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Growing your Business and Networking: A Multidisciplinary Panel Discussion—Lessons learned from the Covid Pandemic

Background

In January 2021, NAEPC hosted a webinar featuring colleagues from the allied professions to discuss how different practices are marketing in the current environment. This article is based in part on a transcript of that webinar but revised to highlight planning and practical steps practitioners might consider moving forward. The hope is that this conversational approach will provide an informative yet informal discussion of the topic. The goal is to provide a wide array of practical marketing ideas that should “speak to” different size and types of estate planning practitioners. While the impact of Covid has continued to evolve since this program, the principles discussed should still have relevance.

Moderator and Panelists Backgrounds

Mr. Martin Shenkman (moderator) is an attorney in private practice in estate and tax planning for closely held businesses and estate administration in Fort Lee, New Jersey and New York City and is the author of 42 books and more than 1,000 articles. He serves as a Director Emeritus on the NAEPC Board of Directors.

Mr. Greg Delisle is the founder and CEO of Forward Progress, serving over 2,000 corporate clients over the past 15 years. In 2012, he created and released a social influencer development platform known as Social Jack. His company has produced over 5000 virtual events and webcasts.

Mr. Tom Forest is the president and CEO of US Trust Company of Delaware. He is the past president and founder of the personal trust division for Charles Schwab bank and Wilmington, Delaware, and a past president of NAEPC. Mr. Forest assisted the IRS with the development of fiduciary income tax returns on magnetic media.

Ms. Bronwyn Martin has been doing comprehensive financial planning for over 20 years with offices in MD and in PA, working with clients throughout the USA, and has a virtual staff of five. She is currently serving as a member of the NAEPC Board of Directors.

Ms. Ginger Mlakar serves as in-house general counsel and oversees the donor stewardship program for The Cleveland Foundation. She has been named among the Best Lawyers in America in the top 50 female Ohio Super Lawyers list by the Long Politics Magazine. She is currently serving as a member of the NAEPC Board of Directors.

Mr. Greg Sellers is a member in the Tax Division of Warren Averett, LLC, a leader of the firm's estate and trust service area, specializing in estate, gift and trust tax planning and he has been serving clients for over 35 years. He has served on the NAEPC board of Directors and is a past president of both NAEPC and of the Montgomery, Alabama Estate Planning Council.

How Covid Affected Marketing and Working with Clients

Marty: Dean, if you could give us some background in how professional practices, financial advisors, charities, CPAs, trust companies, generally marketed pre-Covid and how Covid has turned everything upside down.

Dean: Several years before Covid, we facilitated a lot of marketing events. We produced many events, in particular a lot of in-person sponsored events that were mostly educational by nature. Private or public events shared education for business development purposes. Pre-covid these were a fine approach. About two years ago, firms began to simulcast--run a program both virtually and in-person. And what we saw is that those companies or organizations that were simulcast-driven had already marketed online and were used to it. The firms that were not used to marketing online had a little bit of catching up to do with Covid in place. Pre-Covid marketing looked like more handshakes and more people in person. Then, all of a sudden, we found ourselves in this virtual world where it's not just virtual events, but almost every meeting is virtual. We've had to learn a whole lot together about functioning in a virtual environment. I think that was the biggest impact for a lot of businesses to learn.

Marty: Tom, could you comment on how you marketed pre-Covid and how you're seeing marketing now in a Covid environment? Do you see the changes that Covid has brought to marketing continuing? What do you perceive for the future?

Tom: I believe that Covid has affected the marketing by large banks significantly. For example, those of you who have been to Heckerling, have seen the exhibit booths and events where banks used to reach lawyers, accountants, etc. There was buzz about which banks would invite you to their dinner or other event. That's what we did. We marketed in that way, not only to the attorneys, CPAs, and insurance professionals, but also to clients and prospects. We would take COIs and prospects to baseball games. We have skyboxes at football games and hockey games. And with the Covid pandemic all of that stopped.

That was a huge downturn in traditional marketing for big banks and trust companies, because that's what many did.

For one virtual event planned we had Peyton Manning, Steve Young, and Aaron Andrews for an hour discussing their thoughts on the upcoming NFL playoffs with our clients, prospects, attorneys, etc. It's not the same as going in person, but this type of virtual event is something that we're pursuing now.

What will we do to market after Covid resolves? I would say for the most part, it's going to be a while before we get back to the historic marketing approach of inviting people to sporting events, dinners, and in person events. So, I have a feeling the web-based events might be here for a little bit more.

Marty: Thank you, Tom. I think it's very difficult to translate a lot of the pre-covid events into covid events, as Tom described. Let's shift gears and, Bronwyn, if you can tell us about the size of your practice, so you can show the perspective you're coming from and the nature of your

practice, and maybe you can make a few comments about generally what you did from a marketing perspective, pre-covid and now, post covid.

Bronwyn: Sure, thanks, Marty. My practice has 155 clients who are individuals, couples, families, and small business owners. In March 2020 I started posting on my website that we were no longer meeting with people face-to-face and with a list of options of how to meet: phone/WebEx/Microsoft Teams. I felt it was important to let people know, we are being safe and following the rules for non-essential businesses to be closed, but that doesn't stop me being available for clients and prospects to still have discussions. Now, with the economy re-opening, the way we meet is however the person is comfortable with-to meet in person, virtually, or the true tested way--telephone. And if we are meeting in an office, to be sure that they know my office is a mask-option space.

There was a lot of hand-holding in February and March, 2020, and I made calls, knowing that meeting was not possible, to all my clients to talk to them about what was going on market-wise, reminding them of their long-term goals, and asking how do they want to deal with this new crisis that could be affecting them.

What I also started doing was texting my clients a lot more than usual, especially if I felt that they're in isolation based on meeting calls or their personal Facebook page comments that suggested they're having a tough time being in isolation. I did a lot of business Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter posts, with links of what experts are saying about how to deal with isolation- a reminder that they are not alone with feeling lonely and frustrated.

Marty: Thank you. Ginger, could you tell people what your sphere of the world is, because your lens is going to be different than Tom's and Bronwyn's.

Ginger: I'm in the philanthropic world, focused on donor relations, with The Cleveland Foundation. Pre-Covid we had several live events at interesting places throughout the city, and we'd present information on what's happening in the philanthropic community. We were active in the local estate planning community with our local estate planning council, the Bar Association Planned Giving group; and, we were a frequent speaker and thought partner with them. We also had our own 'lunch and learns' for professional advisors throughout the region, to help them understand how they could partner with us to help their clients and their estate planning. And then with covid, it became a year in which we became a voice across the web and making all our marketing efforts virtual. We created a number of content marketing strategies and tactics, including more than 13 e-newsletters tailored by interest and focus areas of impact, frequent social media updates, a robust blog, frequent website updates. And, in response to the pandemic, we had to change our 2020 signature events to virtual; including our African-American philanthropy summits, annual meetings, donor events, including a series focused on racial equity, the PPP loans, and other strategies available to non-profits in a challenging time of having to be virtual. These events were hosted primarily on Zoom, and sometimes it was in conjunction with other community partners.

We experienced increased attention across the events and a sizeable number of new attendees. For instance, our annual meeting included not one, but *sixteen*, virtual events involving seven

partner organizations and 60 speakers. We grew from a normal audience of about 1,400 people to more than 3,000 registrants with a sustained interest across the whole week, and about 43% of the registrants were new to The Cleveland Foundation.

I believe that we will be looking at doing dual events, virtual and live, because we saw that there were successes with being virtual: we were getting new audiences by being virtual.

Thank you, Ginger.

Marty: Greg, maybe you could comment and first lead off by telling people your lens, and where you're viewing marketing from.

Greg: It will be Marty, thank you. It seems that we might have had a telescopic view several years ago when NAEPC first started the webinar series, and here we are: where virtual is the normal platform for delivery of education not the exceptional platform.

I am a practicing CPA with an emphasis of practice in the estate and trust planning and compliance area, with Warren Averett. We're a regional firm with locations primarily in the southeast. The firm has a marketing department that takes care of our firm's promotion of the services in the various client areas with electronic newsletters, *pre-Covid*. Individually, we hosted monthly lunch and learns for attorneys, trust officers, financial representatives, etc. I'd also take attorney's or trust officers to lunch and did very little marketing to the general public, relying much more on referral sources from our lunch and learns and one on one lunch meetings.

When the pandemic hit, first thing that we did was we paused our Lunch and Learns and found that offering them on a virtual platform was very cumbersome because we were trying to provide continuing education to a small group of people. We suddenly became disconnected with colleagues.

With our clients, we had to be intentional in calling them, offer video conferencing, and continued physical mailings. Pre-Covid we were trying to digitize our tax organizers for clients but met a lot of resistant from our older clients. Now, post-covid, the older population is more familiar with video conferencing, more familiar with email, and more comfortable with our digitized tax organizers.

We expect we will have more people comfortable with digital communications through email and our clients supplying their information to us in a safe, digital format.

Marty: Thank you, Greg.

I have a very small boutique law firm. My feeling pre-covid, post-covid and during covid, is that the only thing anybody wants from a lawyer is free information, so I've never done anything except try to disseminate as much good quality free information as I can. And it was fascinating to see how covid transformed the marketing that we do, and one of the dynamics that no one else mentioned, and maybe it didn't affect others as much as us as an estate planning firm, but the tidal wave of work last year as people start to get planning done before the end of 2020, and dealing with this deluge of work without a lot of face to face interaction.

A cornerstone of our marketing pre-Covid was a paper mailed newsletter because sending something physical would stand out and differentiate me. And the reason I felt that was supported, was the meaningful number of people each year, that would contact me to change an address, and the people that would make comments about receiving the newsletter.

With Covid and the high volume of year-end work it became difficult to do the hard-copy newsletter. This, plus the fear of the spread of Covid by physical means from even handling the mail to handling the newsletter led, to my amazement, clients, even a lot of the much older clients, consistent with what Greg said, quickly became comfortable receiving things by email. There's less than a handful of our entire client list of last year (2019) where I had to physically print out documents and mail them by year's end. Our office was almost paperless pre-Covid, but the Covid pandemic resulted in the clients letting us go completely paperless.

The Covid pandemic had us increase our marketing efforts very quickly on webinars. I felt that by reacting quickly with a webinar on planning in the current Covid environment, a hot topic, or something of interest, it would enable us to provide a great service to clients and referral sources, attorneys, accountants, and other advisors. We added almost 30 webinar recordings to our firm website, and we covered things that were hot and relevant, like working remotely. In March and April (2020), when people were struggling with remote work, I collaborated with other colleagues, often in different specialties, bringing more expertise to the program, and did at least three webinars on remote working. And we did a program on core documents and how they should be modified for Covid, and so forth.

The webinars not only helped us reach a broader audience and expand our email database, but brought in a new business, and I think it was very successful. And the result included our adding 30 –one to two-hour webinar recordings to our firm's website, which I think is very substantial in terms of attracting new clients. So Covid pushed the marketing to a much more electronic format.

Covid has literally changed everything in terms of how we market, and I don't think that post-Covid, that's going to revert. I think we're going to continue to be responsive to new developments and quickly provide webinars on topics relevant to people such as yourselves.

(Tom) There are a lot of trust departments that have an annual policy requirement to mail at least one annual statement to the trust beneficiary. We have over 100,000 trust beneficiaries that we must, *at least*, do a year-end mailing to. So, even though they request it to be online email, we must send a physical mailing out every year.

Marty: Bronwyn? comments on growing your business in a virtual world and electronic newsletters. Do you have an electronic newsletter?

Bronwyn: Thanks, Marty. I've been using electronic newsletters for about 10 years, and my open rate is probably 10% to 15%.

Marty: Ginger? We just started adding a new electronic newsletter to professional advisors who are our primary referral source for new donors. We talked about charitable strategies and what's happening on our community on the philanthropic front in in the newsletter so in August and in

December (both in 2020) and plan to continue their distribution quarterly. Currently, we're sending out to about 1500 advisors with a 99% delivery rate and a 15% open rate We're hoping to continue to grow this reach moving forward.

Greg: The CPA firm uses electronic newsletters out to a very large database that includes clients, referral sources, and others as well separate newsletters to smaller service area or industry sub-groups that need a more laser focus on topics that resonate in their fields. Both types of newsletters are getting about a 24% open rate.

I also personally use the Broadridge newsletter service to my database of about 150 clients.

Once the pandemic was in full force we (both my firm and my own office) started sending out email alerts for newsletters, all focused around Covid resources, whether it be the IRS announcements, the SBA's directions for PPP loans, etc. and those communications were opened at a 39% rate. The results of the Covid-related information newsletters tell us that if there's content that has a real immediate interest, you get a high open rate. I also have similarly high open rates with the Broadridge service that I use.

For our older clients who aren't as comfortable with electronic newsletters, we made phone calls, had video conferences, and continued physical mailings.

Marty: Thank you, Greg.

I send out an electronic newsletter and electronic communications, and I think the webinars that I do are equivalent, if you will, to an electronic newsletter because when I send out an announcement for a webinar, the description of the webinar is really equivalent to a short article on the very topic that the webinar's addressing. We send out electronic communications on a regular basis, and using the contact managers that are available, it is incredibly inexpensive to do. And you don't have to be a tech-wizard to do it. You can hire somebody, whether it's a marketing expert like Dean, or a tech firm, to help you; and I think everybody should be doing it.

I think even if you don't want to put the resources to it, then use a canned newsletter from one of the industry groups that you can buy, so that you keep people informed.

I almost think that the change in the environment due to covid has really accelerated that many more firms are doing electronic newsletters/communication. You almost have to do it just to stay even keel. Even if it doesn't get you ahead in terms of marketing, I almost think you fall behind if you don't.

Dean: you're spot on with that. If you're not there, your competitor is. People start getting better advice or they get more frequent advice from a competitor, and you can lose that client.

If one feels overwhelmed by this discussion on e-communication remember to collaborate. We have a lot of accountants that we put together with financial advisors and with attorneys, so all the content doesn't fall on you. There's a lot of people that have good content that want to contribute. You do want to make sure it goes through compliance but collaborate.

Also, remember that people get a lot of digital things today and a lot of noise, so don't put everything in your newsletter. Put snippets in the e-newsletter, and have the snippet redirect back to your website so that people can read the rest of the article and have the opportunity to see further information about your services on your website.

Growth in a Virtual World

Marty: Let's talk about growing your business in a virtual world. Dean why don't you introduce the importance of a firm's website, talk about web presence, how Covid may have changed the importance or use of a website. What do customers want to look at as advisors in terms of the website; what to do and not do.

Dean: It depends on the target or the audience that you're serving, but we've seen mobile and tablet-based web visitors almost double in the last year. It's insane. We have some clients where as high as 70% of contacts is coming from mobile, so please make sure that you cater to that. People get frustrated easily if they can't find things, if they can't navigate. And make sure you pay attention to what we call the user experience. You'll hear the term "user interface", or "UI", or "UX", which is user experience, and make sure that if you have older visitors, you have to know how they navigate. If you have a mix of visitors, you have to know how that mix navigates on your website and make it easy to find things. The other matter is to make sure you have sections on the front page where everybody gets to. That's what we call "live action updates". So if you have a blog or if you do a newsletter, you probably have articles in that newsletter, which could be blog posts, make sure you feature those on the main page so people can have an opportunity to see that you're relevant, that you're educating, that you're helping. That really promotes that thought leadership aspect that was mentioned before.

Dean: One of the aspects that we saw grow during the pandemic was people of all ages grew their social networks

We saw that we were able to provide education through social media and where people went for personal news. One of the things that went viral, were webcasts that we converted to podcasts, providing education, and thought leadership. With more people walking during the pandemic because gyms were closed, they could listen to audio a lot of times, more than they were able to sit and watch the webinar.

Our thought is that if you understand the different ways that people consume information (social media, webinars, mailings, etc.) and be aware of where the audience "lives"-where do they consume and digest information best- then spend your advertising dollars integrating these types, we have seen business grow, as well as the networks, because of this focusing of attention on how and where.

Marty: Dean, what about SEO (search engine optimization)? How important is that? What do people need to do?

Dean: We could do a whole hour on that. I know SEO is important, pay attention to it, but keep in mind, again, SEO is all about how people find you. It is search engine optimization, that means: What questions are people asking? Those of you that are in direct contact with clients,

you need to communicate to your web designer and the people providing content for your site. What is relevant? What questions are people asking? Because what SEO is, is people are looking for answers and you want to be the answer. So, keep that in mind and make sure you communicate what questions are being most frequently asked and make sure your site pops up at the time for those.

Marty: Everything that's done from a marketing perspective, must make sense for your firm objectives. So, for example, some practitioners represent only high net worth clients, other may focus on mass affluent. The message should be appropriate for the target audience. It has been apparent in my practice that if people called me because they found me from a general internet search the odds were close to 0% those might become worthwhile clients. On the other hand, if Greg as an accountant, or Bronwyn as a financial advisor, or Tom as a trust officer, if *they* referred someone to me, the odds are probably 95% plus that it's a great fit and I'm going to want them to the client.

So, we looked into, and priced, getting SEO work to make our website pop up faster and more prominently and opted intentionally not to do it, because it just proliferates calls from people that are generally not viable clients. Rather, we're trying to appeal to advisors. The point is practitioners should carefully evaluate what it is you they want their website to do. And don't do just what you think everyone else is doing, do what works for your particular practice.

Bronwyn, any comments on how you use a web presence and how Covid may have changed it? Any practical suggestions for other advisors?

Bronwyn: Thanks, Marty. I've had a website for quite some time which I update with different messages, but what did happen in 2020, which was hastened by Covid, was adding a goal barometer to the client's secure portal site. This is especially helpful when the market drops (like the significant drop that happened in March, 2020) and some people panic. The tool incorporates their financial planning goals, all their Ameriprise accounts, and they can upload and link all their non-Ameriprise accounts debt, bank accounts, etc. and these data feed into their goals barometers. When I talk to clients and they're like, "Oh my gosh, am I still going to be able to retire because the market just tanked"? I point out their goal barometer which will show the market drop did or did not affect their ability to be able to retire. I can't predict the future, but if my analysis showed the ability to retire *was* on target, I didn't see the barometer drop significantly after the market drops in 2020. The goal level(s) was back up to 100% after a short period of time [because history has shown us that we can't predict the economic landscape but over time the markets go up]. That's a great tool moving forward, so the client can see that their goal achievement has, or has not, been affected by market drops.

It's likely that a hybrid office environment will become the norm moving forward. So, another tool that we added because of not being able to meet face-to-face for several months in 2020 that will allow any of us to work nationally, and internationally, to bring on *new* clients, is the ability to have *prospects* upload all their documents securely. The documents that I have historically asked the client to bring into that first office meeting: tax returns, investment statements, pay

stubs, etc., they can upload *securely* as a prospect. This is very important when we can't meet face-to-face with prospects to grow our business.

Another tool we've added (in 2020) is that when clients log into their website, they can allow me to see what they're seeing on their screen. Now that we're not meeting as often face-to-face, many people can be overwhelmed navigating another website, and especially for older people, it could be over their heads. How the tool works is that once they log into their secure portal, they can allow me to see what they're seeing on their screen, nothing else, just their financial web page that they have with me. I can point them, literally, to what they need to click on. I can point them and show, "click here, click here, click here, and here's a couple of things that we can do to help you feel more comfortable navigating your financial planning website that you have."

Secure texting has become important. Many clients don't realize that texting generally is not assuredly secure. Availing my practice of secure texting comes at an additional fee for me, but clients feel more comfortable to be able to text me securely, especially with more alarm bells going off about cyber security. So those are four big enhancements I've seen for my clients and prospects to utilize.

Marty: I find a lot of advisors look at a website, "oh, that's a marketing activity", but what Bronwyn just explained is it's not just a marketing activity, it's part of the service that we render to our client: a secure portal, calculators, forms. Those are all services to our existing clients. So, look at your website, not only as marketing and networking, but as part of the service that you provide your clients. That was a really important point.

Dean? using webinars to market your practice. If so, how, thoughts, comments?

Dean: With webinars, just like we talked about with websites and everything else, we have to make sure that we're catering to our targeted audience. Because Covid forced everybody into webinars, or webcasts, or some sort of virtual event, you want to make sure that when you have people register that you're mindful of who's in there. A lot of times people set up an event, they have people register, and then they really don't pay attention to the details of who's in the room. A lot of us are good at best practices with live events: as people are coming into the room, we greet them, we see that they register, we really take special care to make sure they are seated at the right table, they get with the right people, they talk to the right people inside the firm. Treat a virtual event the same way. Now it's time to make sure that those people feel special, they feel individual. And don't assume just because people register that they're going to show up. A lot of times in our events, we don't just send out reminder messages, we give them a personal call, we talk to them, we make sure that the topic that we're going to cover is relevant, and that they're going to get a lot out of it. We can't do that with the larger events, we have some events that climb as high as 5-, 6-, 7- 000 people, but for the smaller and more intimate events, you can certainly have that personalized touch to really just make sure they know that you're expecting them, that you're happy for them that they registered, and you're going to serve them. That's sort of the short version on webinars.

Ginger: Dean did a good overview, but we had many national continuing education events this year (2020), some virtual, but they're more give-back opportunities than marketing tactics. When

we did do virtual events, they have been very well attended, and the positive has been that we've actually been able to reach many donors and partners that we weren't able to do so with the in-person events, because some of them can't drive. The average of age of most people is probably between 50 and 70. The great part is as we've been able to utilize these to connect with so many people, and sometimes we're recording them too now and being able to reuse them for multiple purposes. That's been our experience, and it has been very successful, and I think we're going to continue to look at these new ways when we're doing events moving forward.

Marty: Webinars have become the focal point of what I'll call my educational/marketing and we did one recently for client's advisors on post-election planning. The objective was to explain "What do you need to do now?" We did programs on how GRATS should be structured differently in late 2020, and so on. In addition to the planning-oriented webinars, we've also done a whole series on religion and estate planning, trying to reach new people, and showing clients that we're respectful of their beliefs, and their wishes, and their uniqueness. What I find happens when you do less common topics, is that you attract different registrants, and each webinar we add new names to our database. We record every webinar and then we post it and the accompanying PowerPoint used for the webinar on our firm's website, which has built up a base of materials of over the years. I think this is helpful for marketing itself. You don't have to be the expert in doing webinars. Dean mentioned earlier to collaborate. Collaborate with someone that's done webinars if you haven't. Then get the recordings and post them to your website. It's a great way to build a resource for clients and for referral sources to go to. We also give the recordings to various professional education groups. They post them to their website, so people can get continuing education credits when they watch them on their platforms. From my perspective, it's just another broader audience. When we do these, we post a summary of the program and a link to it on LinkedIn, so that we're pushing it out through that network as well. Many of the webinars that we do, we have them transcribed (many of the web platforms will transcribe the webinar because it's included in their service). If the platform you use doesn't do that, there are online transcription services such as Temi or Scribie that for modest charges will transcribe an hour, or two-hour webinar. We take the transcription and then use a service to clean up the transcription. Then we turn those transcriptions into articles that we then get published. We try to squeeze as much lemonade out of every project that we can and recycle those back by posting those articles, getting others to collaborate on them, and then posting those onto the website, or through other providers.

There are incredible things you can do. And you can do it on a shoestring budget. You can always collaborate. I did an article recently with Bronwyn and a few others and know that getting a group of people together to do something is just a wonderful way to get more fresh ideas. And if three other advisors in different areas are sending out an article or a webinar that you worked on with them to their clients, it's only getting you more exposure, so it's really a win-win. So, record everything you post everywhere and go further and turn them into usable articles as well.

Comments on social media?

Dean: Don't try to be on all platforms. With social media there's quite a few standards and best practices and find out where your audience visits. Also, make sure that you commit to having proper content rotation. What I mean by that is, social media is designed to be conversational. It's not designed to be all announcements, or all news, etc. You're there to engage and be conversational.

I keep it simple. I have a three-to-one policy that says three pieces of high value news-based content that we put out, two things that are personal. Humanize the post: it's not just all about you or your firm. People want to know that you're human, that you're having conversations too. So, include those before you ask anybody to a "call to action." It's more important to have higher engagement numbers than it is to have more followers, and I think people get caught up on how many followers they have. And really, in today's world, it's better to have a smaller audience and a higher engagement.

Tom: coming from a larger organization of over 200,000 employees, we originally said there'd be no use of a social media because the risk was too great for something going wrong and infecting different systems or negative publicity, or whatever. But there's a lot of high touch clients out there with the business owners and trust people that we realized that certain people needed us have a social media presence. So, we do now allow social media, but for only certain salespeople and managers.

Bronwyn: I do use business Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter accounts. I post on the business account pages probably 2-3 times a week.

Ginger: Our marketing team is big into our social media presence. We currently have more than 50,000 followers across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Our follower growth is up 13% year to date (2020), and we have more than 2.5 million social media impressions a year. We use this social media generally to announce our grants and other foundation news; we share stories of community impact; and, we tell donor stories. Currently, we do not use SnapChat and Tik Tok, but our marketing team is saying they're keeping an eye on it, so we shall see.

Greg: Our firm uses Clearview Social as a social media content manager, and my firm produces two or three pieces each week that individuals, who utilize social media, can push through by sharing that expert thought leadership content. I prefer to think of social media, (personally using Facebook), as trying to show the human side of our firm, showing that we are real people, not only for information, but just so the accomplishments that the firm has done, the accomplishments of the individuals, and the reach out to the community where we share our success with the community.

Marty: I think one of the things people want is free information, but quality information. Many people understand the shortcomings of some internet information and want quality information. I post articles on LinkedIn that are interesting planning situations with clients. It's a way to build the network and get people's attention. That's something that anyone can do very easily. One of the other things we *used* to do in our office, is I would have colleagues come to my office to do a series of video clips. I'd have a colleague come into my office and we would do three, four, five

independent video clips on planning topics. Each video is less than 10 minutes and we posted them periodically to LinkedIn. With Covid, the filming in my office was eliminated because we weren't in our office, but we recorded 10-minute web meetings and posted those. We posted those also to a website that we've created, called laweasy.com, so that we have a consumer-facing site with much simpler information that's more digestible than the hour or two-hour long webinars that we post on our firm's site.

Dean: If you look up accountants, estate planners, attorneys, there's thousands of them, depending on your market. If you hire a firm to do your social media make sure that the firm that you're working with that they have an excellent background, they have positive reviews, and that they understand the boundaries of compliance that you have within your firm.

Marty: Final comments on what you'd continue do to adjust and grow your business?

Tom: We get up to 350 pieces of mail every Wednesday. So, what we've done, and this is all of Bank of America, and not just US Trust, Delaware, is that we're going to create a centralized mail place. That will end any mail coming into any office because we're all virtual now. Mail people will scan in all the mail and it will all be sent to the person addressed to by email; and so, we will no longer get an original piece of mail. They've implemented parts of it already, and because of everybody working virtual, we're trying this company wide. It should be interesting when we're all done with no more mail in any office.

Bronwyn: What I did with a lot of my clients when I was speaking to them about their accounts, reviewing their portfolios, and just anything that's going on in their life (March -September 2020), was I sent them a bottle of wine from where I grew up in Australia. With my top tier client's, I also did 2 other activities I hadn't thought of before. "Hey, I know you're sitting around with more time on your hands at home. Pick a book from the New York Times Best Seller's List and I'll mail you a hard copy or the e-book version." And with my 65-plus-year-old clients, living within 75 to 90 minutes distance from me, I offered to pick up groceries, prescriptions, or liquor for them. I know that the liquor consumption went up significantly in 2020. Several of my clients thought this was an email scam and so were shocked when I told them my offer was for real. I think it's something that I will continue to do moving forward only because it lends itself to our client-advisor relationship is not just all transactional. What I did starting March 13th, 2020, for the first time ever, was I started handwriting out birthday cards to *all* my clients. And I think that was appreciated, again, being in isolation. This is not a difficult activity to continue. And I really think I got new business out of just this one activity.

Ginger: I'll really pick up on what Bronwyn was talking about. Again, our work is relationship-based, and we had people just calling many of the donors and advisors to different funds, just to have a conversation with them when the pandemic started and for the first few months. People loved just hearing from someone to say, "how are you?" It wasn't a call because we wanted anything from them, we could provide information if they had any questions about what was happening at the Cleveland Foundation, but it was a way to connect with people that were feeling so isolated. And I think that technique will continue. We also did handwritten notes to

people near year-end. Sometimes people just want something handwritten...and we got some really positive feedback on both of those efforts.

Marty: when anyone sends us a gift, or does something, they always get a hand-written thank you note. There's really no substitute for that.

Greg: We do the same with the note cards. I think most of us on this call are absolutely focused on the higher net worth individuals and doing estate planning for them, and that's where I will continue to focus. I want my referral sources to continue to think of me as their thought leader, and that's where my focus is going to be. In addition, as my practice has aged and realizing that a lot of my referral sources are starting to get to the point where they're handing it off to another generation of workers, I need to make sure that I am becoming that resource to that level of individual as well. So, keep connected with your resources for referrals.

Marty: I want to thank everybody from NAEPC for organizing the program and an incredible panel: Dean, Tom, Bronwyn, Ginger, and Greg. I hope you all found this as informative and helpful as I did, and good luck to all of you and I hope your 2021 marketing is successful and boosted by some of the ideas you got today.

Conclusions

The Covid pandemic has changed our behaviors around marketing to clients and meeting with clients. The panel discussion revealed several activities that could be incorporated into one's practice moving forward.

Events and meetings in 2020 had to become virtual. Virtual events created a medium to draw from a larger geographical area and allowed collaboration. Collaboration proved beneficial and a great marketing activity. Webinars on hot topics were well received.

Embrace new technology to help service your clients. Clients, including more older clients, have become familiar with e-communications. E-newsletters should lead back to your firm's website providing more information about you and your practice and ways to reach you.

Humanize your social media sites, post achievements, and rotate content.

Nothing takes the place of a handwritten card.

Don't be dependent on one marketing strategy—remember the how and where-how does a client get their information and where do they see/hear it.

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