



# 7 Steps to Becoming a Recognized Authority in Your Legal Niche or Market



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## Introduction: the Expert Advantage

In every field – and law is no exception – there are two types of practitioners.

The first is the large crowd of professionals who, at least to the universe of potential clients, look pretty much the same.

Clients see them as being an interchangeable commodity, and have no predisposition to hire one over the other.

The second type of practitioner, a small minority of the total universe of practicing lawyers, is the acknowledged expert, also known as the recognized authority or “thought leader.”

Some rare cases are recognized experts nationwide. More commonly their recognition as a leading expert is in the geographic markets they serve.

The rule of consumer behavior in hiring service professionals (and this includes lawyers) is simply that people prefer to work with service providers they perceive as experts.

For instance, in one New Jersey lake town, there are many contractors and carpenters. But one gets the vast majority of jobs installing new docks and repairing old ones. Why? Because he has built a reputation as the dock specialist.

You know that the legal profession has become dramatically more competitive today thanks to several factors including the vast numbers of new attorneys entering the marketplace, the growth in low-priced online legal services, and the outsourcing of legal services to overseas firms.

The #1 go-to strategy for surviving and thriving in today’s more competitive legal services marketplace is to make your firm stand out by becoming a recognized leader or expert in your area of legal practice. This report outlines the key steps you must take, many of which we at Wells & Drew can help you implement or find help with.

## The First Step: Choose Your Niche

It is an oxymoron to say a generalist can become a recognized expert. To become a known authority in a market, niche, or field, you must first find a market, niche, or field to specialize in.

For lawyers, just the decision to specialize can boost income, sometimes significantly.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, patent attorneys and other intellectual property lawyers earn \$170,000 a year on average – and the top attorneys in this niche make millions.

The average trial attorney makes \$160,000 a year and again the highest paid can earn millions.

Tax law attorneys average \$160,000 a year and employment and labor lawyers make \$155,000 a year.

The top 10% of judges presiding over proceedings in federal, state, and local courts earn more than \$162,140 a year and some law school professors pull down over \$300,000 a year.<sup>2</sup>

Being a specialist has several advantages over being a general practitioner.

First, as noted, specialists can charge more than generalists.

Second, specialists are more in demand. That is because the law of supply and demand is in their favor.

It is rather easy for the consumer to find a lawyer today. In the 1960s, there was one lawyer for every 627 people in the United States. By 2013 there was one lawyer for every 230 people in America.<sup>3</sup>

But if a person makes an invention, he will likely find no patent lawyer in his town and not many in the region. So the specialist lawyer has less competition than the general practice lawyer.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gajizmo.com/highest-paid-lawyers-and-legal-jobs/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://legalcareers.about.com/od/compensation/a/Highest-Paying-Legal-Jobs.htm>

<sup>3</sup>

[http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/market\\_research/total\\_national\\_lawyer\\_counts\\_1878\\_2013.authcheckdam.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/market_research/total_national_lawyer_counts_1878_2013.authcheckdam.pdf)

Plus, all else being equal, people would rather hire a specialist than a generalist. So lawyers in niches have an easier getting clients than general practice lawyers.

### Step Two: Work Your Local Newspaper

Once you have chosen your specialty, you must work to establish yourself as a recognized expert within it – a recognized authority or expert.

There is an old axiom about marketing and money: those who are the most successful in any niche or profession are not necessarily the most skilled practitioners; they are most often the ones who are best at marketing and promoting themselves.

Do not feel you are not knowledgeable or skilled enough to claim a leadership position in your niche or specialty. Heed the wisdom of this old saying: an expert doesn't necessarily know more than others, but his information is better organized.

The central premise or key to positioning yourself as a recognized expert in your specialty is to selectively disseminate information on the topic to your target market; i.e., the businesses or individuals who may have need of the services you offer.

Many professionals seeking to promote themselves set their sights high; e.g., the front page of the New York Times or the 10 o'clock news. But you can start your self-promotion campaign with the lowest hanging fruit: your town paper.

Many towns have a weekly newspaper. Despite what you hear about the death of newspapers, these weekly local papers fill an information need for residents and are widely read. Plus, they will print what you send them.

Here are the options for getting your name in the local paper. These methods can also work for larger daily newspapers in your area as well as state-specific magazines like *New Jersey Monthly*:

**Letter to the editor.** And not just one. Write on a regular basis. Focus on town issues where you can give a legal opinion. People often turn to the letters to the editor section of the paper first before they read anything else.

**Press releases.** A press release is a one-page news or feature article you write relating to some aspect of your practice. For instance, if you are an environmental lawyer, you

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might issue a press release on why your town should protest plans to run a gas pipeline in the area. You can send your press release to as many publications as you think are relevant; they are not exclusive. Appendix A shows proper press release format.

**Articles.** E-mail the editor and offer to write a more in-depth article on an issue related to your practice. Small town weekly papers need material and are easy to get into.

**Columns.** If the editor likes your articles, suggest a monthly or weekly column. Writing a column is a powerful tool for keeping your name in front of your market.

### Step Three: Write Articles for Other Media

Go beyond just your local weekly paper and get published in bigger, more prestigious publications with bigger readership. For instance, write articles relating to legal matters in your niche for journals and publications serving your niche.

A major benefit of getting published is that it helps establish you as a recognized authority in your legal niche.

Whenever you write for publication, type in the upper left corner of the first page the words "First rights only." This tells the editor that you are giving him the right to publish your article, but after that, all rights belong to you.

Use key words in your article that people would search on Google when looking for information on the topic. Since you own all rights to your articles once they are published, recycle them for maximum marketing mileage.

For instance, posting key word-rich articles on an Articles page on your web site will raise your search engine ranking with Google (see step 5). You can also collect the articles in a special report which you offer free to potential clients.

### Step Four: Write a How-To Book of Legal Advice for Lay Readers

In virtually every field of human endeavor, those practitioners who are recognized as being at the top of their profession are usually book authors, writing nonfiction books on their specialized area of knowledge.

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“Just because a person has written a book on a topic, people assume he knows something about it,” notes publisher Edward Uhlán. All the most famous experts in virtually every field – Rachel Ray in cooking, Dr. Phil in relationships, Tom Peters in management, Dr. Oz in medicine – are book authors.

Being an author opens up so many doors for professionals. It gets you invited to speak at meetings. It brings requests to write articles. And it will generate calls from potential clients seeking to hire you.

Today there are 3 primary options for writing and publishing a book:

**Traditional publishing.** The most prestigious way to become an author, this is where you convince McGraw-Hill, Random House, John Wiley, or another mainstream publishing house to publish your book. You get an advance and royalties, and pay nothing out of pocket.

**Self-publishing a paperbound book.** You pay to have the book typeset, designed, and printed. You inventory the print run and handle marketing and distribution. While self-publishing is less prestigious than traditional publishing, it is all under your control: You can become an author even if no publisher is interested in publishing your book.

**Kindle e-books.** The quickest, easiest way to become a published book author is to self-publish your book as a Kindle e-book and sell it on Amazon. Many Kindle e-books are a fraction of the length of a conventional paperbound book, so writing a Kindle e-book isn't a monumental task.

## Step Five: Have a Content-Rich Legal Web Site

Legal marketing expert Larry Bodine reports that, according to a new study by Touchpoint Metrics, law firms are getting new business from their web sites. “There is a significant competitive advantage for firms that deploy a web site as a component of their prospect generation, marketing, and client service efforts.”

Enriching your web site with content can be done both by posting articles you have written as well as with a blog. The more content you post on the site, and the more frequently you add new content, the higher your search engine rankings.

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Your site should be optimized for search engines to increase rankings on Google and other engines. Many clients today begin looking for a lawyer with a Google search. If the client gets your name from a referral or recommendation, they are more likely to search for your site on the web than turn to a phone book today. A Harvard blog reports that 74% of large law firms gained clients whose first awareness of the firm was through the web.<sup>4</sup>

### Step Six: Publish an Online Newsletter

Have a prominent sign-up box on your home page where visitors can download a free report or sign up for a free online newsletter.

To get your free report or newsletter, they must “opt in” by giving you their name and e-mail address and permission to send them more e-mails.

Now that they have opted in, you can communicate with them whenever you want.

Of course, don't abuse the privilege. If you send too many e-mails, or are too heavy-handed promoting your firm, your subscribers will be turned off and unsubscribe.

If you start an online newsletter, begin by publishing one issue a month. That won't overwhelm the people on your list or burden you with a lot of work.

On the sign-up page where people can subscribe to your newsletter, offer a free special report – maybe a PDF with 3-4 of your articles – as an incentive to register. Doing so will get a lot more people to subscribe.

At least 50% to 75% of your e-mails to your list should be useful news and content related to your legal niche. The rest can be subtle promotion about you and your firm; for instance, case studies of client success stories.

### Step Seven: Communicate Your Authority Image

Your image or “brand” is conveyed in so many ways: the demeanor and attire of your staff; office location and décor; the car you drive; the way your telephone is answered; and especially the quality and appearance of your written communications.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://blogs.law.harvard.edu/amy/2005/06/> A blog at Harvard (Amy Campbell's), June 2005: *Law firm web trends in sales and service era*

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Keep in mind that many more people see your correspondence than meet with your attorneys or visit your offices. Does your letterhead, envelopes, business cards, brochures, and other printed marketing materials communicate the image you want to convey?

If not, it may pay to go a step or two above the local Kinko's and talk with a graphic design and printing firm that specializes in marketing and corporate communications for professional services firms. For instance, think about engraving your letterhead on cotton bond paper stock for a more distinctive and elegant look.

Engraving raises the ink above the surface of the paper, conveying a more distinctive appearance for logos and graphics. Your documents are more secure, because a scanner and color copier cannot duplicate the tactile feature of raised ink. In a survey by Altman Weil of in-house corporate counsel responsible for hiring independent law firms, more than half the respondents said that engraving best conveyed a professional quality image and instilled greater confidence.<sup>5</sup>

### **Bonus Tip: Speak and Grow Rich**

Don't overlook public speaking as a way to establish your reputation as a top lawyer in your region or niche. People who give talks, speeches, and presentations are seen as experts in the topic they speak about.

To make speaking work for you, first identify all groups whose members are potential clients for your law firm.

Next, come up with an alluring title for a presentation you could propose for their membership. It should relate to your legal specialty and contain useful tips and information for the listeners.

Now contact the meeting planners of these groups by mail or phone and pitch the idea for the talk with you as the speaker.

While this may sound daunting, it is actually far easier than you might think. What you may not realize is that the local chapters of these groups are often desperate to find decent speakers and programs for their lunch or dinner meetings, or for workshops at

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<sup>5</sup> <https://allstatelegal.wordpress.com/2010/07/26/the-benefits-of-engraving-proven-by-studies/>



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their conferences. When you offer to speak, you are solving that problem and filling a hole in their schedule.

If the group does not videotape speakers, ask for permission to bring in your own video crew to record your talk. You can then post the video on your web site. Larry Bodine says having video on your web site “is a great opportunity to present how you look, how you talk, what you’re like, and make yourself more attractive to clients.” Another idea: record a series of short videos on legal topics and start your own YouTube channel. It’s free!

## About Wells & Drew

Since 1855, Wells & Drew has provided engraved stationery, legal supplies, branding, and marketing for thousands of law offices worldwide.

Wells & Drew owns a paper company to ensure availability of top-quality papers at extremely competitive prices.

Our fine engraving can give your letterhead a uniquely elegant look and feel at prices that fit your budget. With over a century and a half of experience, our engraving team can deliver old-world quality in printed materials that a digital press cannot duplicate.

Our graphics department has more than 40,000 hours of design experience for law firm branding and marketing materials. We offer a full line of legal supplies and branding materials for law firms including:

- Letterhead.
- Envelopes.
- Business cards.
- Pocket folders.
- Brochures.
- Logo design.
- Expandable case files.
- Document mailing envelopes.
- Will covers.
- Corporate kits.
- Note cards.
- Thank-you cards.
- Announcements.
- Pens, tote bags, and other promotional items.

For more ideas on marketing your law firm and building your book of business, call Wells & Drew toll-free at **800-342-8636** to discuss your stationery, graphics, or branding needs today.

## Appendix A: Sample Press Release

FROM: SRW Technologies, 4521 101 St., Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5C6

CONTACT: Steve Cwiak, phone 403-413-4833

FOR: Immediate Release

### **New PTA plasma welding system has deposition speeds up to 3X faster than conventional technologies**

Edmonton, Canada -- SRW Technologies has introduced a new plasma-transferred arc (PTA) welding system that performs at deposition speeds up to three times faster than competing technologies, announced Steve Cwiak, a Vice President with the firm.

SRW's high-tech PTA welding system, the only one of its kind in North America, deposits metal alloys on metal surfaces at rates of up to 55 pounds per hour, compared with 20 pounds per hour for conventional plasma, gas-tungsten, and oxy-acetylene welding technologies. The PTA system can work with metal powder, wire, powder-filled wire, and rods.

The key to the PTA system's greater speed is a new plasma arc transfer system consisting of a solid state DC power source, process controller, and unique plasma torch with hermetically sealed cooling and gas-flow systems. No torch sealing is needed, eliminating micro-leakage in the ionation zone. High-speed flow of the cooling medium enables the PTA system to handle extremely high thermal loads.

The PTA can be fitted with transfer systems to process any part, even those with complex shapes and narrow tolerances. Anodes, capable of up to 150 hours of continuous operation, snap out and in for quick replacement, as do the torches, providing maximum flexibility for the plasma beam's geometrical configuration. Single-pass coating thickness ranges from 14 mm down to 1.5 mm.

When used to deposit powder metal alloys on a substrate, the PTA system has a dilution level of 5 to 7 percent vs. submerged arc systems which can dilute the base metal by as much as 40 percent. Combined with a narrow heat-affected zone, the PTA system's low dilution rate prevents undesired substrate changes.

This can enhance the alloy's wear performance in numerous applications for manufacturing wear-plate components. It also results in a smooth surface finish for easier and quicker finishing and machining.

Other advantages include easy maintenance, low operating costs, enhanced operator safety, precise plasma beam control, superior reliability, and high melting capacity.

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SRW Technologies has significant expertise in analyzing a broad variety of industrial wear problems and applying alloys under diverse conditions. Products include the PTA welding system, PTA and flame powders, welding rods, wires, and wear-resistant parts.

For more information on the PTA system, contact: SRW Technologies, 4521 101 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6E 5C6, phone 888-288-4833. Or visit the SRW Web site at [www.srwtec.com](http://www.srwtec.com).