

How Older Solo Practitioners Can Stay Competitive



solo-practitioners

Expectations are high for you.

Contrary to belief, older attorneys need to be more productive and more efficient than their younger counterparts. You're dealing with a complex stew of challenges, issues that impacts your ability to remain competitive.

It's harder to stay competitive.

If you're an older solo practitioner and you'd like to continue working, your focus needs to shift. You'll need to cover more ground with less resources.

Why bother with that?

Older attorneys should be doing less, not more

That's the perception many of your colleagues have.

But is that true?

In my [previous article](#), I laid out the challenges older attorneys face in the legal industry. Clients and law firms want younger, cheaper talent. Most clients, most firms aren't looking for an exceptional solution, they're simply looking for *good enough*.

Youth is expendable.

Dangle partnership in front of younger attorneys and you'll find many are willing to run themselves into the ground.

Not so with you.

Your knowledge and experience have made you into the shrewd, efficient and technically precise attorney you are today. You command higher fees because you're able to deliver results younger practitioners can't.

You're unaffordable.

At least, that's the perception surrounding you. If you're a partner at your firm, you may be too expensive. If you're not a rainmaker, it's often difficult for firms to justify the expense of keeping you on. When your firm finds a cheaper option they're more likely to take it.

It's worse for solo practitioners.

The perception among your prospects, clients and colleagues is obvious. Many of them feel you're too old to practice law. That you should be "encouraged" to retire.

They'll never say it of course.

They'll simply watch your performance. If you do well, they'll ignore their bias. Fail once and your age is immediately called in to question. Competitors will feed these doubts in your prospects.

Their knowledge is outdated.

Ask them about X. If they answer with Y, they're giving you outdated advice. They're just too old.

Attracting, winning and keeping clients becomes more difficult once this bias takes hold. At that point, younger, more aggressive attorneys begin chipping

away at your client list.

It's depressing.

It's also inevitable, isn't it? At some point we all get old and once that happens our practice begins to decline.

Right?

Don't believe the lie. Older attorneys are *more* competitive

Not less.

Over the course of your career you've developed a vast array of resources that younger, more aggressive attorneys can't touch. Spend these resources carefully and you'll find you already have what you need to be competitive.

What resources?

- A clear understanding of *how* to practice law
- Connections with key influencers and power brokers
- Clarity about what *works* in your market and what *doesn't*
- Awareness about how to spend your time
- The ability to survive and thrive over an extended period of time (decades)
- A realistic understanding of how things are/get done in the industry

These skills are significant.

What's even more significant about these details is the fact that your younger counterparts don't have these skills and resources.

Younger attorneys...

- **Work longer and harder.** But a large block of their time is lost on unproductive or insignificant work.
- **Pay the tax of inexperience.** They make a significant amount of avoidable mistakes. Earlier in your career you did too. But you've paid your dues. Younger attorneys must do the same.
- **Ask the wrong questions.** They often don't know where to focus their time and attention, so they spend a significant amount of time mired in trial and error.

- **Throw effort at the problem** when they need to rely on brain power. They rely on strategies and tactics that are effective but inappropriately managed.
- **Are paid based on their ability** which isn't a lot. They're paid less because they don't have enough experience and because they struggle with the details above.

This isn't a fair fight.

The tools and resources you have at your disposal are more refined than those of your younger counterparts. Make no mistake though, they're nipping at your heels.

Okay then.

The question isn't about remaining competitive, it's really about extending your lead and dominating on your terms.

How do you do that?

First, look for opportunities to boost your authority, credibility and reputation

As an older attorney your reputation is already set in stone, right?

Wrong.

Now is the perfect time to look for opportunities to boost your authority, credibility and reputation. This overcomes ageism because it shows that you're still a formidable attorney. This makes it easier to attract clients and opportunities.

How do you do this?

- **Subscribe to journalist [feedback outlets](#)** like [HARO](#). Pitch consistently compelling content to journalists in exchange for publicity, prestige and credibility.
- **Pitch radio shows, podcasts, webcasts,** YouTube channels and television programs with compelling content. Once you're set to appear, wow them. Do your best to over deliver.
- **Speak at/write for publications with an audience.** Blogging isn't an ideal first step. You don't have an audience. Instead, approach noteworthy publications with ideas that are fresh, compelling and valuable to their

audience. *Over deliver.*

- **Serve your community** with your skills and talents. How can you use your skills as an attorney to serve your local community? This could be with low involvement tasks like speeches and content or it could be more involved e.g. pro bono legal work.
- **Work as a connector**, introducing worthy up and comers to notable influencers. This is low involvement, high value work as it identifies you as a super connector in the minds of those you bring together.
- **Become a maven.** Mavens have a vast amount of knowledge and wisdom. Share this wisdom with those in your firm (or outside of it) who are most able to benefit from your knowledge and expertise. Invite recipients to come to you with future requests.

These strategies are powerful, but they're exponentially more powerful when they're *combined*. Use them or come up with your own.

Second, document your knowledge and experience

This isn't simply about creating content. No, it's more than that.

It's about your legacy.

Documenting your knowledge, experience and training gives you an opportunity to continue to serve those around you, whether you're with them or not. This cements your position as a noteworthy influencer and authority in your own right.

How do you do this?

- **Write a book.** Create a book with the core tenets that have guided you through your career. Younger attorneys value honesty, transparency and, of course, value. Create a book that gives them the practical advice they'll need to weather the storms they'll face.
- **Create courses.** Packaging your knowledge and presenting it as a digital/online course for clients, other attorneys or legal professionals. Want to boost the effectiveness of this course? Provide stringent requirements for your students (e.g. this free course is only available to attorneys who meet the following criteria) that don't involve money.
- **Teach in a structured setting.** Universities, the bar association (local/national) and other educational groups are hungry for content. How do I know? Their audience is hungry to learn! The demand for exceptional education is greater than the supply. Teaching gives you a serious boost in

credibility you can use to establish a dominant position in the marketplace.

- **Speak at industry events.** Speaking at industry events will, over time, establish you as a lawyer's lawyer. An exceptional individual who's capable of teaching other attorneys and legal professionals. Speak at notable events for free to establish credibility. Then, if you prefer to, charge smaller outlets to cover your time and expense.
- **Create tools and resources for clients/younger attorneys.** Use the Google model to create value and establish yourself as an influential leader: **(1.)** Create a quiz or web-based tool on a topic of your choosing (*g. Are you about to be fired? When to push for partner. Will you win your custody battle?*) Focus on *serving* rather than profit. **(2.)** Hire someone to create/implement your idea. **(3.)** Promote your idea internally, at your own firm. Use attorney feedback to fix the bugs and problems. **(4.)** Promote your tools and resources to those outside your firm.

Find a way to get the knowledge and experience inside your head, out.

Then share it with the world.

Doing this gives you the leverage, prestige and power you need to outperform the younger attorneys nipping at your heels.

Third, partner with the powerful

Find powerful partners.

Work with these partners to share the value you've created in steps one through three. These partners are crucial to your continued success.

These partners can be:

- Large, well-known publications like the [ABA](#), [com](#), [Above the Law](#), [Justia](#), etc.
- Corporate partners and tangential sources (e.g. legal products and services)
- Notable journalists and news organizations like [@AlisonFrankel](#), [@aricpress](#), [@VolokhC](#), [@adamliptak](#) and [@JonathanTurley](#)
- Government and law enforcement agencies that rely on or can use legal help
- Non-profits that have a platform but don't have the legal support they need
- Local municipalities

The key to working with these partners?

Give them what they want.

If they have a problem you can solve, offer to do so. If they're looking for feedback or advice, share it. Do they need connections to an influencer in your address book? Provide it. Take the supplier approach. Whatever they need, you can provide.

Then do so.

Once the relationship is established you can choose to request their help with promoting your ideas and interests. Or, simply continue to serve without expectation in return.

As an older attorney, you're outmatched

That's the fear, isn't it?

As we've seen though, this isn't really the case. Older attorneys have a significant amount of skills and resources, things younger attorneys can't match.

They haven't paid the price you have.

You struggled and failed. You worked hard for decades serving, protecting and providing for your clients. You've served your firm well. These details aren't easy to reproduce. It's the reason why you're still competitive, why you're still a formidable attorney in your own right.

This isn't about staying competitive.

It's about giving. Giving to others secures your legacy. It makes your dominant position permanent. What are you giving to those around you? Your clients, your firm and the industry – they all need you.

Give, and you remain competitive. Retreat and you give up what's rightfully yours.

Giving is inevitable.

Give value, or give up your position. They're your only options.

As an older attorney, you're *more* competitive

Don't believe the lie that says you aren't.

Your value lies in your **knowledge**, *experience* and **timing**. You've paid your dues and earned these benefits. You've developed a vast array of resources over your career. Resources younger attorneys can't touch.

Don't give ground. Give the value you've accumulated away instead.

Clients and law firms want younger, cheaper talent. Most clients, most firms aren't looking for an exceptional solution, they're simply looking for good enough.

That will change if you teach them.

Expectations are high for you. Give those around you the compelling reasons they need to rely on you. Those reasons are already inside of you – the knowledge you've gained, the experience you've developed and the timing you've cultivated.

Give more and you'll show those around you that you're too valuable to ignore.

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