



THE NEW ELLIS GROUP

Monday Monday

Connecting the Dots with Karen Kaplowitz



*Helping you create and reinforce the habits of successful career building,
gleaned from my work as a business development strategist, trainer and coach*

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Creating High Value/Low Cost Speaking Opportunities. Are you in the habit of relying on invitations to speak at events organized by groups which require sponsorships for prominent speaking roles? Are you frustrated that your marketing budget will no longer support such invitations? Are you struggling to find comparable speaking engagements without a big price tag? Many high quality, national, industry-specific and practice-specific events are “pay to play,” with for-profit organizers demanding big sponsorship price tags and treating lawyers as vendors. On the plus side of pay-to-play, good organizers often deliver high quality attendees. On the down side is the difficulty of proving to your firm that the return on investment justifies the expense. Also, when everyone knows that speaker selection is influenced by sponsorships, the prestige of the speaking engagement may be devalued. If you are scaling back marketing expenses, consider these options for lower-cost speaking opportunities:

- Do It Yourself programs. Webinars, breakfasts, lunches, seminars, and conferences presented by your law firm allow you to tailor the programs to your target markets, exclude competitors as speakers or guests, and control costs. Being one of the particular lawyers featured by your firm lends some prestige.
- National, state, local and specialty bar associations. Join the program committees. Even though more bar groups rely on sponsorships and reward lawyers from sponsoring firms with program slots, speaking opportunities still go mainly to the most active lawyers.
- Local business, professional and industry groups need qualified speakers. Tell your clients you are available to speak at their groups or at client-appreciation events they organize for their own clients.
- Negotiate the costs of pay to play sponsorships.

Example: Your firm has slashed marketing budgets. If you sponsor the big standard industry conference in Las Vegas and host a hospitality suite, you will wipe out your budget. But you are reluctant to give up a prominent speaking engagement and the opportunity to see and entertain clients. Before deciding, you call the conference organizers and a few key clients. You learn that the organizers are willing to negotiate the sponsorship terms and that some clients are not even attending this year because of costs. You elect to attend but with modifications. You go without your spouse and use mileage and hotel points you have accumulated instead of charging your firm for travel. You skip the hospitality suite and just arrange dinners with a few important clients. When a speaker cancels, you try to steer the spot to a client whose company is wavering about sending her. You arrange to stop on the way home to brief a client who can't attend. It turns out to be a great conference: fewer clients and prospects but less partying, more serious attention to business, and fewer competitors.

Are you selling the benefits of past conferences to justify the continuing expense to your firm? Are you finding creative ways to keep the most prestigious speaking opportunities while diversifying with lower cost alternatives?