

# MARKETING FOR COURT REPORTERS

When NCRA surveyed court reporting firm owners, it found that the companies that continued to market were more likely to grow. Here are a few pointers if you are ready to heat up your marketing plan.

By David Ward

When Lynette Mueller decided to open her own court reporting firm, Omega Reporting, in Memphis in 2010 after 30 years as an independent, she knew she would face some challenges. "I was always getting work from the largest firms, but I never was really put on any local attorney jobs, so I never developed any relationships locally," Mueller explained.

Mueller, RDR, CRR, figured the best way to overcome this lack of local relationships was with an aggressive marketing campaign that blended a few traditional advertising components with a heavy dose of online outreach.

Not only did Mueller create her own marketing piece — a 6"-by-8" card that she put in with every transcript — but she also built an impressive website, launched her own blog, and even jumped into social media.

"I also worked hard on search engine marketing," Mueller added. "A year ago, if you had put 'Memphis court reporters' in the search engine, you would have had to go back seven or eight pages to find me; now I'm on the first page. I'm now active on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, because those are very important in helping with search engine optimization."

Mueller also writes her own email newsletter. "I built a database of attorneys and paralegals, and I send that out monthly," she added. "I use Constant Contact so I can incorporate and link back to other information to find which subjects and topics are of interest to attorneys."

What makes Mueller's efforts even more impressive is that she's done all of it — from search engine optimization to email marketing to direct mail to social media — on her own.

"It's not that difficult," she said, quickly conceding, "It does help that my husband is a marketing guy. But I feel you've got to keep up or you're behind."

For court reporters who have, for years, relied strictly on their reputation and word-of-mouth referrals for all of their business, the notion of becoming a marketing expert on top of all their other skills may seem like a bridge too far.

However, with the legal industry declining in some markets and

staying flat in most of the others, court reporting firms large and small are finding that they need to expand their reach if they want to grow their businesses. And the best way to do that is with the right marketing strategy.

"These days, most of my work comes from out of town," explained Michael Wierzbicki, RPR, CMRS, of Wierzbicki Court Reporting Service based in Pensacola, Fla. He added that he quickly realized that reaching that out-of-market clientele required leveraging the Internet as much as possible.

"All the people coming up now — the paralegals and administrators — are all more comfortable on the web and with emails," Wierzbicki continued. "They want to do everything online — they do not want to make phone calls."


Wierzbicki turned to an outside professional to both design and polish his website and to find ways to help prospective clients find that site. He noted that not only was the cost very reasonable, but these outside pros also came up with simple and clever ways to raise his profile. "The name of my firm is Wierzbicki Court Reporting Services, but I have the Pensacola Court Reporting online name," he explained. "My web guy was smart enough to do that."

Todd Olivas of Olivas & Associates in Temecula, Calif., is also a fan of marketing as a key to business growth, especially via the Internet. "I stopped taking out print ads in local law journals and directories," he said. "I'm now putting all my resources into online."

Like many firms, Olivas said he learned by trial and error which marketing programs to embrace and which to avoid. One program he learned about the hard way is paid search — where a company, in this case a court reporting firm, bids to have his or her site pop up first on Google or Bing when a person or law firm searches the words "court reporting."

"I did do some paid search for about a month; it blew through my budget, and I wasn't able to capture the business that I wanted," Olivas explained. "Now, I prefer to spend my resources on really good content — not just boilerplate — that's going to be with me forever."

Olivas's website not only works as a marketing tool with contact

e discovered that a lot of our local clients weren't aware of some of the services we provided and that it really was on us to do a better job of getting the word out."

information as well as a list of the firm's services, but it also includes a blog that Olivas writes, links to articles and other content relevant to court reporting, and *ReadBack.org*, a Q&A website for court reporters and reporting students that now boasts more than 1,000 members.

"It's a way for me to provide something of value to the court reporting community, and it also ends up making my site more relevant when it comes to search engines," Olivas explained. "On my website, I also have a way for reporters to add their information into my database, and when we get jobs in their area, they're often the first reporters we call."

Chuck McCorkle, vice president with the Chicago-based firm McCorkle Court Reporters, advised it's important for firm owners to figure the most cost-effective marketing mix for their company and not spend money for programs that don't show results.

"A lot of people try to sell us search marketing services," said McCorkle. "But we continue to search ourselves and find that we organically have been on the first page of results for a while, so we sort of leave it alone."

Given that many law firms go to Google or Bing first when looking for court reporters in a new market, Janette Schmitt, RPR, secretary/treasurer of Schmitt & Lehmann, which has offices in Portland, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash., said it helps to regularly monitor your own name on search lists, though she added you don't necessarily have to be top of that list. "You just don't want to be beyond the first page of search results," she added.

#### WEBSITES AS BUSINESS AND MARKETING TOOLS

Many court reporting firms have figured out that a properly designed website not only helps facilitate their business by providing a platform to schedule depositions and access e-transcripts, but it also helps them better market all the services they offer, from conference rooms to legal videography.

"We discovered that a lot of our local clients weren't aware of some of the services we provided and that it really was on us to do a better job of getting the word out," McCorkle said. "So we kind of polished up the website and made sure it showcased all of our services. Now it kind of works like a brochure."

Terry Krause, another vice president at McCorkle Reporting, added, "All of our invoices now tell people to go to the website to download transcripts, so when they get to the site, they can see all the options they have available."

But as different companies in different industries have discovered, there can be danger in relying too much on online marketing, and court reporting firms need to realize that they may still need other more traditional programs — including face-to-face

meetings with current and prospective clients whenever possible — to keep their local relationships strong.

"The majority of the business we get is word of mouth and getting in touch with the right person at the law firm," noted Krause. "But it does help to keep our name out there, so we also do print ads in the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, as well as in the *Sullivans* and *The NCRA Sourcebook*. There are also a couple of different legal industry-related golf outings in the area that we sometimes sponsor a hole at."

Vincent Rosalia is founder and managing partner with DepoLink Court Reporting & Litigation Support Services in Harrison, N.J., as well as its subsidiary CourtReporterDepo, and he is a huge advocate of marketing, even in this tough economy.

"DepoLink has been around eight or nine years, primarily serving the New York metro area," Rosalia explained. "CourtReporterDepo is our national effort, where we try to appeal to the traveling attorney by simplifying the way paralegals and other professionals at law firms get court reporters in parts of the country they're not familiar with."

Rosalia does have a sales staff and uses print ads in New York-area legal publications and other traditional marketing tools to attract local business. But he's found that some strategies, including direct mail marketing, aren't nearly as effective because it's hard to reach their target audience, which is the paralegal doing the deposition scheduling at law firms.

"With direct marketing, if we target law firms with a brochure or letter, it takes a lot more than a mass mailing because often those don't get out of the mail room because they're perceived as junk mail," Rosalia noted.

Rosalia also said that with any national outreach, it's probably best to leverage online channels and keep your message simple and direct.

"We do banner advertising and search engine optimization," Rosalia said. "And we have a tag line 'Schedule with Confidence,' which is aimed right at the paralegal who needs to schedule a deposition in, say, North Carolina, and who needs to find court reporters who are reputable and credentialed."

Rosalia also advises investing in face-to-face marketing by having booths at — or even just attending — shows and conferences for paralegals and other law-related organizations. "Sometimes, it can be effective just to be at a booth, shaking hands and talking to prospective clients about our services," he said, adding that because so many court reporting firms are using the Internet to market, these personal interactions have become a great differentiator for his business.

While some court reporters may feel the need to cut back on some expenses in a tough economy, Rosalia stressed that marketing should be one of the last things squeezed. "We just enjoyed one of our best years, and one reason for that was that we believed in and kept spending money on our marketing, be it local or nationally," Rosalia concluded. "There are good predictions for our industry in the coming years, so you have to continue to muscle through. Every firm has budgetary considerations, but you need to make sure marketing is one of the last things you look to cut."

■

*David Ward is a freelance journalist in Ramona, Calif. Comments about this article can be directed to [jcfeedback@ncra.org](mailto:jcfeedback@ncra.org)*