

# Steering into a specialty practice



Jay Drick (Cooley Class, 1976) has carved out the perfect niche for himself. A solo practitioner in Howell, Mich., Drick takes on auto-related cases, such as odometer fraud, repair scams, lemons, and drunk driving. Much of his caseload comes from referrals by other attorneys in the area. In return, Drick sends all of his non-auto-related cases back to the various attorneys.

It's a symbiotic relationship that's been working for years, and it's the brainchild of a man who knew from the start that he wanted to specialize.

Drick's first job out of law school was as a clerk for Circuit Court Judge Michael Harrison. He learned from daily observation of attorneys at work that he wanted to practice on his own. "I liked the freedom I saw," he remembered, and saw



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solo practice as the path to that freedom.

He spoke to some colleagues who quickly affirmed that the smart thing to do was to

specialize, and focused on the automobile field.

“I decided that cars were going to be around as long as I was an attorney, and people certainly got into trouble with them.”

Drick’s legal career got underway when he joined a local law firm in Howell. An acquaintance named Tim Hensick joined the same firm. Later the two would go out on their own, but as solo practitioners sharing space.

“We saw the advantage of one copier, one set of law books,” he explained. That set-up continues to this day.

Once in private practice, Drick really hit the books. He studied the Michigan Consumer Protection Act, the Odometer Fraud Statute, the Uniform Commercial Code as it relates to repossession, then the Service and Repair Act.

“It’s cradle to grave car law,” Drick explained.

Drick markets himself primarily to other attorneys. He sends out a one-page letter that explains what he does and outlines the referral system. He attaches a bright, lemon-yellow Rolodex card that concisely states his name, number, and services.

“I send this to attorneys in the surrounding area,” he said. “They don’t want to reinvent the wheel...or risk malpractice in a complicated, unfamiliar practice area.”

The beauty of it, is that Drick is not competing with these other attorneys for their cases.

In another creative move, Drick created a tip sheet, Tips For Safe Driving, and had it tucked in karaoke song books. That started when his wife owned a karaoke establishment for awhile and included his booklet in with the other ads that dot the songbooks. Soon he branched out into other karaoke establishments.

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For Drick, the tip sheet idea was an easy one. “I fish where the bass are,” he said simply.

Drick also has a publication that he provides consumers to help figure out if their odometer has been spun back.

Drick keeps his caseload pretty close to the Howell, Mich., area, but he welcomes all calls.

“If I can’t do the referral, I can at least bounce questions off (them). Picking my brain is okay.”

Drick’s sense of competition got him into law school. When a fraternity brother of his said he’d been accepted into law school in Lansing, Drick recalls thinking, “Gee, if he can get in, I can get in!” He applied, was accepted, and earned his juris doctor as part of the original graduating class of Cooley Law School.

At the time Drick and his colleagues started law school, Cooley was still

unaccredited. That concern was on everyone’s mind, Drick said, adding however, that he reassured his classmates, “Justice Brennan promised us with his personal word. This guy is a big hitter; he can do it.”

And, of course, it was done. Cooley was accredited and even the original class graduated with the American Bar Association’s full approval.

Twenty-five years later, Drick still likes his work.

“It’s not hard to get up in the morning because I run my own business. I feel like I can take off, or work extra.”

Working extra is a way of life for Drick. He makes a practice of going the extra mile for his clients. One of his highest compliments came from a colleague who told a potential client that Drick’s office was one of the few places where “you could get a dollar’s work for 90 cents.”

It was hard getting started, Drick recalled, but now it’s great.

Drick warns students thinking about solo practice to get educated in the practical aspects of running a law office.

“You can spend thousands of dollars foolishly,” Drick warned. From advertising and expensive copy machines, all the way down to letterhead stationery and envelopes, there are both wise and foolish ways to do things.

Drick is probably in court four or five times a week. His cases, particularly the drunk driving cases, are difficult. By the time a client makes it to Drick’s door, the individual may have five or six prior convictions. Drick shifts into overdrive trying, as he puts it, to “put torpedoes in the prosecutor’s boat.” Once the other side sees there are some leaks in their boat, Drick reasons, they are more willing to work with him. ■