How do lawyers get clients?

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So, how do lawyers get clients? The short answer, my friends, is from referrals and reviews. Put yourself in the shoes of the consumer. If I want to find a nearby library or a landmark, I start with Google. If I want to find the nearest fast food joint, I start with Google, and I'll maybe try a directory app like Yelp.

But what about finding a lawyer? Do people really just Google their way to adequate representation? Do they, much to the consternation of a lawyer I once knew, really turn to Yelp, where lawyers are reviewed like "[darn] donut shops?"

Some do, according to the *2019 Legal Trends Report*, though the majority still look for lawyers the old-fashioned way: They ask a lawyer, friend, or family member for a referral first. According to the report, 59% of clients sought a referral from someone they know or have been in contact with, but 57% searched on their own through some other means—and 16% did both. These numbers are proof that times are changing, as not all clients rely on referrals to find a lawyer. In fact, many opt to search on their own.

59% of clients seek a lawyer referral

How do you get more referrals from John Q. Public? Networking. And while the term networking can terrify shy folks, if you don't view *networking* as the objective, it's a lot less scary and sleazy. In fact, lose the term entirely: To me, the term means forced social events held for the purpose of career advancement.

Instead, just be you—in public. Be in sight, and in mind, for a lot of people. Have a strong reputation for integrity. And pursue genuine relationships with others outside your small circle of lawyer friends by joining groups centered around hobbies, for example. Let it slip occasionally while amongst these non-lawyer friends that you are a licensed attorney. Do that, and after a while, you'll notice friends and family will start passing around your name.

Additionally, there's an even stronger source of referrals out there: your former clients. Build strong relationships with your clients by communicating, treating them fairly, and depending on your area of practice, winning your cases, and they'll reward you by telling their friends about their "divorce guy" or "wills wizard."

17% of clients find a lawyer with an online search engine

The phonebook is dead, and that snake oil SEO salesman might be onto something (so long as you don't hire one of the bad ones).

Here is the truth about search marketing: It's no longer just about your website, though your website and search engine optimization (SEO) are still extremely important. Go search for a particular type of lawyer in your city and see how much stuff is crammed into Google and Bing results these days: First, there are paid ads, local maps results (with reviews!), and after all that come the unpaid (organic) search results that everybody talks about.

The crowding of the search results page is a double-edged sword: It means more opportunities to show up (paid ads, local results, reviews, or regular search results) but it also means more opportunities to lose a potential client's, or even a referral's, interest—sure their friend recommended you, but you have a few recent bad reviews that show up when your name is searched, so do they really want to hire you?

SEO can help you attract new prospects, but it's best to have multiple channels by which you're bringing in new clients.

Clients finding lawyers through referrals from another lawyer

I used to practice family law. As a cynic might guess, my referral and call volume spiked after I moved out of state and stopped handling divorces. What do I do with those calls now?

I send them to a lawyer that I am certain will not only do well for them, but will care about their cases and their families, because I want these clients to get even better service than I would've provided. Plus, this attorney was a mentor for me back in the day and we maintained a strong relationship up until I left the state—both common reasons why lawyers send other lawyers clients.

What about attorney referral agreements? Formal ones between lawyers are tricky, though informally speaking, I would definitely be more likely to return the favor if someone had sent me a client in the past, so long as I thought the other lawyer treated their clients well.

What about those paid referral services? Your luck may vary, but myself and others I worked with had none: All referrals we received from these services were low-value cases looking for free or near-free legal help.

Clients using law directories

Here's a little story about Avvo: A mid-sized firm I worked at in a small-ish suburban town had more than half a dozen "Avvo 10.0s" (the perfect lawyer rating), all with positive client reviews as well. We would regularly get calls for family law cases from their directory, and some people would call twice ... or five times.

Marketing for lawyers is multi-channel: Yes, you need a great website that makes it easy for consumers to learn about you, decide that you know your stuff, and contact you. But you also need reviews on Google, Yelp, and Avvo.

Why? They'd work their way down the list of lawyers in our town, and since our directory and online reputation game was strong, they'd see us first, second, third, etc. Some would get frustrated after the second or third call, but most would end up setting up a consultation by the time they reached the end of the page.

There are other directories and legal lead generation services that you can list yourself in as well. Some are paid, such as FindLaw, LawInfo, and SuperLawyers, while others are free and ad-supported, like Justia, Yelp, and Avvo. One could even make a strong case that Google Maps' local business listings are a valuable directory as well—maybe even the most valuable directory, since everybody uses Google. Yelp review ratings, meanwhile, are prominently displayed on Siri (iPhone) search results, as well as Bing.

Which directories should you pay the most attention to? To find out, look for lawyers in your area on Google and Bing, and look at which directories show up in the search results consistently. Directories' rankings vary by geography and practice area, so checking close to home is a great place to start. Or you could just start with places that let you advertise for free.

How to get clients for your law firm

As evidenced by the statistics above, there are multiple ways that prospective clients will go about finding the legal representation that suits their needs. While referrals are important, having a strong online presence is just as crucial. Here are some top tips on how to generate new clients for yourself.

Create a website

Following on from the previously mentioned statistics: Of the 57% of clients not using a referral to seek legal representation, 17% of those used a lawyer's website. Think of it as your digital business card. Enlist a professional to create a website for you that is well-built, fast, and visually appealing. From there, make sure that you keep your website updated with current information and content.

Be discoverable

Because referrals aren't the only way to secure new clients, you need to make sure that your online presence is strong and search engine optimized. Investing time and money into good SEO can be the difference between your website showing up on page one of Google or not–and once you get a coveted position, you have to work to maintain it.

Leverage online marketing

As much as you can be doing everything right organically for your business's online presence, money talks. Leveraging online marketing is a smart way to ensure that you can compete with the top dogs. Law firms can also build personalized email campaigns using law firm email marketing software to stay top of mind with past clients and nurture new leads. Engaging a digital marketing agency to handle your online marketing and to provide advice is a solid investment.

Focus on content marketing

We mentioned earlier that keeping your website up to date is important—but what can you fill it with? Content marketing is your golden goose here. But what is content marketing, and why do you need to pay attention to it? In a nutshell, content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable and relevant content. If you do this consistently, you can attract and retain a clearly-defined audience—and this audience can become clients. What this means for you is that to stand out from your competition and build a strong online presence, you need to be writing articles that are informative and timely to host on your website. From there, sharing them on your social media channels helps even further.

Reviews and ratings

When you've achieved a good result for a client, make a point to follow up with them and request a review or a rating on Google or Bing. Positive reviews and ratings ensure that you can hold your own against your competitors, not to mention that they highlight your

skills and trustworthiness. Adding this simple step as a matter of procedure on your end is something small that can make a big difference in attracting more clients.

Reputation management

Unfortunately, sometimes you can garner a poor review from a client. If for whatever reason you are not happy with the state of your online reviews, reputation management is something you should consider. There are online reputation management services that you can engage to curate a positive digital brand for your business.

Be helpful to get more clients

This one is a no-brainer, but the fact bears repeating: If you do a good job and secure favorable outcomes for people, they will be more likely to recommend you to others.

Final thoughts on how lawyers get clients

In summary, lawyers get new clients by two major methods—referrals and reviews. By utilizing networking skills and events, you can get your name out there and let people know that you are a reliable, trustworthy source of legal representation. Likewise, if you strive for excellence in your work and encourage your clients to leave you glowing reviews, this will have a positive impact on your reputation organically. A combination of paid SEO efforts and a strong reputation will serve you well when prospecting for new clients.

About Clio

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