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Seven Ways a Niche Helps Your Business Development

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Any marketing expert will tell you that having a clear niche is good for the bottom line; yet, many attorneys continue to be generalists within their practice areas. Some may think that they have a niche, simply by virtue of being an environmental lawyer, an IP lawyer, an insurance lawyer, etc. Imagine having a real estate agent who specializes in Southern California. Sure, she has the basic skill set that you need, but there is no reason to think she has any special knowledge or insight related to your particular neighborhood. It works the same way with the law. Just because you *can* cover a wide range of legal issues doesn't mean that it is wise or profitable. I understand that putting yourself out there as a specialist in a particular niche can seem scary or difficult. So, here is a list of reasons why niching is worth the effort.

1. **Clients want experts** - If you had a brain tumor, you wouldn't want a generalist to operate; you would want the best brain surgeon you could find. The same principal applies for business problems. If the issue is important enough, the client will want an expert, someone who has handled many similar situations in the past, who has a grasp of the subtleties and can nip problems in the bud. Even though a generalist may be perfectly capable of doing a great job, clients simply feel more relaxed and confident knowing that they chose an expert.
2. **Clients are Willing to Pay More for Experts** - Maybe clients want to work with you. However, wanting something and being willing to pay for it are different. The critical question is if they are willing to pay your rates. If they see you as a commodity, they are more likely to quibble over your rates and your bills. Whereas, if you are seen as one of the preeminent people with the skill and knowledge they need, they are a lot less likely to push for discounts.
3. **Higher Quality Referrals from Other Attorneys** - In some circles, referrals get a bad rap because some lawyers only refer out the undesirable, low quality cases that they don't want. The first reason attorneys may avoid giving referrals is that they don't trust the other attorney to do a good job. Having a clear niche addresses this concern because it makes your expertise clear to the world, and thereby reassures other attorneys that referrals would indeed benefit their clients, and thus reflect well on them. The second reason other attorneys may not give referrals is if they feel they can profitably do the work themselves. This is where choosing your niche wisely comes into the picture. As long as your area of law is complex enough that it is not worth it for other attorneys so invest the time and energy getting up to speed, you naturally attract high quality referrals.
4. **Higher Quality Referrals from Your Social Network** - Our social networks can be a great source of business, and yet most attorney's friends and family are not terribly clear on what they do for a living. How many of you have been asked about DUIs or divorce issues by people who just don't understand that you actually do M&A? If someone at a party asks what you do and you list seven areas, people are left with the impression that you do everything and you end up with lousy, low quality referrals. The more clear and precise you are about your niche, the more easily your social network can send you business or aid you in making relevant connections.



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5. **Narrows the Competition** - Instead of competing against all white-collar criminal defense attorneys or all civil litigators in your geographical area, you are competing against only a handful. Of course, it also narrows the field of clients but it's a lot easier to distinguish yourself for your amazing customer service, your personable demeanor or your brilliant team when you are competing with 10 people rather than 300 or 3000.
6. **It helps You to Stay Focused** - Deciding where to put your time and energy is a constant struggle for any attorney, and the more recognition and opportunities you have coming your way, the more difficult the choices become. One of the great things about having a clear niche is that it becomes easier to choose where to network, who to reach out to for meetings, and which invitations to accept.
7. **It Leverages Name Recognition** - The reason this is important is the same reason that TV and radio adds play over and over again. It is the repeated exposure that makes people remember you and associate you with certain types of clients or cases. For example, maybe someone first meets you at a networking event. A couple months later, they see you speak. A couple weeks later, they notice that you are on the board of directors for the organization in which you met. Six months later, they read an article that you authored. This repeated exposure in the same niche makes you both more memorable and more credible. Similar activities but spread over several different subject areas or geographical areas will likely have less impact since you lose the leverage created by repeated exposure.

Lawyers often worry that narrowing their niche will lead to fewer clients. However, it almost invariably has the opposite effect. Imagine what your life would be like if you could double the number of cases or matters that you really enjoyed? What if you could charge 50% more for your services? What would it be like if the right kind of associates and staff were applying to work with you? The benefits of having a clear niche are significant and well worth getting out of your comfort zone and trying something new.

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