

Promoting  
Your Practice  
During the  
Pandemic Is

# VIRTUALLY EASY

Virtual opportunities, if managed appropriately, can lead to an increase in business and networking efforts.

By Jonathan R. Fitzgarrald and Lana J. Manganiello



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has been disruptive and, to many, devastating. That said, those law firms using the pandemic as an excuse to indefinitely defer all new business initiatives or networking efforts are missing out. Companies like Peloton, Zoom, Amazon and countless professional services firms have seen opportunities amid the commotion and disruption, and so can you.

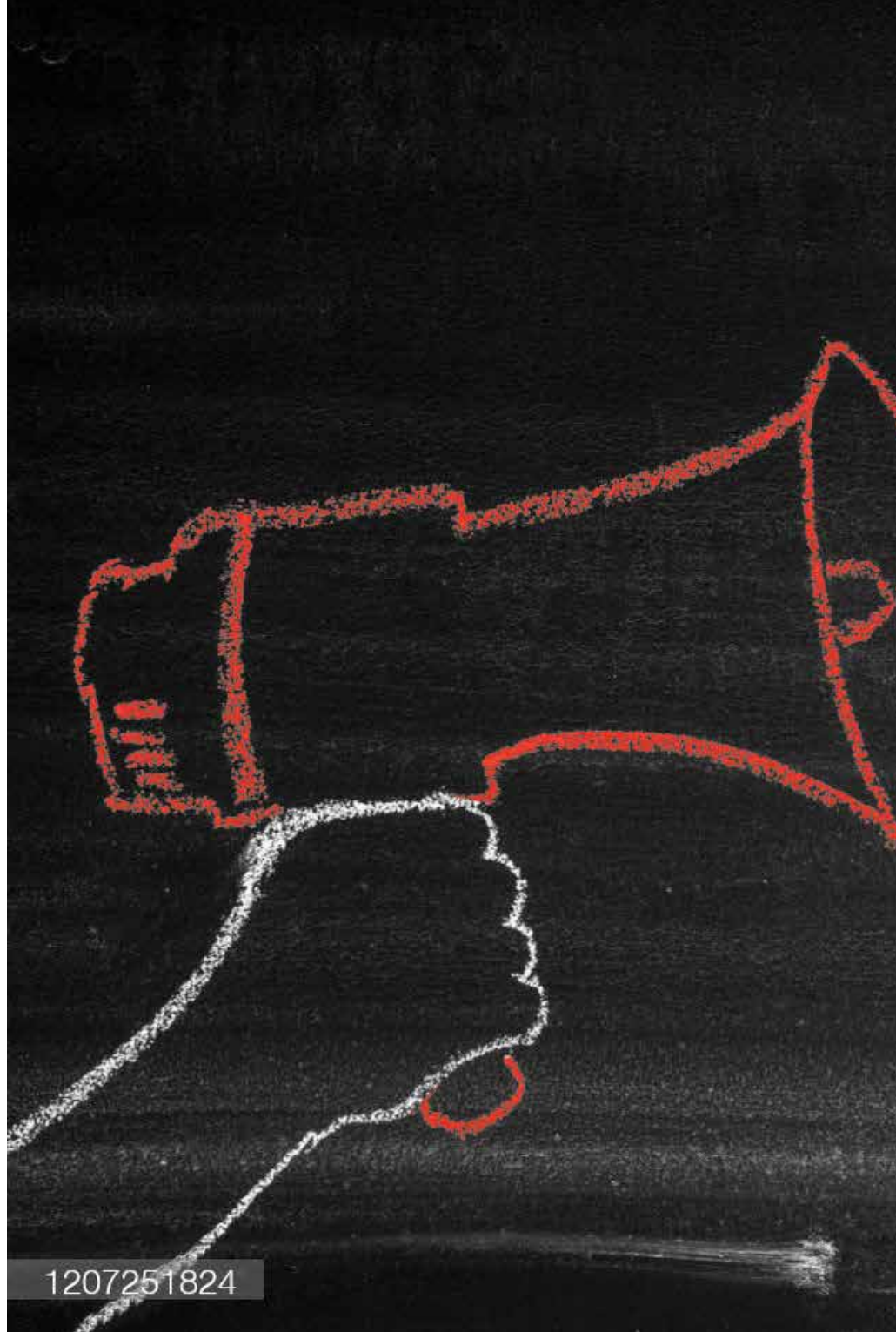
Uncovering opportunities may require improving on existing methods or adopting new approaches to expanding your practice. Ultimately, you will not replace your traditional methods of marketing. Instead, you can incorporate and master new habits that will reap dividends long after conferences and mixers are back in vogue and N95 masks are as passe as mullets and stonewashed jeans.

### **THE ELEVATED ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS FOR DEVELOPING BUSINESS**

Any time there is transition or disruption within a marketplace, clients, prospects and referral sources look to trusted advisors for sage advice, level-headedness and timely solutions that will enable them and their businesses to continue to thrive. If the pandemic taught us one lesson regarding client development, it is that developing relationships on a one-on-one basis (rather than only broadcasting to the masses) is where practitioners are recognizing unparalleled success.

A common sentiment among practitioners is “I’m already too busy with the work on my desk, so why would I look to develop more?”

Existing matters are a result of previous networking and marketing efforts. Being busy today does not guarantee you will be busy tomorrow or in subsequent months. You may have to rely on new ways of creating opportunities and getting ahead of challenges by constantly adding to your pipeline to ensure



consistent workflow. The goal is to keep relationships *warm*, so they never feel awkward when you reach out. If there was ever a time to double down on your outreach, the time is while the future of the marketplace feels uncertain.

Connecting professionally during a public health crisis can come off as insensitive or salesy if done improperly. One strategy to combat what others may

perceive as opportunistic is to regularly offer value when reaching out. The objective is to stay top of mind in a useful way—send a legislative update, client alert, invitation to a webinar or Zoom meeting, or a copy of an authored or relevant article—via a personalized and thoughtful email. Although none of these activities alone will create a tidal wave of new business, continually demonstrating



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changed forever. The choice is ours to either bury our heads in the sand, or acknowledge that the world has changed and embrace new technologies and methods to embrace it. Those willing to adapt and be more inclusive of different ideas and practices will find a treasure trove of opportunities right under the surface.

During the pandemic, professionals became a captive audience, with more and more joining LinkedIn and other social networks. Those who were online prior to the pandemic increased their screen time. Given all this online activity, now is the right time to find creative ways to engage this active, online audience.

Part of our new normal is the proliferation of videocalls. Prior to the pandemic, many were unfamiliar with the technology and likely would have reacted negatively to a contact's Zoom request. During a pandemic, it became the only (good) option. Seventy percent of all communication is nonverbal; and while we lose the benefit of being physically present with professionals in person, the ability to see others via video is a massive advantage over communication via email or phone.

Being sheltered in place (among everything else that comes with a pandemic) also provides a shared experience with members of your network. This instant commonality makes it easier to connect on a more human level, thus deepening relationships that can lead to new matters, referrals and introductions.

Meeting virtually has proven to be a great time-saver, and the investment required to connect with someone new

is lower than ever before. Now, meetings with a prospect or cold contact may only take 10 minutes instead of three hours, once travel time is factored in. No longer must we suffer through an awkward, hourlong conversation with someone you quickly realize is not a great fit. This also means connections who may have been difficult to schedule in the past are now more likely to agree to a virtual, introductory meeting.

From a geographical perspective, working virtually allows the world to become your oyster. You can expand the reach of your business and the reach of your networking activities. Beware the urge to spread your reach for the sake of spreading your reach, though. If you expand your audience geographically, you need to narrow your focus professionally. A family law attorney based in San Diego with a general practice likely would not see a boost in business from promoting herself all across the country. However, the same attorney could see a boost in business by focusing her marketing efforts on matters surrounding surrogacy while expanding her reach geographically.

### **STRENGTHENING EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS IN A VIRTUAL LANDSCAPE**

Maintaining the clients and relationships you currently have is the quickest way to revenue. It is also the most direct way to continue being productive and having a steady workflow. As business development coaches and trainers, our clients regularly solicit strategies for initiating and developing *new* relationships. While

that you are alive, willing and able to be a resource is a critical element of growing your practice.

### **HOW VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGIES CAN ADD VALUE**

No matter how quickly we get back to a *new normal*, the timing of when it happens or how much of the *old normal* will return, the way we do business has



expanding your network is crucial, a tremendous number of untapped opportunities exist among *current* contacts.

Leverage the incredible time and effort you have spent building out your network by staying top of mind with existing relationships. Set a daily goal to proactively reach out—via phone, video, email, text or handwritten note—to three or four contacts with no agenda other than to “check in.” Meeting this daily goal is the easiest way to strengthen existing relationships, because proactively reaching out is one of the highest demonstrations of service.

Studies suggest that repetition leads to familiarity and likability, so the higher the frequency of interactions the better. Once or twice a year is not frequent enough to build familiarity. Your most important contacts need to interact with you eight to 10 times a year. Remember, the brutal reality is that the most competent professional is not always the one who gets engaged—it is frequently the most visible.

Be proactive. If clients or prospects need to contact you for counsel and advice on a specific issue, you have likely waited too long to be a resource. Instead, anticipate the needs of those in your target market and be sure to reach them before they reach you. Your target market should include your clients and your referral sources who may refer you for ongoing services to their clients. Consider what issues your target market may have three, six and nine months from now, and create strategies or thought leadership to address them.

Particularly during uncertain times, business development and networking efforts should be highly personalized, thoughtful and intentional. Large, virtual networking groups and happy hours have, for the most part, run their course. Elevate your networking by thinking of creative, unique ways to interact with professionals in your network. Virtual cooking classes, mixology and wine

classes, virtual murder mystery events and customized trivia games are different and highly engaging. Meeting your contact at a local coffee shop and, while social distancing, walking around the block to catch up can also accomplish your objective of connecting. If the activity sounds engaging to you, it will likely be engaging to your target audience.

If, after reading this, you think you have done a less-than-ideal job of reaching out to your network in the last year, start today. Waiting six more months to connect will only make the exercise that much harder. Remember, distance does not make the (business) heart grow fonder—it makes it wander.

### ZOOM ETIQUETTE

Zoom etiquette is a phenomenon that professionals are all still navigating. Examples of what not to do abound. Bad video etiquette can lead to missed opportunities or a hit to one’s reputation—all of which can be avoided by intentionally planning and exercising good judgment. While working remotely, first impressions matter as much as ever. Decision makers tend to make up their minds about the value you can provide within the first four seconds of the interaction. This dynamic also applies to virtual settings. Keep the background complementary to what you do as a professional, dress in attire fitting for your target audience, sit in front of a window or light source so you are well lit and properly align the computer camera with your eye level.

Avoiding distractions is critical when it comes to choosing your background. Distractions draw attention away from you as the speaker or participant. A good rule of thumb is to keep your background professional, simple and consistent with the physical room you would normally use to host your target audience. Avoid open closet doors, open bathroom doors, messy or disorganized surfaces or fitness equipment. If you cannot change



locations, choose a virtual background that covers up your “noise” and best represents who you are as a professional.

Distractions are also inevitable. Do not get derailed by an animal or child entering the video frame, the doorbell ringing or a dog barking—it happens! Silence your office and mobile phones, turn off audible computer notifications, and put a sign on the outside of your door informing others that you are currently on a videocall. Do your best to avoid distractions, but also realize they are part of the shared, virtual experience.

### BEST PRACTICES AROUND VIDEOCALLS

One study found that people are 34 times more likely to get a “yes” when they make



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an ask face-to-face than when they make an ask over email. When scheduling an interaction with a client, prospect, referral source or colleague, always suggest a videocall. While on the call, understand that you may need to project more energy than you normally would to keep the other party engaged. Nodding your head and providing vocal affirmations now and again telegraph that you are paying attention. Although it feels a bit awkward, look directly into the computer's camera to make the interaction more intimate and to avoid looking bored or uninterested. A good practice is to log in to the call five to seven minutes early. Doing so will give you a much-needed buffer in the event you experience technical issues logging in.

An added benefit of doing things virtually is the “cheat sheet”—an agenda of sorts, for your eyes only, that outlines the points you want to cover during the meeting. Take time on the cheat sheet beforehand, so you can be better prepared for the virtual meeting. The cheat sheet should have talking points written down to keep the conversation moving. It is wise to spend a minute researching your contact so your cheat sheet can include information about their latest public highlights. Think ahead about individuals you believe might be valuable introductions and have those names on your cheat sheet. You can also include potential next steps to suggest at the end of the call, keeping the relationship moving forward.

Working virtually also alleviates the need to block out drive time on your calendar. Although this newly found time may encourage you to stack your meetings back to back, beware of overscheduling. Inserting bumper time between videocalls is important, because you can process what was discussed and capture follow-up activities. Omitting travel time from your schedule is a huge plus, but be mindful of what you are losing by not having time to think and reflect between meetings.

### IT IS ALL IN THE EXECUTION

The fortuitous and spontaneous times of running into a colleague in the office hall or a referral source at a networking event are likely on hold for a while. Finding new ways to re-create these interchanges are of utmost importance to your success moving forward.

Even in times of change, the role of networking and building relationships remains the same. Business contacts continue to need legal services and meaningful connection. Being thoughtful, proactive and consistent during these fluctuating times will differentiate you from your competitors and keep you top of mind with your target audiences for when a need arises. **LP**



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