

Image as a Marketing Tool



No matter what type of business you decide to start, your personal and professional image will always play a key role in your success. Disability consulting is no different!

Disability consulting is a service with heavy emphasis placed on trust and competence. In many cases the client will be paying a significant fee for services and must be able to trust and rely on your honesty and judgment. If you are to market this service successfully, you must actively develop and maintain an open and professional image. This chapter will discuss some of the approaches you can use to create and maintain this image.

The following is a list of suggestions for developing a professional image for your consulting service. These suggestions are designed to help you market your service and promote good will with the general public.

1. Communicate with your clients.

- a) Explain your service.
- b) Explain your fee structure.
- c) Discuss possible outcomes of the client's case for both allowances and denials.
- d) Give no guarantees concerning the outcome of a case.
- e) Keep the client up to date on the progress of a case.
- f) Contact the client in writing with progress reports at least once during the adjudicative process and at the end of the case, win or lose.
- g) Discuss options with your client if the case is denied. If you don't think the case is winnable, tell the client directly!
- h) Always be courteous to your client no matter how much of a pain he/she may

be. Keep in mind that a claimant is usually under enormous stress as a result of both his disease state and perhaps financial concerns.

2. Advertise your service consistently.

The longer your ad appears in a given source, the more credible your service will become in the eyes of the public. I don't know why this is true, but it has proven itself time and again. As potential clients become familiar with your service's name, message and logo, they are much more likely to trust and utilize your service. This trust phenomenon may be as a result of a combination of familiarity and longevity of service.

3. Understand your craft.

Seek to learn as much as possible about disability consulting through personal experiences, continued education via OJT (On the Job Training) and through a relationship with SSA itself. It is never wise to create an adversarial relationship with SSA. Be friendly, open and professional and you will find that SSA can be very helpful to your service. A friendly working relationship with an SSA employee is also noted and respected by clients. Disability Associates also offers two levels of support that when utilized will help improve your knowledge in this field.

4. Dress appropriately.

I find that a dress shirt and tie is as formal as anyone needs to get in this field. The shirt and tie look with rolled sleeves gives the impression of a hard working yet informal professional. The informal professional look is an excellent image to portray as a disability consultant. Too much formality could frighten the client away by giving the impression of a high priced service. This is often why claimants feel uneasy about using attorney representatives.

After your service outgrows your home office, it is important that you pick a commercial location that will not intimidate the client. The fancier the office location, the less likely a client will use your service. The client may feel he can't afford your service and avoid trying. Stay away from Park Avenue!

On the other hand, too informal an environment could give an unprofessional impression that is equally bad. You must attempt to balance your image, which requires judgment and knowledge of your local market.

5. Join a business organization.

There are several business or professional organizations you might consider joining after you have established your company. Examples are the Better Business Bureau or local Chamber of Commerce.

6. Make community appearances.

This is especially important in small rural communities. Take every opportunity to talk about your service in a public forum and be sure to have plenty of business cards and brochures available to hand out to the public. The more visible you are, the faster your service will grow!

7. Design professional looking letterhead, brochures and business cards.

Contact any ad agency or business printer for help in this area if you wish. However, I believe that most people are perfectly capable of designing and producing these types of materials without professional help. With the use of a computer, all of the above materials can be easily produced. If you have a color printer, you can add detail to your presentations that will work effectively in almost any setting.

8. Home Office.

If you operate your service from a home office, don't be afraid to let your clients know it. The majority of businesses in the US are operated from the home. This fact should not reduce your professional image.

Try to set aside a formal meeting area for client interviews in your home office if possible. If this isn't possible, be willing to go to the client's home or a safe third or mutually comfortable environment for at least the initial interview. At least one face-to-face meeting with your client will help build that all important trust relationship. However, we have found that this business can be successfully operated without using the face-to-face interview with each and every potential client.

Image is an important consideration in the marketing of a professional service such as disability consulting. There is no substitute for professionalism in the eyes of a client who is in need of help. Try to achieve a professional image in all aspects of your marketing campaign. If you are unsure of how to create a professional image in your written literature, you can seek help from an advertising agency, the SBA, printers or a university business writing program. There are also multitudes of books available on the subject of business

structure, writing and image creation.

If you have problems with professional image in your media ad campaign, you can seek help from the same sources mentioned above. For specific advertising help, you should turn to the media source you are going to use to produce your ad. Most T.V. ads for example, can be produced by local studios and the creative ideas and technical help is usually part of the package. Never underestimate the power of image in the development of a successful consulting service.

SUMMATION

A professional marketing image is created by following the list below:

1. Communicate with your clients.
2. Advertise consistently.
3. Understand your craft.
4. Dress appropriately.
5. Join a business organization.
6. Make community appearances.
7. Design professional looking marketing materials.
8. Be available to your clients to answer questions or concerns about their case. This single act will make the claimant feel that he is getting his money's worth by utilizing your service.