

**A Shifting Business Model:
How a New Way of
Marketing Your Law Practice
Can Result In Never Having
to Market Again**



By Alexis Martin Neely

It may seem a bit strange to be writing about never having to market again in a book about marketing, but isn't that what we'd all really like? Marketing is expensive, it's time-consuming and it can be painful when you don't know how to do it the right way.

Imagine what your business would be like if you could just stop marketing altogether. If you knew without a doubt that each month just the right amount of money would flow into your bank account to cover all of your overhead and leave you with a nice profit. Imagine what it would feel like to stop chasing after the next new client and know that you were *the* go to lawyer for clients who would never think of contacting anyone other than you.

That's what it was like back in the day. Lawyers didn't have to market. All of their clients came to them by referral. Lawyers didn't have to sell. We were trusted advisors handed down from one generation to the next.

And when clients did call, they weren't calling for a one-time transaction, such as a divorce, or an accident, or a will. They were calling because they needed guidance from the person they knew they could always turn to for objective, even-handed and well-thought out advice. They were calling because they knew that having a lawyer on their side was smart and they would never even think of making a legal or business decision without consulting their lawyer.

In the past, lawyers were advocates, helpers, guides, and friends. Today, our society sees lawyers as sharks—always out for themselves or focused on how they can make a quick buck. As a result, people are afraid of lawyers.

And it's no wonder, really.

Unfortunately, over the past 50 years the changing nature of our world and the broken business model that has failed to keep up has forced lawyers to become ambulance chasers, document mills, and litigation hounds-- instead of being the trusted advisor clients deserve.

The Broken Business Model and How It's Stuck You On a Marketing Merry Go Round & a Cash Flow Roller Coaster That Will Make You Nauseous

In 1999, I graduated first in my class from Georgetown University Law Center, clerked for a year on the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals and finally began my career at one of the best law firms in the United States, Munger, Tolles & Olson (MTO).

I chose MTO primarily because it had been started by Charlie Munger, Warren Buffett's trusted advisor and personal lawyer. Charlie Munger may well have been one of the last of the personal lawyers of old.

It's reported that Warren didn't make a business move without consulting with Charlie. And Charlie added tremendous value to the Buffett family business and fortune throughout the years.

It was this very reason that I went to law school in the first place; namely, I wanted to be the kind of lawyer to my clients that Charlie Munger was for Warren Buffett.

Yet, you can imagine my surprise when after being at MTO for a few months I discovered that's **not** how law is practiced anymore.

Today, the attorney/client focus is not on relationship at all. It's on transaction, hourly billings, and fees collected. Lawyers are forced to bill time by 6 minute increments and there is no incentive whatsoever to follow up with a client after a transaction is complete unless you can bill for that time. Clients get scared just seeing an envelope from their lawyer in their pile of mail, knowing that what's in there is a great big expense.

The first time the client opens that envelope and sees they've been billed for every phone call and email, they make a vow to never call you again—unless, of course, they absolutely, positively must. Not the foundation for a great personal relationship.

As a result, the client has now been conditioned to stay away from you, their lawyer. And, you are not able to do your best work with your client because you are forced into a position of reaction instead of pro-action. Furthermore, the client begins to associate you with bad things happening rather than seeing you as a partner who will help your client make smart decisions that will ultimately save them money in the long run.

I saw this play out every day at MTO. Clients would come into our office to get their estate plans taken care of, we'd complete some form documents for them, they'd come back in and sign their documents and we'd very rarely ever hear from them again, unless of course something bad happened.

Over time, their assets would change, the law would change, and their life would change, but you can bet your bottom dollar they weren't calling us to tell us about it because they knew they'd get a bill in the mail a few weeks later.

The saddest part was that they would go through life thinking everything was taken care of for their family, but it wasn't and their family would only find out when it was too late.

In fact, this happened to my own family when I was in law school. My father-in-law died thinking everything was taken care of after he spent a few thousand dollars with a lawyer. Unfortunately, that lawyer didn't take care of everything. Far from it.

When my father in law died, his assets weren't owned in the right way and his plan was out of date. I thought it was malpractice. You can imagine my shock then when I had been at MTO for several months and realized this practice was not malpractice at all, it was common practice!

And as I said earlier, putting in place form documents that were unlikely to work when my clients needed them is **not** why I went to law school, so I left the big law firm and the big paycheck to open up my own firm--swearing I'd do it different along the way.

Stepping Out of the Box to Create a New Business Model for Lawyers

Although I made a huge step towards leaving the broken business model behind, I quickly discovered that starting my own firm wasn't enough. I needed a whole new way of doing things, and this new way was something I'd have to create on my own because the experienced, "successful lawyers" were seemingly incapable of moving beyond the old, broken way.

I learned the "successful" lawyers really weren't so "successful" after all. What they were was stuck. They were stuck on a treadmill of marketing to bring in the next new client and then scrambling to do the work necessary to complete the transaction so they could find someone else to pay the bills. A non-stop merry-go-round.

The MOST successful lawyers had figured out how to bring in a constant stream of clients, but they were using what I call "hard labor" to do it – in-person (often one on one) networking and seminars. Effective, but painfully time-consuming and expensive.

I knew there had to be a better way.

Yet because I couldn't find answers from the "successful" people in my industry, I decided to create it myself by cobbling together the "best of" lessons I learned from entrepreneurs across many other industries – carpet cleaning, automotive repair, accounting, event planning, coaching – you name it, I learned from them and more.

But what I really learned is that **business is business is business** –what applies to the optometrist applies to the lawyer to the podiatrist to the entertainer to the coach to the internet entrepreneurs, etc. It's all very much the same when it comes to the running the business side of the practice no matter what the business owner is doing on the service side. So I began to learn from the top business owners in other industries and directly apply those principles in my law firm.

A New Business Model is Born: Happy Clients, Reasonable Hours (or Even Part-Time), and a 6-Figure Salary (Without the Boss)

Needless to say, my searching, trying, testing, tweaking, and trying some more finally paid off. Within three years, I not only built a firm that consistently brought in more than \$100,000 of revenue per month, but I did it by flipping the broken business model on its head and creating something entirely new that clients loved. Better yet, this new model allowed me to work only 2 days a week in my office and spend the rest of my week working from home where I was free to start new businesses and spend quality time with my kids.

Today, I not only teach this business model to other lawyers, but I am building the infrastructure (the systems, tools, and technology) that allows other lawyers to utilize this business model without reinventing the wheel on their own. These lawyers are thriving, despite the recession. They love what they do and, more importantly, their clients love them for it!

I understand this way of practicing is not for everyone. Some lawyers find a sick sense of joy in working insane hours and feeling overwhelmed. They think it's just part of the job and part of what it means to be a lawyer.

Not me. I know that it's possible to be a fantastic lawyer, have a great family life and make a lot of money.

So, What Is This Business Model, Anyway?

Under the new business model I have created, lawyers are not a commodity. Lawyers are trusted advisors who provide lifetime counsel to their clients and when their practice is "full" they stop taking on any new clients.

Imagine that ...

Imagine what that would look like in your own life. It would mean you could stop spending time and money on marketing. What a relief that would be, right? You could sleep well at night knowing you'll never have to wonder about making payroll. You would be able to take vacations, time off, and even work from home if you wanted to, several days per week.

The best part is, your clients would appreciate you, they would love knowing they had your trusted counsel when they needed it and that you've got their back no matter what happens in their life.

Sure, there's going to be some lawyers out there who are going to say this is too good to be true. And they are going to remain stuck in the old, outdated way of doing things that served no one. Why? Because it's comfortable and safe.

This new model requires you to step outside of your comfort zone. It requires you to retrain your mind to a whole new way of thinking and it won't happen overnight.

But, the good news is that when it does happen (and it only takes 3-5 years if you are not reinventing the wheel), it lasts the rest of your career and allows you to build something that not only supports your lifestyle now, but allows you to create something you can sell down the road when it's time to retire.

Under our current model, we work and toil for years to build our practice only to have to keep doing it forever. Does that sound appealing to you? I hope so because under the old, outdated broken business model that's the reality and that's exactly what you'll get.

Think about it. How many lawyers do you know who have sold their law firms? Very, very, very few.

I sold my law firm after 5 years in practice. Unfortunately, the man I sold it to was so stuck in the old paradigm that he promptly ran it into the ground, but I was able to sell it because I had created a business that had a recurring stream of revenue (#1 value driver of a business), documented systems (#2 value driver of a business), and clients who loved the service I provided and referred their friends and family consistently (#3 value driver of a business).

Now, I was only in business a total of five years and only operating under the new paradigm full force for about a year (there was a huge amount of trial and testing that went into creating the new paradigm), but we already had \$9,000 per month of recurring revenue at the time I sold the firm. Recurring revenue that I didn't have to see any new clients to create.

Is This New Business Model Really Possible For You?

I know you didn't go to law school because you dreamed of being a slave to your job. You didn't sign up for sleepless nights, fights with your spouse, the guilt of watching your kids from a distance because you have too much on your plate or dipping into your own funds when it's time to make payroll and there's just not enough cash to go around.

Nor did you sign up for a cash-flow rollercoaster dictated by the ups and downs of the economy or current market trends. I'm sure you know that great fortunes were made during the Depression and great fortunes were made in the early 1970's during our last major recession. Entrepreneurs such as Warren Buffet and Bill Gates still managed to grow their companies to new heights despite the rollercoaster everyone else was on.

And the good news is that you too can get off the ride!

Here is the key though; **you have to work harder and smarter**. You cannot continue to do the same old thing because if you were barely getting by with that in a good economy, you will without a doubt go out of business now or give up entirely. The old way is just not tenable. It doesn't work.

But it's not your fault, either.

Yet it will be your fault if you keep doing the same old thing and expect things to change in your life.

Change is possible, but it will not happen on its own. You will need to step outside the box, step outside the way you've learned to do things and adopt a new way of being with your clients and in your business.

No, it's not going to be easy—it's going to take faith in yourself and faith in something bigger than yourself to move to the next level. Without this faith, you'll simply worry yourself and your business to death and become just another victim of economic circumstance.

From Fear to Faith and a Whole New Way of Being

I've walked the long hard road of building a brand new business model. I've done the trying, testing, making mistakes and picking myself back up again to try something new. Throughout the journey, I've consistently stepped from fear into faith and now I get to ease your burden by sharing with you a few concrete steps you can take to make this the start of something brand new in *your* life and your business.

I can't take you through the entire business model in this one chapter (but, you can learn all about it and how to implement it in your business when you join my Law Business Revolution for free at www.legalmarketingrevolution.com) but what I can do is get you started by helping you understand what to begin right away from a marketing perspective that will allow you to one day get off the roller coaster completely.

What I'm sharing with you is quite simple in theory— but it does require your absolute commitment and dedication. So if you can settle in your mind that you'll do this, we'll get right to the top 3 things you need to succeed this year, which is to be *focused, consistent and diversified* in everything you do. Let's break these down into a bit more detail.

1. Focused

This is one of the most difficult, yet critical concepts that all business owners struggle with. Focusing my marketing was the one thing that I resisted trying for the longest time and had the single biggest effect when I finally did.

But this starts by resolving in your mind, “who is your ideal client?”

If you immediately thought “my ideal client is anyone who needs a [estate plan, divorce, DUI resolved, PI handled, etc.]” or something equally broad, think again.

Your marketing *cannot be effective* if you focus so broadly. You don't have enough money to reach ALL the people who need your services.

You must focus.

Now if you said something more **specific** like “My ideal client is between the ages of 53 and 62, lives in Burlington, Vermont and has a 9 to 5 job working for Burlington Coat Factory,” then I’d say you’re onto something. This is someone you can reach.

And you can get to know this person. Before you create any other marketing materials, you want to have gotten so clear about your ideal client that you can actually see him or her or them when you are creating your marketing. You can see what they look like, what they’re worried about or what they’re thinking about.

The more you know about your ideal client the more you can laser focus your message, your market and your media in your marketing campaigns.

Now focus can be very scary. I understand. There’s a part of you that will feel as if you are cutting off huge groups of people who need your services. But, here is the amazing thing-- the more I laser focused my client attraction, the more I attracted clients of every nature to my business. I can’t explain exactly *why* it works (I think it has something to do with people being attracted to focus), but it’s worked for every single person I’ve ever talked to, coached or worked with who have been willing to laser focus their marketing efforts.

2. Consistent

Focus is fantastic, but without consistency it won’t be effective. Being consistent with your marketing means that every single month you will engage in a series of actions designed to generate new business for you. It doesn’t mean you do something one month and then nothing the next month and then 2 things the month after to make up for the month before.

Lack of consistent action is exactly how you get on the cash flow roller coaster to begin with. You do a whole big marketing campaign, get busy serving the clients that came from it and suddenly realize you have nothing in the pipeline for the following month! It’s a constant up and down of cash flow coming through your business and its unpredictable, which makes it very difficult to forecast, plan and make decisions.

3. Diverse

The third and final piece of your client attraction strategy must be that it is diverse. Diverse marketing means you cannot and must not rely on just one source to bring in new clients. One is the worst possible number for any business owner because it means you are trapped.

Most lawyers are looking for the one big thing that’s going to bring in all their clients. But, *there is no one big thing* and expecting there to be will simply lead to disappointment. Yet when you have a whole new business model in place, you *can* focus on just one thing, your existing clients. But, getting to that point takes time – a minimum three years of focused, consistent, diverse marketing bringing in new clients.

So, if you currently get all your clients from referrals or seminars or any other “one” thing, it’s time to branch out. Eventually that source is going to dry up and then you’re in trouble. One is simply too risky for you to build your business on.

Putting It All Together

By now you’re probably thinking, “Gee Alexis, you want me to market consistently and not just by doing one thing I’m good at, you want me doing all kind of marketing. Do you really expect me to have a nice lifestyle and cut my hours back with all this extra work you’ve just dumped on my plate?!”

My short answer to this is no. Marketing alone will never get you off the marketing merry-go-round. It will get you lots of clients coming in, but there’s a whole lot more to building a sustainable, scalable, sale-able law business that keeps your clients thrilled and lets you work on your terms.

If you want to build a scalable, sale-able business that you can work in part-time and sell when you want to retire, you are going to have to put in serious effort. But, consider this I’ve met hundreds (even maybe thousands) who have put in the hard work and have to continue putting it in constantly because they’ve built something they can’t escape.

Operating under the old model may appear easier at first, but when you look down the road, what you’ll see is 25, 30, maybe even 35 years of the same old, same old and then no way out.

Instead, I suggest you put in a few years of concerted effort following a proven system for doing things and you’ll create a business on your terms. One way or another the next several years are going to pass by; the only question is, “what will your life and business look like after they do?”

Systematizing—The Final Piece of the Puzzle

If you want your business to look like what I’ve described is possible under this new business model, namely **Happy Clients, Reasonable Hours (or Even Part-Time), and a 6-Figure Salary (Without the Boss)**, you need to get in place four (4) client focused systems and two (2) firm focused systems to make this happen.

Client attraction is the first of the client-focused systems that you must have in place to break free of the broken business model.

You also need a proven system for engaging clients. You can do all the marketing in the world, but if you can’t convert your prospects into clients at least 85% of the time, you are wasting your time and money. With a proven client engagement system, you’ll engage nearly 100% of your prospects.

Once you engage your clients, you need a client service system that ensures your clients are taken care of in the same service-based, client-focused way every time without fail. By doing this, you will turn these clients into raving fans who refer all of their friends and family. They'll talk about you constantly because they'll be so blown away. And here's a big secret about client service systems--so few lawyers have them and it's really far easier than you think! Small things in client service make a great big difference.

But just taking care of your clients the right way is not enough to get you beyond the broken business model. The absolute key is having a system for retaining your clients for life. This is where your recurring revenue comes from. This is where your business changes completely. You will be fulfilled, your clients will be thrilled and you will no longer wonder why you became a lawyer in the first place. You will finally have it all.

Now if you're a true solo attorney doing this all by yourself, I can assure you that you'll never be able to carry this all out on your own. You'll need to get some help, but that doesn't mean you need an office full of employees either. But you will need to have a team supporting you. The great news is that today, your team can be almost entirely virtual, which reduces overhead and headaches. When you have a system for having an accountable team (the first of the two firm focused systems), you don't have to build your business all alone.

Finding, hiring and training team members I could trust to do things my way was, and continues, to be the single most challenging part of my business-- but it is absolutely possible for you to do it. It certainly helps when you aren't reinventing the wheel, but instead can plug your team into an already created training process that systematically tells your team how to do what they need to do to run the business the way it needs to be run.

Are You Ready To Do What it Takes for Real Success?

Building each of these systems in my own firm was a painful process. I went through team member after team member because I was constantly changing things and my team couldn't keep up all the time.

One of the main reasons I chose to move beyond my small law firm and create programs to put all the pieces together for attorneys who want to practice under this new business model is because I didn't want to see other lawyers go through the painful trial and error and testing I did.

My current programs give lawyers who serve families (Personal Family Lawyer®) and lawyers who serve small business owners (Creative Business Lawyer™) turn-key systems, tools and training necessary to attract, engage, service, and retain clients for life along with training for their team members on how to run their offices and implement the systems.

If you are in a practice area serving a demographic that I have not yet created a system to serve, consider how you can apply these concepts I've shared to your own business. There's no doubt you can transform your practice area if you simply step outside the box and discover what's possible when you embrace a new business model that will allow you to close your practice to new clients and **stop marketing altogether** in relatively short order.

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In addition to Alexis Martin Neely, contributors to the book include (but aren't limited to) Tom Foster, Rem Jackson, and Mischelle Weedman-Davis.

For further information on the book, please visit <http://www.greatlegalmarketingbook.com>

Biography

Alexis Martin Neely

There are few people who possess the leadership skills to inspire others. There are even fewer people who are willing to combine action with leadership in order to take new ideas and make them a reality.

Alexis Martin Neely is exactly that kind of person. As founder of the groundbreaking Family Wealth Planning Institute, Alexis has created a unique resource that is revolutionizing the way personal legal services are provided to families and small business owners in the world today.

Alexis began her career at the prestigious law firm of Munger, Tolles & Olson and left after only three years to start her own law firm, Martin Neely & Associates, when she recognized that the hourly billing model of the traditional lawyer didn't match up with her dream of creating a personal relationship with her clients.

After only a short time in practice on her own, Alexis had what she now calls an epiphany when she recognized that everything about the traditional business model of the small firm lawyer was broken.

She then set out to create a whole new business model that left behind hourly billing and focused on pro-active ongoing communication with clients and a revolutionary membership model for ongoing service. Within just three years, Alexis had built an annual revenue of more than a million dollars per year in her small firm.

In late 2006, Alexis began teaching these principles to other lawyers through the Family Wealth Planning Institute and has now created a network of lawyers that is providing families and small business owners in the United States with affordable access to their own long-term relationship with a personal lawyer.

Today, she also coaches small law firm owners on how to integrate education-based, relationship marketing into their law firms and coaches professional business owners on how to go from one to one client service to becoming the go to expert in their industry so they can go part time or retire within 3-5 years.

As America's Personal Family Lawyer® and the author of the best-selling how-to legal planning book for parents (*Wear Clean Underwear: A Fast, Fun, Friendly – and Essential Guide to Legal Planning for Busy Parents*), Alexis is recognized nationwide as a legal expert. She has been named by *Worth Magazine* as one of America's top 100 lawyers, has appeared on the TODAY show and is a regular on CNBC's *On the Money*. She is also the Family Financial and Legal Expert on Better TV and is frequently quoted in magazines and newspapers throughout the US.