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## **Business of Law**

By Frank Michael D'Amore<sup>1</sup>

### **Staying Connected**

Lawyers frequently ask for advice as to the best way to keep in touch with their contacts. They also are quite interested in knowing how often they should do so, as there is a discernible concern about not becoming a pest. As ongoing technological advances have increased the number of contact options and have made it so easy for instant communication, I will share some thoughts on keeping in touch today.

Preliminarily, it is important that you approach this with the right mindset. There is a tendency, especially with some private practice lawyers who are thirsting for more business, and with others who are aggressively looking for a job, to send out signals that your contact is driven by self interest. This often is revealed even among those who try hard to mask it. This is off-putting and significantly undermines your efforts. I urge you to adopt an outlook in this realm that is motivated by the primary goal of trying to help others through your contacts with them. I am confident that if you can do that, you will benefit greatly from your efforts, as your contacts will try to reciprocate for the help you have given them.

As elementary as this may sound, it is vital that you have a consolidated and updated contact list. I am often quite surprised to learn that many lawyers do not have a central contact list; rather, they have partial lists that are located in various locations (in contact management software, Outlook, firm databases, paper Rolodexes, and in stacks of business cards that have never been inputted). Spend the time (or have support staff help you) to pull this disparate information together and input it into one source. Once this is done, the master list can then be segregated into subgroups (such as in house lawyers, private practice attorneys, business contacts, etc.).

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The master list can also be cross-referenced by priorities, which will help guide how often you reach out to certain contacts. For example, assume that you are a law firm lawyer who has 15 principal clients, 10 more companies that are important business development targets, and 10 business or private practice lawyers (in other firms) who are crucial referral sources. These entities and lawyers may comprise your “tier one” contacts that you want to keep in touch with at least every quarter. “Tier two” contacts may be more minor (and perhaps former) clients, secondary referral sources, and lawyers you interact with in professional associations, all of whom may merit contact twice per year. Finally, “tier three” contacts, who you may reach out to just once a year, may be more attenuated (but real) company and law firm contacts and others you interact with in various civic and charitable organizations.

One of the best ways to track developments related to your key contacts is to use Google Alerts: <http://www.google.com/alerts?hl=en>. This is a terrific tool that will deliver email updates to you on any saved search term. You thus can enter names of your important contacts and clients. You can also use the alerts to stay abreast of stories about competitors of your clients (as they may relish that information) or even specific subjects that are important to you and others. This is a must-have in your arsenal, as it is one of the best ways to have timely and on-point information delivered to you that may be valuable for your contacts (which thus gives you a perfect way to interact with others that is not intrusive and, in fact, is quite helpful).

I will examine social media in more depth in a future column, but I do note that it should be part of your arsenal in keeping touch with others. Whereas most efforts to keep in entail outbound activities (placing phone calls, sending letters and emails, attending conferences, etc.), Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, RSS feeds, and blogs can drive persons to you without you having to contact them individually (which operates as a more inbound type of action). I strongly believe that these media are here to stay and will become increasingly important ways to stay connected with others. Thus, if you have adopted a Luddite type of stance with respect to social media, it is time to get with it and to at least being exploring how these media can be a boon to you professionally.

As noted, sending information of value to others should be a centerpiece of your strategy. As such, when a Google Alert produces an on point story that a contact may find of interest, quickly send the link to him with a brief sentence or even the words “thought this may be of

interest to you.” Similarly, if you spot a story in a newspaper or magazine, it very likely can be found online—do your best to find a link and send it, as the immediacy of transmitting it by email will trump sending it by snail mail.

Even though virtually every law firm sends out newsletters, feedback I have received is that they are valued by in house counsel. This is particularly the case when the newsletter is related to the area in which the in house lawyer practices. Although it is much easier to hand over a contact list to your firm’s marketing department so that newsletters can be sent to them, I recommend that you consider an alternative (unless your list is much too long). Contacts should appreciate a personalized email with that newsletter that is accompanied by even a sentence or two from you—if you, or an assistant can do that, it can make a real difference.

Of course, despite the value of sending information, human interaction remains vitally important. Getting together for a meal or coffee periodically with those in your area still resonates. Making it a point to find time to personally visit your principal clients every year may be even more important today, as face to face interaction has lessened. If you are going to be at a conference or other out of town meeting, let your contacts know that in advance, as it may be a good way for you meet them.

There likely is no one best way to keep in contact. Rather, you should employ as many of the methods outlined above as you can and marry them to what may work best with each contact. You can determine which tool is best by assessing the feedback you get and, if that is lacking, to ask your contacts what they most prefer getting from you.

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