

## Case Study Series: What's Working in Marketing & Selling Professional Services

### Rebranding and Content Marketing Help Law Firm Increase Revenues 84%

By M. Sharon Baker

#### OVERVIEW

Michelle Bomberger created her Bellevue, WA law firm in 2005 with a plan to serve small business clients and operate like a traditional business, offering unconventional pricing (by law-firm standards). She chose a business name she thought would attract the right clients, and began offering services such as business incorporation and contract review for fixed fees. Hourly rates were charged only on less predictable projects, such as complex transactions requiring negotiation or legal research.

Although the solo practice steadily increased revenues each year and added two support employees by 2009, Bomberger realized that to grow larger, she needed to make some changes and attract new customers.

#### Situation

Armed with an MBA and extensive business experience honed at previous high-level jobs, Bomberger knew she wanted to run her law firm unconventionally, behaving more like a business. Rather than adopting the “bill by the minute” practices of most law firms, she adopted a flat-fee approach to address fears of most small businesses.

While her approach seemed risky to others in legal services, Bomberger knew she was addressing her target market's biggest fear when faced with a need for legal services: just how much would a lawyer cost?

To promote the firm, she “went where clients were” and joined organizations such as Women Business Owners and local chambers of commerce. She also connected with consultants at the small business resource center and spoke at local events. In addition, she published a blog for search engine optimization.

The one-on-one marketing strategy “allowed me to attract great small business clients and test the model,” Bomberger says. “The firm grew consistently for three years, but I realized I would never be able to achieve significant growth doing simply that” one-on-one outreach.

## **APPROACH**

### **Rebrand the Firm**

Bomberger knew she needed to boost awareness of her firm with a better marketing plan and reach larger customers, particularly those companies that needed legal services on a consistent basis rather than one project at a time.

She launched a branding campaign in 2009, one that involved a name change and a content marketing plan. The timing was ideal, she says, because with the onset of the recession many law firms cut spending on marketing. “We were very visible and present in the market when others weren’t,” she says.

Bomberger initially named her firm Small Business Legal Services, a name that communicated exactly what the firm offered. But she later realized that the larger companies she wanted to target, those with revenues from \$1 million to \$30 million, didn’t want to be classified as small businesses. The name limited her business and didn’t resonate with her desired prospects, she says.

After brainstorming with her team, Small Business Legal Services became Equinox Business Law Group, a name that “struck me as a good analogy for what we do, which is to help companies balance business and law,” says Bomberger. She hired a graphics company to create a logo and company stationery.

### **Coordinate Newsletter, Blog, and Live Events**

She then launched a monthly newsletter, amped her previously just-for-SEO blog, and coordinated those outreach and lead nurturing efforts with a live monthly event. Each month, the newsletter, blog posts, and events were coordinated around the same theme, and revolved around issues of concern to existing clients and prospects.

Monthly topics included hiring employees, the ins and outs of alternative financing, and doing business in other states and countries, among others.

The email newsletter was a way to stay in front of existing clients, provide resources businesses need to be aware of, and keep top of mind for future issues a company may encounter. It went to a contact list of 1,500 clients, partners, and prospects and included alerts and links to upcoming blog posts around the topic of the month to drive traffic to the website, and included information about the upcoming event.

### **Tap External Content Sources**

Bomberger started blogging in 2005 and wrote a post each month, but the blog was used only for search engine optimization. As part of the content marketing strategy, Bomberger reached out to two or three experts a month who were targeting a similar audience and asked them to write a blog post on the monthly topic. Between the newsletter, the blog, the guest bloggers, and the event, clients and prospects get a full, holistic view of the monthly topic.

Doing so allowed her to post more frequently and generate additional content without the burden of doing everything herself. It also allowed her to reach new prospects as guest post writers shared their posts with their clients and prospects.

### **Monthly Events Engage Clients**

Bomberger then created live monthly events that dovetailed with the topic of the month, using the blog, newsletter, and email nurturing campaigns to create interest. She invited topic experts to present and share their knowledge at the event. “The goal is to get our business clients in the room to engage them in conversations,” she says. “We shoot for an audience of 15 to 25 people and the event tends to be interactive.”

Bomberger also invited clients or prospects she believed may have to deal with the business issue at some point. “Sometimes the topic triggers steps they can take and this is a way to have a conversation with them in the room or thereafter,” she says. “Often we are opening their eyes to issues they may not have seen.”

The topics helped clients and prospects understand that they may want to seek legal help as an issue emerges rather than late in the process.

### **New Flat-Fee General Counsel Services**

As part of the overall rebranding in 2009, Bomberger launched a new legal service offering, taking her unconventional pricing model a step further. She introduced unlimited general counsel services for a monthly flat fee. Typically, law firms work on an hourly basis, rounding work to a tenth of an hour, displaying each transaction and who worked on them, a practice that results in three-page invoices where clients can track every penny they spend.

The traditional practice “drives people crazy,” Bomberger says. Her flat-fee approach is based upon what a business may need, and what their anticipated needs may be. In return, clients can get help with any document or contract, any meeting, and make any phone call, and pay the same monthly amount no matter what happens or how much time is used.

“The risk we take is that something unexpected and incredibly time consuming will show up on the table,” Bomberger says, adding that’s only happened once. “On the flip side, the client has comfort of knowing that even if they have a quick question or big question, they can call us rather than spending the time digging around trying to figure out it, which is what usually happens.”

This allowed the client to engage the law firm without worrying about the cost and smooth out costs, which could range wildly from month to month depending upon their issue. Instead, they have unlimited access for a fixed price.

## **RESULTS**

The new general counsel service coupled with the rebranding campaign and the content marketing strategy helped Equinox Business Law Group increase revenues nearly 84% in just two years, growing from \$204,000 in 2009 to \$375,000 in 2011.

This year, Bomberger expects revenue at the four-person firm to grow 30%, to \$500,000.

About 10% of Equinox's revenue now comes from the flat-rate general counsel services, and at any time four to seven clients, roughly 10 %, choose this pricing method, Bomberger says.

Last year, the firm engaged a branding expert to help shore up Equinox's messaging and positioning and re-vamped the website adding videos, which, combined with a public relations campaign this year, she expects to fuel the firm's growth.

#### **Additional Insights from Equinox's Michelle Bomberger:**

- With a flat-fee model, recognize you will have some wins and some losses, and tweak the model as needed.
- Set clear client expectations upfront. It is important to be clear on how you operate to minimize surprises for clients.
- Look at your offerings and pricing from a customer's perspective: What do they need, what do they want. Figure out how to exceed their expectations.
- For consultants and service providers, think about how you can really be different. This quality needs to be something clients can objectively see, feel, and understand—not just exceptional customer service. Once you figure out your unique selling point, market the heck out of it so everyone knows how different you are.

#### **Resources:**

Website: <http://equinoxbusinesslaw.com/>

Blog: <http://equinoxbusinesslaw.com/blogs/>