Marketing on a Realistic Budget

by Barbara A. Arbogast and Linda F. Cohn

In Part I of our three-part marketing series, we focused on “Staying Competitive on a Small Budget” (see the Winter 1993 issue of Lawyer Referral Network). This article focuses on marketing for medium-sized marketing budgets (budgets of $15,000 to $30,000).

Perhaps the best way to discuss marketing on a medium-sized budget is through a case history. Ours will focus on the one we know best, Metropolitan Lawyer Referral Service, Inc. (MLRS) of Denver, Colorado.

MLRS is an independent lawyer referral service founded in 1972. It is sponsored by six local bar associations, each of which provides two members to serve on a board of directors which determines policy for MLRS.

MLRS is financially independent and receives no money from any of its sponsoring bar associations. All of its revenues come from membership dues, referral fees and forwarding fees. The board has complete autonomy to determine how and when MLRS’s financial resources are spent.

At its inception in 1972, MLRS had a monopoly on the lawyer referral and information service business. Advertising by attorneys was not allowed by the ethical rules, and no competing referral agencies existed. No particular advertising was therefore needed.

After advertising by attorneys became ethically acceptable, MLRS saw its monopoly on the referral business begin to decline. A decision was made to advertise and actively market the service. Because of its past successes, MLRS had a large budget (large for an agency with its cash flow) for the purposes of advertising and making itself known to the general public.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the board hired professional help to direct its efforts and tried a variety of marketing approaches, including:

- billboards;
- comic strips written specifically to advertise MLRS which appeared in daily newspapers on a regular basis;
- a service by which members of the public could request information from the Colorado Bar Association’s Tel-Law tapes free of charge (an expensive option, since staff were required to play requested tapes and to update the tapes periodically); and
- an “in-court” program in which lawyers were hired to interview and assist people at the courthouse (also expensive and ineffective in increasing referrals).

At their inception, MLRS’s marketing strategies consisted of a few radio and television ads in combination with a variety of mechanisms designed to personalize the service. The latter include:

- fliers about the service, which are available in boxes at all of the courthouses;
- fliers distributed to large employers, such as Lowry Air Force Base. (Included in the flier is a wallet-size, perforated card on which the consumer can write, as a reminder, the name and address of the referred attorney and the date and time of the appointment);
- sponsorship of community athletic teams; and
- participation in community events which afford an opportunity to promote MLRS.

Through experimentation, we have learned valuable lessons about marketing on a medium-sized budget. Some pointers are offered here.
**Conduct Targeted Marketing**

MLRS conducts targeted marketing with selected groups (for example, community organizations, trade associations and voluntary membership organizations). A sample proposal for targeted marketing through selected organizational publications (such as community newspapers, internal staff newsletters or trade association journals) is provided below.

**Sample Proposal: “Selected Groups Assistance Programs”**

1. *(Your LRIS)* will provide a series of (#) articles for publication in (weekly/monthly/quarterly) *(program newsletter name)* covering areas of interest to *(program name)* members. These articles will include a byline for the attorney who actually prepares the articles and a tag line for *(your LRIS)*. The articles will include a solicitation, either at the beginning or end of the article, regarding questions that *(program name)* members would like to see answered. If *(your LRIS)* receives questions, *(your LRIS)* will undertake to find lawyers to provide written responses in the form of articles in future issues of the publication.

2. Free Initial Half-hour Consultations: *(Your LRIS)* will provide a certificate to be published in the *(program newsletter name)* which would entitle *(program name)* members to a free half-hour legal consultation. *(Program name)* members who call *(your LRIS)* must inform the referral counselor that they have a certificate. In addition, they must bring the certificate to the initial consultation and present it to the attorney. The certificate is valid regardless of the type of questions the *(program name)* member wants to discuss.

The advantages to this approach are:

- **Positive association:** provides a service to the targeted groups.

- **High exposure:** articles in organizational publications are seen by more readers than large ads in local newspapers.

- **Results:** free advertising reinforces other advertising efforts by increasing name recognition and providing high-quality clients to panel members.

- **Increased referrals:** participants in a targeted group will make a conscious effort to use the service when the need for a lawyer arises.

- **Cost-effective:** advertising is free!

**Maximize Your TV/Radio Ad Dollars**

In January 1991 MLRS established a budget of $15,000 for production and the purchase of air time for its 1991 first quarter campaign. Of the $15,000, $2,000 to $4,000 was allocated to production costs and the balance dedicated to air time on television stations.

High-frequency advertising schedules were placed from January through June 1991. Thereafter, a low-cost “maintenance schedule” reinforced television advertising efforts and maintained a level of awareness about the lawyer referral service.

Currently, MLRS uses a promotional mix of television and radio to reach its audience. MLRS sponsors a legal segment each Tuesday in “Colorado Today,” a locally-produced program. The sponsorship provides for an opening “billboard” and one 30-second commercial for a weekly cost of $85. (A “billboard” is an announcement by the program director that “the legal segment is brought to you by The Metropolitan Lawyer Referral Service, Inc.”, followed by MLRS’s commercial.) For $165 per week, MLRS runs one 60-second commercial during the Monday legal segment of a radio call-in show called “Trouble-shooter with Tom Martino.”

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**Illustration of High-Frequency Television Schedules at Two Different Budget Levels**

**Schedule I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>WEEKLY FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>5-6 am</td>
<td>AM Network News (Rotate Channels 4 and 9)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Scheduled by Station</td>
<td>Movies and News (Channels 2, 4 and 9)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weekly frequency:** 35 30-second commercials  
**Weekly cost:** $250  
**Monthly cost:** $500

**Schedule II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATION</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>WEEKLY FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(4, 9)</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>5-6 am</td>
<td>AM Network News (Channels 4 and 9)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2, 4, 9)</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Late night</td>
<td>Movies and News</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2, 31)</td>
<td>Sat./Sun.</td>
<td>11 am-5 pm</td>
<td>Weekend Rotator</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weekly frequency:** 41 30-second commercials  
**Weekly cost:** $565  
**Monthly cost:** $1,130
Here are some tips with respect to TV and radio advertising:

*Production of Commercials:* When you venture into unknown territory, it pays to have a guide. MLRS looked to an advertising agent to negotiate and coordinate production of two 30-second TV commercials and one 60-second radio commercial. Production costs for graphics, scripting, voice, music and editing were $1,500.

*Advertising Agent Fees:* Agent fees to place schedules on television and radio stations and to monitor these schedules to ensure that MLRS actually received the exposure it paid for were negotiated at ten percent of the gross total of all advertising schedules placed on behalf of MLRS. MLRS retains five percent of the agency commission.

*Promotion Recommendations:* To maintain public awareness, television and/or radio advertising should be done on a *low-cost, sustained basis.* Since consumers use lawyers only when the need arises, "blitzing" an audience with information about lawyer referral and information services does not create increased demand. Because of the consumer's limited need to use the service, maintaining a high-frequency advertising schedule is not cost-effective and not recommended.

### Make Your LRIS Available for Community Functions

Go to your neighborhoods and your neighborhoods will come to you. Sponsoring a team event and being available for community fairs provides for advertising that is unique, directed, attention-getting, cost-effective and lasting.

### Become a Team Sponsor

**Sequenced Implementation Steps:**

1. Keep up-to-date on community affairs. Contact your amateur recreational sports promoters (basketball, softball, soccer, etc.) and league bowling centers. Let them know about your non-profit public service and your willingness to sponsor a team or teams in a tournament/league event.

2. Purchase a low-cost display ad in the day's events program. (Using your LRIS's Yellow Pages ad is ideal for creating a lasting identity.)

3. To display your LRIS, have the captain of the team you sponsor contact local pro shops to have team shirts lettered with your LRIS name and telephone number.

**Estimated Costs:**

1. Team shirts:
   - (a) Basketball ($11x4) $44.00
   - (b) Bowling ($31x4) $124.00

2. Sponsorship Fees:
   - (a) Basketball (tournament) $70.00 (2 days)
   - (b) Bowling (league) $15.00 (35 weeks)
   - (c) Bowling (city/state tournament) $60.00 (1 day)

3. Display Ad (optional) $80.00

**Does Promotional Sponsorship Work?**

One means of evaluating the effectiveness of promotional sponsorship is recording the "source" of the referral when consumers call the service. Responses to the question, "Where did you hear of our service?" revealed a considerable group of people who heard about MLRS through team sponsorship. An increasing number of users are being referred by a "friend of a friend on your MLRS team."

**Showcase Your LRIS at Community Fairs**

**Sequenced Implementation Steps:**

1. Keep up-to-date on community affairs. When a community fair is announced in community newspapers, contact the chairperson of the event and let him or her know about your non-profit service and your willingness to participate.

2. Purchase a low-cost display ad in the community newspaper that announces the day's events (again, using your Yellow Pages ad is best).

3. To promote your LRIS, make a weatherproof vinyl banner (eight feet long by three feet wide) to drape across a display table. (Local sign/awning companies can make custom banners for you.)

4. Have sufficient handouts (small giveaways) and brochures available for interested persons.

5. When possible, have panel members available to talk with the public.

**Estimated Costs:**

1. Display Ad $80.00
2. Banner 125.00
3. Handouts 230.00
4. Total $435.00

Finding the right mix of marketing tools takes time and patience. What is right for one service may be wrong for another. Luckily, starting from scratch is not necessary. Rather, you can benefit from the successes of others and learn from their mistakes. Hopefully, these pointers—along with your own experience and ingenuity—will help you to craft a program that meets your program's specific marketing needs.

For more information about MLRS's marketing program, call Barbara Arbogast at 303/831-8000. 

Barbara Arbogast is the Administrator of Metropolitan Lawyer Referral Service, Inc., Denver, Colorado. Linda Cohn is a member and past president of MLRS.

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### Help Us Design the 1994 National Lawyer Referral Workshop!

The 1994 National Lawyer Referral Workshop will be held October 19-22, 1994, at The Fairmont Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Standing Committee is currently planning the workshop sessions and would like to solicit your suggestions for specific workshop topics. If you have ideas that you would like to share, please contact Kathy Cartwright at 312/988-5760 no later than May 30.