

T H E P R I M E R U S

Paradigm

A new model for lawyers and law firms

SPRING|SUMMER 2010

**The foundation for
good marketing: trust**

**Building relationships as
strategic partners, trusted
advisors, good friends**

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The Foundation for Good Marketing: Trust



In the 1970s, a young lawyer named Rick Quinlivan started doing litigation work for a machine manufacturing company.

Unfortunately, he lost his first case for them. Then he lost the second. But still, this company continued to trust Quinlivan with even the most serious of their cases. Thirty years later, they still do.

“They liked the way I tried that case even though I lost it,” said Quinlivan, now managing partner at Quinlivan Wexler LLP, a Primerus firm in Santa Ana, California. “Since then I have not lost another case for them.”

Quinlivan’s relationship with this company has survived changes in personnel, as well as his move from one firm to another. Their bond is based on the client’s assurance that they will

receive excellent service at reasonable rates. It is based on Quinlivan’s proven integrity over time. It is based on *trust*.

In today’s world, where consumers and clients face a constant barrage of advertising and marketing competing for their attention, *trust* becomes paramount. Many large law firms have more marketers than Primerus firms have attorneys, with corresponding marketing budgets. How does that contrast with the Primerus model for marketing – based on relationships, trust and value?

“The Primerus approach to business development and marketing is building relationships and differentiation in the legal marketplace,” said Primerus President John C. “Jack” Buchanan.

“We expect a commitment to the Six Pillars from every one of our attorneys. We then go beyond that, becoming for our clients strategic partners, trusted advisors and ultimately, good friends.”

Importance of trust

In his article, “A Matter of Trust,” David Maister, an expert on the management of professional service firms, laments the erosion of trust in relationships between professionals and clients, stressing to professionals the need to earn, and re-earn it, throughout their careers.¹

In the article (an excerpt from Maister’s 2000 book *The Trusted Advisor*), Maister tells the story of his effort to find a lawyer to process a relative’s will. He writes:

“The first few lawyers I talked to tried to win my business by telling me about when their firm was founded, how many offices they had and how much they would charge me. None of this inspired much confidence. Finally, I encountered a lawyer who, during my initial phone call, asked how much I knew about what was involved in processing a will. My reply was, ‘Nothing!’ He then suggested

that he would fax to me a comprehensive outline of the steps involved: what I needed to do immediately and what I should forget about for a while because it was not urgent. The fax also provided the phone numbers of all the governmental bodies I needed to notify, even though this had nothing to do with his legal work (or fees). All of this (immensely helpful) information was provided freely, before I had retained him. Naturally, he got my business. He had earned my trust by being generous with his knowledge and proving that he was willing to earn my confidence.”

Maister also writes about the importance of values in building trust between two parties. “People will trust you, be they client, colleague or employee, to the extent that they know what your principles

(or deeply held values) are, and to the extent that they know you can be relied on to act in accordance with your principles. If people don’t know what your values are, or worse, suspect that you have none beyond your own short-term self-interest, they will not trust you with their business, their loyalty or their cooperation.”

He also states that trust is about relationships. “I will trust you if I believe that you’re in this for the long haul, that you’re not just trying to maximize your own short-term benefits of our interactions. Trust is about reciprocity: You help me and I’ll help you. But I need to know that I can rely on you to do your part and that our relationship is built on shared values and principles.”

Those shared values and principles are immediately apparent to clients of Primerus firms, in the form of the Six

Pillars. Clients know from the start that every Primerus attorney shares a commitment to these values, and that they will provide the roadmap for the way an attorney provides service to a client.

Clients also know that any Primerus firm has undergone an extensive vetting process in order to gain admission to the alliance. The third-party Primerus endorsement offers firms the opportunity to avoid the self-praise marketing and advertising tactics that turn off so many clients, and instead rely on the confidence and trust inspired by a quality endorsement.

“Law firms can talk about how great they are in their marketing and advertising, but it’s what others say about them that matters most,” said Buchanan. “The Primerus endorsement speaks volumes to clients. Without question, it tells the world that a firm is worthy of trust.”

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Marketing done right: One firm's story

Six years ago, Rothman Gordon, a Primerus firm in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was about to celebrate its 50th anniversary. The firm decided it was time to give itself a gift, in the form of a fulltime marketing director. The firm of 28 attorneys wanted to create brand awareness as a firm, rather than marketing the services of attorneys as sole practitioners, said firm CEO and managing shareholder Bill Lestitian.

After hiring Anne Parys to fill the new position, the firm created a logo, chose a consistent firm color and penned a tagline. They scrapped their old letterhead which listed individual attorneys and replaced it with one featuring the firm logo. They also developed a new website, began weekly cross-marketing meetings and developed personalized marketing plans and budgets for every attorney, including associates.

Creating a marketing culture has not only benefited the firm, but in turn, has benefited clients. With heightened brand awareness, the firm was able to recruit new lawyers, including some from the large international firms in Pittsburgh. Those attorneys brought their clients with them to Rothman Gordon, and instantly clients were receiving the same level of experience and excellent service they were accustomed to – for a dramatically lower rate.

Clients also realized the benefit of cross-marketing the services of the attorneys within the firm. Parys started weekly meetings with a representative from each of the firm's practice groups where they communicate about the issues and needs facing all of their clients. "We are able to put clients in touch with lawyers who are best suited to help them with all their legal needs," Lestitian said.

Parys credits the firm's marketing success with the attorneys' open-mindedness to her ideas. "They would listen to everything I threw at them," she said. "If a firm hires a marketing director and then

ties his or her hands and shoots down every idea, then the firm is not going to get any benefit."

Lestitian said the firm's managing committee had made a commitment that marketing was going to be a top priority. "We basically threw out 49 years of doing things one way and did it again."

And yet, with all the changes in regards to marketing, the firm remained true to its roots of personalized service and lasting client relationships. In fact, the firm used these values as the core of their brand.

Building on trusted client relationships

"We didn't sacrifice anything in terms of client relationships. If anything, we enhanced them," Lestitian said. "We have always taken great pride in our personal relationships with clients. We are big enough that we can do sophisticated legal work, but if a client wants to talk to the head of the firm, they can just call me and I will pick up the phone."

Rothman Gordon capitalized on this with its new tagline of "Just right." The expanded tagline on their website reads: "Some law firms can be too hot on the latest technology, forgetting the client relationship comes first. And some law



firms can be too cool on understanding the latest trends and issues affecting their clients. But Rothman Gordon is an approachable firm that balances new technology and knowledge with old-fashioned client service. Which makes Rothman Gordon just right.”²

The firm also used its emphasis as trusted advisors to long-time clients as the focus of an ad campaign in the *Pittsburgh Business Times* coinciding with its 50th anniversary. (See sample ad on this page.)

Expert or trusted advisor?

In his article “Do You Really Want Relationships?”, Maister addresses the difference between a *transactional* view of clients versus a *relationship* view. (The article is an excerpt from his 2008 book *Strategy and the Fat Smoker*.)³ He states that the difference between transactions

the advisor’s role is subordinate to this, not that of a prime mover.”

According to Maister’s polls of his seminar audiences about what they look for when buying professional services, 80 percent of the typical audience reports that they would prefer to hire a true advisor and would be willing to pay more for that service. When he asks the same audiences which approach their firms take, the numbers are reversed.



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and relationships is similar to the distinction between being an *expert* to one’s clients versus being an *advisor*:

“An expert’s job is to be right – to solve the client’s problem through the application of technical and professional skill. In order to do this, the expert takes responsibility for the work away from the client and acts as if he or she is ‘in charge’ until the project is done. The advisor behaves differently. Rather than being in the right, the advisor’s job is to be helpful, providing guidance, input, and counseling to the client’s own thought- and decision-making processes. The client retains control and responsibility at all times;

Eighty percent mostly market themselves or are perceived as experts, not trusted advisors. Many, he said, have dreams of someday becoming known as a “trusted advisor firm.”

Buchanan said this reinforces that the Primerus model represents the new paradigm today’s clients seek. “We created Primerus in 1992 based on the belief that there were lawyers out there who still believed in the honored traditions of the legal profession embodied in the Six Pillars,” Buchanan said. Since then, the alliance has grown from just a few firms and a few lawyers to more than 150 law firms and more than 2,000 lawyers.

“Embracing old values, Primerus lawyers move forward from the much

admired Six Pillars to establish new and even more important relationships with their clients,” Buchanan said. “They are not satisfied with being just a billable hour commodity provider of legal services. Instead, like the great lawyers of the past, they desire to invest at their own expense in a truly worthwhile relationship with their clients – to take the time to learn their client’s business, concerns, needs and desires – to become a true strategic partner and trusted advisor with their clients.” 

¹<http://davidmaister.com/articles/2/25/>

²<http://www.rothmangordon.com/>

³<http://davidmaister.com/articles/2/80/>