How (Simple) Data Can Help You Land New Clients

Written by Mark Britton

Most lawyers are excellent at talking to their clients face-to-face. It's what we're trained to do. We understand through conversation who our clients are, what they need, and why they're in our office.

This is true of prospective clients, too. We can ask questions about their situation, about what they are looking for in a lawyer (supportive and empathetic or all-business and get-it-done), and even what their payment threshold is.

But today, people start their search for most anything online, from cars, to shoes, to doctors and lawyers. They hit the search bar on their web browser, are served up pages of results based on their query—and the online conversation begins.

Unfortunately, this conversation can often seem like it's one-sided. What are your visitors saying through their clicks and visits? How do you know when a prospective client likes what they see on your website, and when they don't?

In other words, how do you learn what your visitors are saying so that you can participate in the conversation?

The answer is simple: Look to your data.

Data may sound like something only math nerds love and understand, but data can be used both by large companies in Silicon Valley and by your Aunt Sally for her JarredJams.com site. It may seem like companies such as Lyft, Snapchat, and Avvo rose to success out of nowhere, but they didn't—they grew rapidly by understanding and ultimately serving their customers, and they started by surfacing actionable data and analytics.

Here are a few simple ways that you can find and use data to help you better understand your prospective clients and gain their business.

1. Pull data from analytics tools.

If you have a law firm website built sometime in the past decade, odds are you have analytics at your fingertips. Many sites are built on WordPress.com or Squarespace, and both have dashboards that will show you plenty of information including:

- Which other sites your visitors are coming from (e.g., Google, Avvo, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- How long visitors are staying on each page of your site
- How many visitors are new versus returning
- What type of devices your visitors are using (e.g., mobile phones, desktop computers)

You can also use Google Analytics to track site statistics—and you can integrate data from AdWords, AdSense, and other Google advertising products to get an even more complete picture of your marketing efforts. For example, you'll be able to see whether your Google ads are driving the level of traffic you'd hoped to your website.

Once you've gathered your data, you'll need to spend some time interpreting it and coming up with hypotheses as to what is happening and why. You can do this by talking to your clients, or by using tests like the ones on usability hub. Some examples of what to consider include:

- Are visitors staying on your homepage for a long time because they're interested in reading the information you've put there, or because they're having difficulty finding your contact information?
- If you don't have many returning visitors, why not? Is it because they're finding what they want and connecting with you quickly, or because they're deciding not to retain your services?

Once you've got a hypothesis, it's time to participate in your side of the online conversation.

If visitors are having trouble finding your contact information, move it to a more prominent spot on your homepage. If visitors are not retaining your services after visiting your web page, you may want to try adding more information about how you help them resolve their legal problems. In this way, you'll improve how you communicate with your potential clients online.

2. Read (and track) reviews

People love to read reviews. While no one believes everything they read, reviews still provide customers with valuable insight into what working with a certain lawyer (e.g., you) would be like.

According to Avvo research, 95% of consumers say reviews matter in helping decide who to hire. Reviews also give you valuable insight into what your clients think of the work you do.

In other words, reviews are great for your online reputation, but they're also a big part of the online conversation you have with your clients—smart lawyers take feedback from reviews and adjust their practices accordingly.

Make sure your firm is getting plenty of reviews online so that you have plenty of data to work with. Start by soliciting reviews from past clients. Better yet, ask clients to post reviews to Yelp, Avvo, or Google Maps when you've completed their cases—make it part of your process by including the ask in a follow-up email to each client.

Tip: Don't worry too much about negative reviews. They provide legitimacy, especially if you have numerous positive reviews. Too many positive reviews, and it might appear that some of them are fake.

Once you have enough reviews, you can do simple math to get helpful data—what percentage of clients liked working with you, thought you were readily available or unavailable, or said you were supportive or apathetic? Pick a metric you'd like to track, categorize your reviews in an Excel spreadsheet, and set up a few basic formulas to do the math for you.

If you spot an issue, take steps to implement a solution. For example, if you find that a large percentage of clients say you seemed unavailable, invest in tools that better help you run your practice on the go, hire an assistant, or use tools like Ruby Receptionist to help your clients feel taken care of even when you're swamped.

Once you do this, you may see the online conversation change. Reviewers may even post follow-ups about how you've resolved their issues and how they feel listened to—an important part of any conversation, online or offline.

3. Test and measure your ads

When it comes to your online marketing efforts, testing one hypothesis as to why your site visitors are behaving in certain ways isn't enough. You need to test multiple hypotheses, challenge them over and over, and, just like in high school science class, you need to test your ideas against a control. This is commonly called A/B testing.

Here's how to do it: First, pick something you'd like more information on. For example, you may want to test whether your Google Display Ad is effective or not. If the current headline reads "Bob Smith, hard at work for you!" Call that ad A, then, re-write the headline to "Injured in a car accident? Call Bob Smith, personal injury lawyer." Let's call that ad B.

Your hypothesis would be that ad B should be more effective than ad A because you've included more keywords, or words that consumers would naturally use when searching for a lawyer after a traffic accident.

Now, run the two ads simultaneously—targeting the same online audience—and see if your hypothesis is correct.

You could do something similar with an email marketing campaign by changing the subject lines or the wording of the email content. You could also do this with print ads, billboards, and really, anything in your marketing portfolio. Just collect the data, analyze it, and see what it's telling you.

Then, test something new. Keep repeating the process, and you'll ensure that you keep speaking to your potential clients online in a way that grabs their attention and compels them to continue the conversation with you.

Once you've gotten pretty good at these online conversations, you'll start to see that they can be as important as the ones that happen face-to-face. Odds are, if you can speak to clients more clearly through your website, responses to reviews, and online ads, you'll have more prospective clients coming into your office—and you'll understand them better than you ever have before.

While your legal practice may not be the next Lyft or Postmates, data can help you connect with more clients and meet your business goals, no matter how big or small they are.

About Mark Britton

Mark Britton is the Founder and CEO of Avvo, an online legal services marketplace that helps connect consumers and lawyers. Prior to founding Avvo, he was the Executive Vice President of Worldwide Corporate Affairs of InterActiveCorp Travel and Expedia, Inc. He

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About Clio

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