What does a Marketing Shoestring Look Like?
Marion Smithberger, LRS Director, Columbus Bar Association

Don’t hide your pretty foot in a combat boot. It is relatively inexpensive to keep our message in front of our boards, our members, the courts, prosecutors, legal aid via our ads and articles in our publications, fliers at bar functions, sponsoring seminars. Print LRS business cards that can be handed out by the judges and other court personnel.

Social service agencies, particularly those that operate in conjunction with the courts, are not quite as easy to reach as our members but still very fruitful sources of referrals.

Public speaking. The service organizations such as Rotary or Jaycees are always looking for speakers. We need to let them recruit us.

The Media. Reporters are always looking for legal experts for background and as quotable sources. Help them. You may even start to get quoted yourself!

Telethons. Consider having your staff and panel members answer the phones at telethons such as the ones for PBS. In addition to helping the community or charity, we get free publicity and build collegiality.

Street Fairs etc. especially the ones where they will let you have a spot for little or no cost. See if you can get members to help you work the booth.

Ask a Lawyer. Lots of variations on this. Sometimes done in conjunction with radio or television stations; sometimes as an auxiliary to LRIS where the lawyer comes into the office and answers questions.

WebPages Lite. If you have Internet access in your office you can construct your own simple web page with consumer information and an opportunity to e-mail you for a referral. Be sure that your template collects enough information so that you can track the call. Links to more powerful (and expensive) legal websites can make your inexpensive web site very useful. Maintaining a website usually involves a nominal registration fee and a monthly charge.

Public service announcements. Producing radio PSA’s does not have to be expensive. Cleverness is the name of the game. Think about a one-minute practical legal tip for the listening audience. Produce several and see if you can find a radio station who is willing to let you use their studio to record them and duplicate them. This is easier if you also buy a little time.

Phonebooks and other directories. The phone number needs to be where clients might look to find it, which is usually the phone book. A shoestring marketing budget does not allow full page buys but we do need to buy listings large enough so that we are seen.
Brown bag lunches are an excellent way to take our message to local companies. The brown bags generally work best if we bring panel members with us and the presentations are focused on a topic such as buying a house, estate planning, or consumer fraud. We can also consider brown bags with the courts and the law firms. The orientations for these brown bags are different. With the law firms we would usually explore why they may want to encourage their associates to join the Lawyer Referral. When we meet with the Courts we talk about what we can do to facilitate their referring unrepresented litigants to our service, e.g. printing LRS business cards for them to distribute, printing the LRS number on subpoenas.

Do a good job. Most businesses start small with tiny marketing budget. Our business grows through word of mouth, relationships, skilled panel members, and well-trained staff. If we are doing a good job and truly helping clients find the right attorney, the word will spread and maybe we won't have to hide our pretty foot in a combat boot.