

Speaking ENGAGEMENTS

HOW TO POSITION YOURSELF AS
A MARKETABLE THOUGHT LEADER.

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LAWYERS ACROSS ALL PRACTICE AREAS

and in all geographic regions can and should pitch themselves as speakers for events both inside and outside of the legal industry. This article will focus on how to make yourself a marketable speaker and how to then obtain speaking opportunities. Doing so will undoubtedly build your credibility as a thought leader in your areas of practice, within the legal community, and within the broader local geographic area or areas in which you work.

How to Make Yourself a Marketable Speaker

These days everyone goes online to check you out before and during their interactions with you. This is even more true for those who book speakers for events—the first thing they will do is look at your website biography. Both the firm's website as a whole and your website biography should be crafted so that the site shows up at the top of organic search results for your name. In addition to your law firm website, continuing legal education providers and event organizers will also simply search for you in search engines and read what they find. Ensuring that everything they find about you online puts your best face forward to keep you in the running for speaker consideration is a huge part of making yourself a marketable speaker.

Five Top Tips to Lay the Groundwork for Speaking Engagements Marketing:

1. *Claim and build out your online profiles.* Google yourself and claim any and all digital citations and legal directories that list you and build them out. These include Justia, Best Lawyers, Google Business Profile, and more. Most online directory listings are free, and even the ones that cost money still allow you to claim them and build them out—you just can't see all the data stored on the backend without paying, which is OK.

2. *Start publishing content online (and offline) in your own name.* If your firm allows it, you should start publishing your own content directly via your LinkedIn profile, or on a free platform like Medium, about your practice areas or a niche you want to develop to increase your online authority. Most people think of “publishing content” as just including text, when in reality, digital content includes a variety of media, such as videos, livestreams, and podcasts. Creating meaningful and helpful content on any platform and strategically increasing its reach will help raise your individual footprint and thus put you on the radar of those looking for thought leaders to add to their speaker rosters for upcoming events.

3. *Perfect your CV and biography.* Just when you thought your resume creation days were over, I am here to tell you they're not! You should create and maintain an updated CV and make sure your law firm website biography remains current, fleshed out, and includes obvious information conveying that you are available for speaking opportunities. You will also need a separate *speaker biography*—which should be different from and much shorter than your website biography—to pitch yourself for public presentation opportunities as part of speaking engagements marketing.

4. *Don't ask for or expect to be paid.* Even as someone who is in high demand as a speaker, I do most of my speaking for free or just ask for travel expenses if travel is required. The benefits achieved through public speaking are more than sufficient to justify doing it for free, especially if you don't have a lot of engagements under your belt yet. Just to name a few, your name and topic will reach the members of the group for which you are speaking, you can update your LinkedIn profile, lawyer directories, and website biography noting your presentation, and you can then use the speech, slides, or other materials prepared in your individual and/or firm marketing materials such as email newsletters and social media channels (unless the event host precludes it, which occurs on occasion with larger groups). You can also ask for a contact list of all attendees and/or other speakers at the event for follow-up marketing and networking.

5. *Be grateful.* At the conclusion of your presentation, be sure to thank the event sponsors and/or the individuals who extended the invitation to speak. You can also go old school and send a thank-you note (or email) as well. In addition to expressing your appreciation, you should also take the opportunity to ask for feedback. Some groups provide this automatically as part of their own internal assessment of how their audience likes each presenter, but even if not—ask. The more you learn from each speech, the better you will become at being a *marketable and engaging speaker*.

Speaking Engagements Make You a Thought Leader

Thought leadership is a dominant force in business-to-business marketing, and, for many law firms, their primary target demographic includes business owners and/or decisionmakers. If the individual lawyers at a law firm position themselves as thought leaders and industry experts through speaking engagements marketing, they can leverage this influence to answer questions of potential clients and to build brand awareness for the law firm. Having a neutral third party like a state bar association or a trade industry group verify your credibility goes a long way toward establishing independent proof of your capabilities.

While being focused on a niche or topic is great, limiting yourself to having just one option for presenting is a mistake. Meeting and conference planners like options and choices even if they are all within the same niche or practice area, so be sure to diversify your topic list and present it with engaging titles that identify the precise benefits each group's audience will obtain from listening to your talk and/or receiving your materials. **TBJ**

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