

PLEASE PUT YOUR AREA OF PRACTICE ON YOUR BUSINESS CARD

My local bar association has a great Solo/Small firm group. Every other month there is a dinner in which about 100 attorneys show up and network and mingle. In the months in which there isn't a dinner, there are 4 lunches around the county, where 20-40 attorneys show up -- again, to eat and network and mingle.

I just came back from a lunch in which there were about 30-35 people there. I knew quite a few of them, but I also met a few and came back with a big stack of business cards to enter into my address book. Going through them, I see that some people haven't put their area of practice on their card!! That person just lost all possibility of receiving a referral from me (unless I know them otherwise).

If your card says "Moishe Pipik, Attorney at Law -- Patent -- Trademark -- Copyright," then when I enter you into my address book, I also enter in Patent, Trademark, and Copyright. Then, when someone calls me and asks for a copyright attorney, I might not remember your name off the top of my head, but I can type in "copyright" into my address book and Moishe Pipik will pop up.

However, if your card just says "attorney at law" and doesn't specify what you do, then you've lost all possibility of coming up in my search. Of course, if I KNOW you, I mean really know you, that's different. But how many people do you know? You want to be able to expand your possible referral pool as wide as possible.

David A. Shulman, Florida

That's a good point. I guess it makes it more of a one-step referral process, versus calling an attorney with no practice area on his card and asking, "Tell me again, do you divorces?" I'm glad I read this email when I did, because I'm currently in the final stages of designing my logo/letterhead/business cards. Do you find it better to put the practice areas on the back of the card, or try to fit them in the front?

Ryan Phillips

"J.S. Tyre, practicing in lots of fields, specializing in none."

OK my cards don't really say that. But what would you have folks do who don't limit their practice to one or three things?

James S. Tyre, California

One other thing to consider, and that is putting your photo on the card. I know, I know. This screams "Real Estate Agent" to many people. But I was convinced by an attorney marketing guy that this is the right thing to do. It is basically for the same reason Dave Shulman mentioned. It is hard to remember who the cards belong to when you come home from an event with a stack of cards. Photos really make it easier.

I know some people will never consider doing this and find it to be unprofessional. I understand that point of view. But it is something to think about.

Mark Tanney, Washington, D.C.

There must be a few areas of law you prefer to focus on; put those areas on your cards.

Lisa Solomon, New York

About the photo thing, one of the things I miss going from an iPhone to a court-approved BB is the camera. I would just ask and snap shots of new folks I meet and associate it with the business card later on. I guess these days with websites, it isn't all that difficult to get someone's photo if you're that committed.

As for the business card / practice area / referral bit, I can see the great value in it for client marketing. But if I don't know someone well enough to know their practice areas, or be comfortable with the relationship in order to drop an email or phone call to inquire, then I shouldn't be referring business to them. I guess I subscribe to Norm Solberg's recently discussed thoughts and experiences with respect to referrals and the implicit vouching that one does when making such referrals. How can I vouch for someone I can't fully place after a networking meeting?

Ducchi T. Quan, Virginia

I would suggest saving all of your personal information, practice areas, photo, etc. as a contact in your phone. Then when you meet someone, you hand them a card and ask them if they would like it in electronic version to. You then drop them an email with it attached. This gets you two points of contact and helps insure you will get into the person's address book.

If you have an iPhone, I would suggest getting the app "Bump." It allows you to "bump" your contact information (as well as files and photos, if need be) to another phone that also has Bump. This is a time saver.

Mike Winkler, Kansas and Missouri

Some places require you to have particular credentials to advertise specialties or practice focus areas.

Jim Moriarty, Iowa
General practice with emphasis on trial work, mediation and avoiding Tax law like unto the Plague.

It is clear that having practice areas on your card is an advantage for other attorneys, but what about laymen? If you have one or two focus areas, but are open to doing other things if you have free cycles on the processor, I think that putting practice areas on business cards handed out to potential clients can be harmful.

The best solution I have come up with is to have two sets of cards. One for other attorneys, and one for laymen. The attorney cards can be very specific with minimal marketing hype and the 'layman' card can be slick and general.

Duane Dawson

There's a difference between holding yourself out as a "specialist" or "expert" and telling people what you do.

David A. Shulman

I really think that whether or not you put your photo on the card depends on your area of practice, the image you're trying to present, the types of

clients you are trying to attract, or in my case, whether or not you'd lose to Steve Buscemi in a beauty contest.

David A. Shulman

I completely agree with you; however, I write notes on the back of business cards (e.g., practice areas) so part of the blame falls back on you for not asking/recalling the practice areas.

Cari B. Rincker, New York

I have mixed views about the picture thing -- I have received them from people and they look really great and professional (e.g., Jean Tien's) while others can look a little tacky. It's all in the design layout and picture quality.

Cari B. Rincker

Regarding pictures on biz cards, I think the issues of 1) how effective it is with potential clients and 2) how (un)impressive it is to fellow lawyers often get mixed up. They're two totally different questions. Maybe calling for two sets of biz cards, with and without pics.

But as for issue 1), it really depends on the target market. No general rule really applies. I can definitely see how for certain markets, a biz card pic could be really effective.

As for issue 2), I tend toward the conservative and shy away from pics on biz cards.

Gene Lee, California

I put at least 6 of my practice areas on my card. Fortunately, I have real experience with all of those areas.

Clients ask me about my other practice areas from the list on my card or e-mail. I think it's a definite plus to list some if not all of your areas.

Paula McGill, New York, D.C., Maryland and Georgia

This may be true. But if you're looking to expand your base of referral sources, you can't expect to rely on other people. It may be my fault that I don't remember what someone does. But that doesn't help them at all.

David A. Shulman

If the practice areas were already printed on the front (or back) of the card, you wouldn't need to write them on the back of the card.

Lisa Solomon,

In California, you can say 'Practice limited to ...' For areas you don't have a certification in. This doesn't mean you're an expert, just 'this is all I can do'

Michael Toback, California

It all depends on whether the person has a face for radio or TV.

Frank Nunes
