taking the time to forge connections with new lawyers who come into your community can provide opportunities for you to learn about new technologies and new theories of practice.

To learn more about how to establish a productive mentoring relationship, you can download the practicePRO program's "Managing a Mentoring Relationship" booklet on the practicepro.ca website.

Meet your new "associates"

If you are not already a member of the Canadian and Ontario Bar associations, signing up is one of the easiest ways to build connections with lawyers in your community, and joining a practice section is a great way to meet lawyers in your particular area of practice. While these associations are perhaps best known for their continuing professional development programs, they also host general social and networking events, and not only in Toronto – there are a number of programs each year offered in other communities around Ontario. There are also local associations serving every part of the province.

Besides the national, provincial, and district law associations, there are also associations that have been developed by lawyers who share practice interests, culture, or other demographics. These associations typically encourage mentorship, networking, and mutual support. A few examples:

- the Women's Law Association of Ontario
- the Criminal Trial Lawyers' Association
- the Hispanic Canadian Lawyers' Association
- the Family Lawyers' Association
- the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers
- l'Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario

And there are many more.

Of course, just joining an association is not enough. To get the full benefit of this kind of community-building, consider volunteering in an administrative role, or offering to give a presentation at an association meeting. The idea is to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible to meet and converse with lawyers in your community and to build professional relationships and friendships. Don't only focus on introductions that will "be good for business." Getting to know people who may not be an immediate source of client referrals can offer other kinds of help. For example, the connections you make may be great sources of advice about local judges' preferences with respect to court materials, contact information for experts, or even just basic career advice. Finally, consider joining a club or other special interest group in your community.

Impress your opponents

If you are new to a local legal community, you can make excellent connections simply by treating opposing counsel with courtesy and respect. Often, the lawyers best placed to assess your professionalism and competence are the ones sitting on the other side of the negotiating table. If you can establish that you are both a competent advocate for your client and a reasonable and courteous opponent, you will be on your way to being accepted, within your practice area, as a person who does quality legal work and is worthy of respect. You may even get referrals from lawyers who have come to trust you, and who need to turn away clients for conflicts or other reasons.

Being seen as a reasonable opponent often boils down to basic professional courtesy: being accessible (returning phone calls and emails); keeping your word; and being fair when it comes to agreeing to adjournments, requests to reschedule meetings, and requests to allow the other side to rectify minor errors. It also means avoiding sharp practice and dirty tricks.

Be seen

Finally, you can't expect a network of allies to come to you. If you want to develop a support network, you need to get out of your office and meet other lawyers in person. This may mean traveling to attend the occasional conference or CPD program in person (instead of just watching webcasts at your desk), serving on an association executive, volunteering at charity events (especially those sponsored by the legal community), or attending social events.

You can also be "seen" on social media – for example, on LinkedIn, on Twitter, or as a participant in a legal online community (listserv, chat room, message board). If you like to write, consider launching a blog, and invite lawyer colleagues to subscribe to your posts, or to prepare "guest posts". You can also visit other lawyers' blogs, and engage them via commentary.

Sole practice is not for everyone; but if it's the right fit for you and you invest time in building your network, you can make your mark while avoiding isolation and practice risks.

Nora Rock is corporate writer and policy analyst at LAWPRO.

Additional Resources for Lawyers

LAWPRO's Practice Management Resources	
Managing Booklet Series	Find eight booklets that discuss various aspects of management including conflict situations, practice interruptions, and finances.
Ontario Mentoring Programs Guide	Use this table to find a mentor.
Additional Resources	
LSO: Coach and Advisor Network	Find a Coach or an Advisor
LSO: Practice Management Helpline	Confidential service for practice management topics.
Member Assistance Program	MAP provides access to counselling, coaching, online resources and peer volunteers.

SPEAKER BIOS

Mark Hunter

Mark Hunter is a marketing and communication executive with 25 years of experience, including more than 15 years specializing in professional service firms. His expertise spans both B2C and B2B environments where he has consistently demonstrated an ability to drive strategic initiatives and improve organizational performance.

Mark has successfully led Canadian and international organizations' marketing, brand development, and communications efforts. His approach focuses on relationship-building, collaboration, and continuous improvement, consistently driving individual performance and company profitability.

His ability to push market strategy while simultaneously managing its operational execution sets Mark apart in the field.

Mara Da Camara

Mara Da Camara is a dynamic marketing consultant and event planner with over a decade of experience collaborating with both B2B and B2C clients. Her expertise encompasses a wide range of services, from crafting tailored social media strategies for small businesses to orchestrating comprehensive marketing initiatives for multi-million dollar annual budgets.

Mara has successfully spearheaded the planning of more than 25 large-scale events and conferences, each attended by over 400 guests, along with countless smaller and virtual gatherings. Her passion lies in curating impactful events that create unforgettable experiences for attendees, fostering an environment where meaningful connections and lasting relationships can flourish.

In her tenure at a prestigious boutique firm in Toronto, she was instrumental in developing streamlined processes and systems that facilitated transparent tracking and strategic investment of marketing resources, consistently delivering a robust return on investment for both time and financial commitments.

Mara earned her degree in Communications, Culture, and Information Technology from the University of Toronto and holds a diploma in Digital Communications from Sheridan College. Additionally, she has completed post-graduate courses at the University of Toronto in Digital Marketing Management and Search Engine Marketing, further honing her skills in this ever-evolving field.

Sandra Bekhor

Sandra Bekhor is a Practice Management Coach who helps lawyers, consultants, architects and other professionals realize their potential by pursuing the right possibilities for them.

A tireless advocate of the value of strategic tools and authentic voice in practice development, Sandra speaks and writes on the subject for professional bodies and publications, North America wide. She is host of ‘Get in the Driver’s Seat’, a podcast focused on stories about leadership moments in small to mid-sized professional practice.

Sandra is an Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EIR) at York University’s accelerator program for women-led businesses (ELLA), the Subject Matter Expert (SME) for the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada’s (RAIC’s) ‘Marketing for Architects' course and contributor of a chapter on marketing plans to the 2nd edition of ‘LinkedIn Marketing Techniques for Law and Professional Practices’, written by Marc W. Halpert and published by the American Bar Association (ABA).

Outside of business, Sandra can be found in her creative space, painting expressive abstracts, practicing yoga and meditation or consuming piles of books… often several at once!

Sina Hariri

Sina Hariri is Counsel and Manager, Practice Management (Supports) at the Law Society of Ontario where he oversees the Coach and Advisor Network program, and the CPD Accreditation department. He also supports the Practice Management Helpline by providing confidential guidance to lawyers and paralegals facing ethical, professional responsibility, or practice management issues relating to the Law Society's rules and by-laws.

Prior to joining the Law Society, Sina was a sole practitioner and mediator in family law, providing dispute resolution services to private clients, and as a court roster mediator with the Superior and Ontario Courts of Justice in Toronto. He was also on the legal panel at the Office of the Children's Lawyer where he represented minors in child protection and domestic court matters.

Throughout his legal career, Sina has been active on several Ontario Bar Association executives including Family Law, ADR, and Young Lawyers' Division sections. He also sat on the Board of Directors with the Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario (FDRIO) and was chair of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts Walsh Family Law Mooting Competition.

Sina has a Canadian LLB law degree from the University of Windsor, an American JD law degree from the University of Detroit Mercy in Michigan, and a Master of Law in Alternative Dispute Resolution from Osgoode Hall.

Safiyya Vankalwala

Safiyya Vankalwala is Communications Counsel at LAWPRO, focusing on risk management, including monitoring changes in the law and claim trends as well as developing and delivering practical resources to lawyers across Ontario.

Prior to joining LAWPRO, Safiyya worked at a fintech company in strategic planning and legal technology development. She spent 15 years practicing law, has an undergraduate degree in Political Science and Law & Society from York University and her LL.B. is from the University of Ottawa. Safiyya was called to the Ontario Bar in 2007.