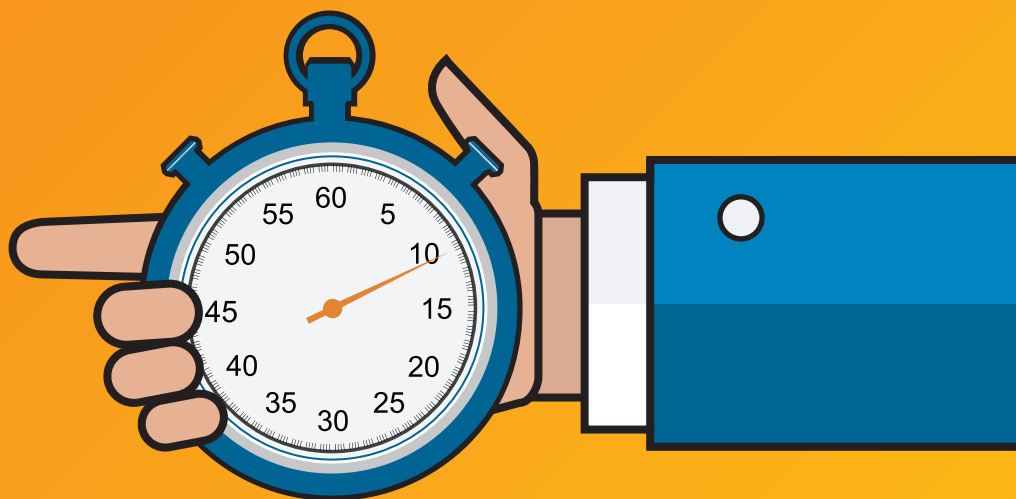


YOUR NEXT CLIENT WANTS TO HIRE YOU **NOW!**



AN ANALYSIS OF LEGAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

NONE OF THESE PEOPLE HAVE EVER HIRED AN ATTORNEY. NOW EACH OF THEM WONDER: **DO I NEED ONE?**

One evening,

on the way to her son's daycare, Angela stops at a light changing from yellow to red. Suddenly a jolt sends her head jerking back and forth. Once the shock of the moment has cleared, she realizes that she has been rear-ended. Still not quite believing what happened, she begins to feel pain in her neck.

Steve is baffled

when he receives an overnight letter from a Manhattan law firm. His confusion blends with skepticism and joy when he discovers that the letter appears legitimate. The law firm represents a female cousin — one who, he learns, has recently passed away. To his amazement, she has left him her entire estate.

Mike and Amy

have wanted to raise kids ever since they married, but Amy had long had trouble conceiving. Finally, she saw a specialist, who told her she'd probably never have children. Consoling his heartbroken wife, Mike suggests adoption — his sister works for an agency that helps Americans adopt children from overseas.

The situations are different, but the people involved have a great deal in common. They're all facing major and unanticipated changes and challenges in their lives. And there's something else they didn't anticipate: the need for legal representation. Further, they often don't want to spend a lot of time finding it. Like most Americans, they want to find a good attorney and hire that attorney as soon as possible.

The tendency for consumers to move quickly is a boon for your firm. But you need to be prepared to take advantage. And you prepare by understanding the modern legal consumer's journey.

Like any business, a law firm needs to know its customers. Using insights into the motivations and typical behaviors of consumers and how they make decisions, your firm can ensure that what you offer best meets consumers' needs and preferences.

Admittedly, few law firms have the time or capability to undertake the extensive research needed to understand today's consumer market. If you run a small firm, that might include yours. So how can you build this crucial understanding?

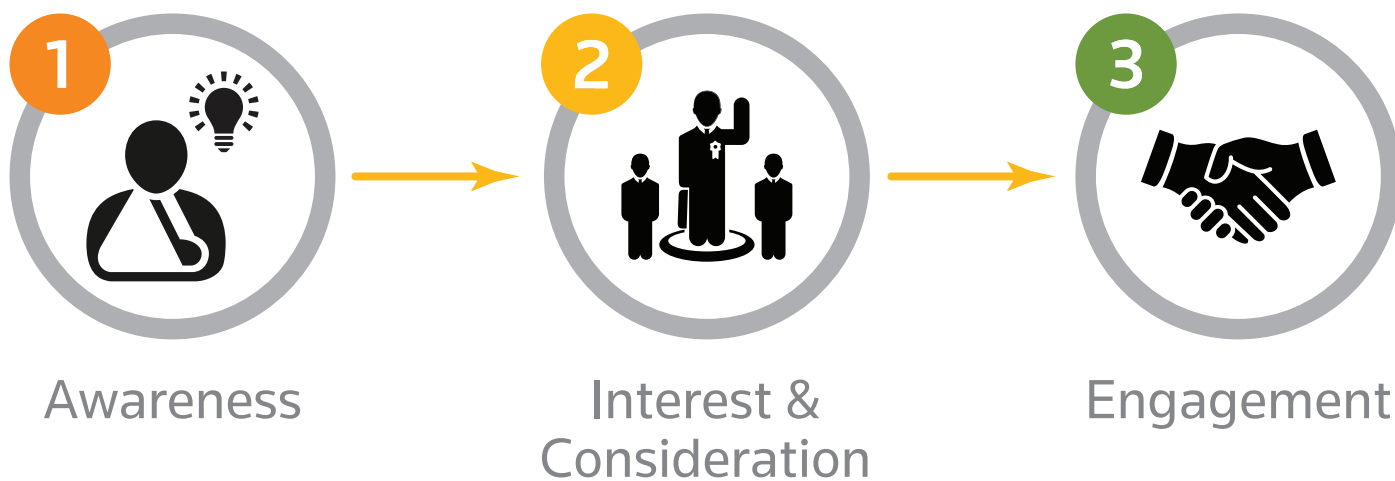
One key source is the extensive survey of legal consumers that FindLaw conducts to help attorneys better understand the ever-changing market for their services. The 2015 U.S. Consumer Legal Needs Survey, which was conducted between August 4 and 18, queried 2,000 consumers age 18 and older who had a legal issue they considered somewhat or very important. Each respondent, or someone in their household for whom they are responsible, had experienced at least one such issue in the 12 months preceding the survey.

In this paper, drawing from the data gleaned from the survey and other sources, we will explore the three stages a typical legal consumer follows in his or her journey:

- Awareness — the point where the consumer recognizes that he or she has a legal need
- Interest & Consideration — the point where the consumer begins to search for and evaluate possible solutions, including hiring an attorney
- Engagement — the point where the consumer chooses to contact and hire an attorney

Along the way, we will point out some surprising insights about how consumers choose attorneys. We also will discuss the ways that you and your firm can best market your services to clients who urgently need an attorney.

The Legal Consumer's Journey



STAGE 1: AWARENESS

The journey begins, of course, when a consumer understands that he or she or someone close to them has a legal problem that requires an attorney.

The vast majority of respondents (74 percent according to the 2015 FindLaw Survey) said that the perceived legal issue involved him- or herself. But over the past five years of FindLaw consumer surveys, a growing number of consumers are taking action on legal issues involving others — particularly their spouses or children.

And emotion, not reason, primarily drives that action. That’s because legal consumers typically recognize that they’re facing potentially major risks. That’s why they’re looking for a lawyer — and why they want that lawyer to deal with those risks as soon as possible.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that consumers buy based on emotion.¹ In a legal situation, where the fear of negative consequences can play such a significant role, this dynamic often becomes even more powerful.

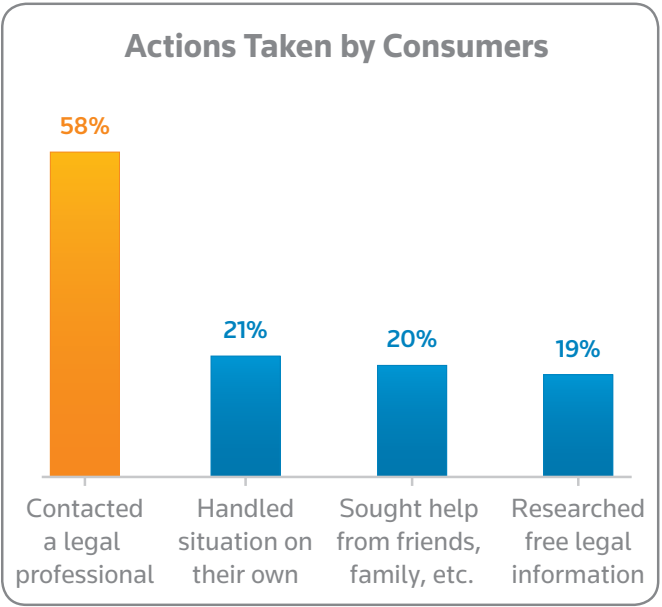
People strongly prefer avoiding losses over acquiring gains.

Not surprisingly, the most easily recognized legal needs are those in which consumers believe they face a major risk. Loss aversion is one of the primary motivators for pursuing legal

representation. In other words, people strongly prefer avoiding losses over acquiring gains.

The 2015 FindLaw Survey also reveals that the main reason consumers consider hiring an attorney is to avoid future legal difficulties. A second, related motivator is, understandably, the desire to avoid jail time. In total, almost half of the responses (46 percent) fall into these two categories.

In order to avoid the negative outcomes they fear, legal consumers naturally and urgently seek a solution to their problem. According to the survey, consumers are almost three times more likely to seek a legal professional for help than any other potential follow-up action, including taking care of the issue themselves; seeking help from friends, family and non-legal professionals; or conducting research to better understand the legal need.



¹ www.psychologytoday.com/blog/inside-the-consumer-mind/201302/how-emotions-influence-what-we-buy

The Takeaway: Be the Confidant That Legal Consumers Need



Legal consumers are often strongly motivated by the fear of negative consequences to seek out an attorney and move quickly to resolve their issues. If you can convince them you have the credentials and experience to prevent their feared outcomes, statistics indicate you will become a very attractive choice. So now the question is this: How can you maximize your chances that these motivated consumers find you?

STAGE 2: INTEREST AND CONSIDERATION

It is important to understand that many legal consumers simultaneously evaluate attorneys while searching for one to contact. These two traditionally separate processes are now often treated as one. Legal consumers aren't merely looking for you, they're looking for validation that you're the right choice — and they're looking for that validation in multiple places.

So what do consumers consider while simultaneously identifying and evaluating potential attorneys? According to the 2015

FindLaw Survey, these are the most important factors they keep in mind:

- **The attorney's expertise in the relevant legal field.** This factor was listed by 46 percent of respondents. However, interestingly, this factor's importance has declined over the past five years.
- **Recommendations from others** (37 percent). As you'll see below, this is not surprising given the significant weight consumers place on recommendations from trusted sources as a way of finding an attorney.
- **A sense they can trust the attorney** (30 percent) in handling their legal matter.
- **The location of the law firm** (30 percent) and how far they would need to travel to visit the firm. All told, 78 percent of those surveyed rate location as very important. In addition, 41 percent cite 20 miles as the maximum distance they are willing to travel.

Not surprisingly, legal consumers move quickly through the discovery and evaluation stage. That requires you to build a sense of credibility just as quickly.

**For legal consumers,
search and evaluation are often
one process. Attorneys must tend
their reputations in addition to
their visibility.**

Offline sources

Even in our digital world, offline sources of information are still the most common pathways consumers follow to research attorneys. “Offline consumers” overwhelmingly prefer to consult with someone they know: 40 percent used referrals from friends, family, or coworkers; 27 percent used an attorney they already knew and had used; and 17 percent used an attorney that was referred by someone with whom they do business, such as an accountant, tax professional or doctor.

Since offline connections play such a fundamental role in how consumers find potential attorneys, it’s essential to maintain a strong brand and reputation within your community. (For more about building your brand, download the white paper, [Marginalizing Your Most Valuable Asset.](#)) Also key: Developing and maintaining your network of business associates and current and former clients. Doing so will help keep your firm top of mind among potential referral sources.

The likelihood of a consumer to rely on offline sources decreased 9 percent in the past year.

Online sources

While offline sources remain powerful, their influence is waning. The 2015 FindLaw survey shows that the likelihood of consumers continuing to rely on offline sources dropped from 85 percent to 76 percent in the last year. Over the same

period, consumer use of online sources increased from 19 percent of consumers to 28 percent, with the majority using multiple resources to do their attorney research. That’s true even though legal consumers typically move quickly to make a hire. In fact, one could argue that they’re tapping online sources of information precisely because those sources are online and thus easy and quick to access.

Websites. For respondents who first go online in search of an attorney, most cite search engines such as Google. Consumers consult an average of four websites in their research, and they’re demonstrating a steadily growing satisfaction level with the experience of finding an attorney online. That said, the traditional online strategy of firms placing an extreme focus on driving traffic to their website through search engines — to the exclusion of other tactics — no longer reflects the diversity of consumer behavior.

Directories. More and more consumers are consulting online attorney directories, with 45 percent of consumers beginning their search on sites such as FindLaw, Lawyers.com and Avvo. Legal consumers find directories valuable because they are backed by recognized and trusted brands and are often accompanied by robust and helpful content resources. In that regard, they provide an additional layer of credibility compared with a simple Web search. At the very least, firms should place a priority on adding rich, descriptive content on the most prominent directory sites.

Social media and review sites. Consumers also cite the growing importance of a firm’s

A GROWING INFLUENCE

YOY CHANGES IN IMPORTANCE AMONG TOP SOCIAL MEDIA FORMATS, 2014–2015



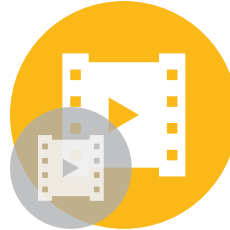
+ 71%

Twitter



+ 78%

Blogs



+ 88%

Video



+ 117%

Facebook

online social presence as a way to help evaluate potential attorneys. Recall that above we noted that consumers' preferred method for finding an attorney is to seek out referrals from friends, family and coworkers. Social media, in particular, provides another way to obtain a trusted referral in an online setting. Every social media category (blogs, video, Facebook, Twitter) grew in importance to consumers by 70 percent or more in FindLaw's 2015 survey.

While consumers may not always search for an attorney directly on social platforms, they often use these channels to solicit recommendations and reinforcement from their networks. In the event that their network cannot provide a referral, consumers increasingly value reviews of firms by previous clients on such sites as Avvo, Yelp, Facebook and others. In fact, studies show a growing respect for online reviews in general. According to Nielsen, 68 percent of individuals surveyed in 2013 said they trusted consumer opinions posted online, an increase from 61 percent in 2007.²

Firms should claim and populate profiles on prominent business review sites such as Yelp, Google My Business, Bing Places for Business, Facebook for Business and Yahoo. Alternatively, services such as Yext can help firms syndicate their business information to a broad variety of business review sites.

Other platforms

Mobile devices. There's another dimension to the online search and evaluation experience that's growing quickly among legal consumers. More than 60 percent of consumers use some form of mobile device, whether smartphone or tablet, to conduct their attorney searches. And they report high satisfaction levels in doing so. Increasingly, mobile devices are becoming the preferred way to research and purchase products and services. That means, of course, law firms need to be certain their websites are optimized for mobile devices. Firms ignoring this step place themselves at a severe disadvantage.

² Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages Report, September 2013

Video. Law firms also may want to consider adding video to their marketing mix. As the 2015 FindLaw Survey reveals, legal consumers increasingly see video as a way to learn more about attorneys, from six percent in 2011 to 14 percent in 2015. Video can showcase your personality in a way that textual content cannot easily duplicate. When consumers are making urgent, emotional decisions, providing an efficient way for them to get comfortable with you and begin to build a sense of trust is invaluable. As you add video to your site, keep in mind that consumers generally prefer shorter videos (less than two minutes long).³

Many paths. One integrated solution.

So it is critical to employ a dynamic, integrated marketing strategy, one that uses a variety of carefully chosen tactics and properties to create multiple locations and ways for consumers to discover and evaluate your firm.

“Integrated marketing” isn’t just marketing speak. It simply refers to a strategy that makes use of all the channels and formats where your potential clients might search and find your message — your services, your mission and your awareness of the client’s needs.

An integrated approach also addresses the dynamism of the online landscape. A continually monitored, recalibrated and optimized marketing program will allow your firm to respond to changing consumer behavior patterns and the effectiveness of individual tactics.

The Takeaway: Be Everywhere The Consumer Is Looking



Today’s legal consumers access multiple platforms and methods in their attorney research, so it is not always easy to predict the path that legal consumers will take. They could be using their mobile devices, reviewing your credentials on your website, or even bypassing your site altogether and turning to social media or an online directory. Your best bet is to position your firm across multiple channels in order to achieve three things:

- Create a highly visible online presence
- Allow consumers to discover you via methods they prefer
- Increase the probability that relevant consumers will contact you

STAGE 3: ENGAGEMENT

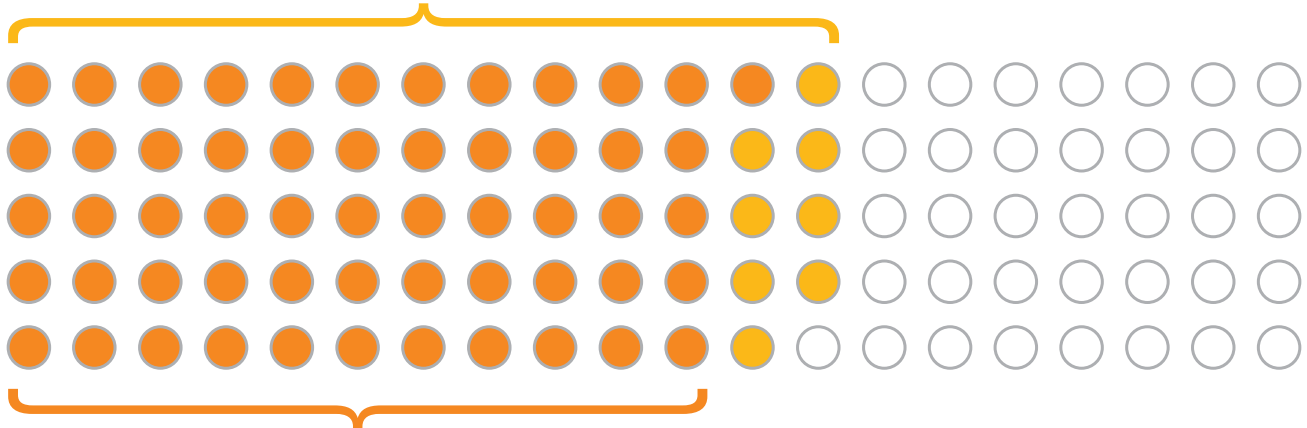
Possibly the most vitally important conclusions revealed by the 2015 FindLaw Survey are these: Once consumers have completed their research, 64 percent of them contact only one attorney. And once they decide to contact an attorney, there is an 87 percent chance they will hire that attorney.

³ Mobile Video 2015: A Global Perspective, On Device Research, 2015

LEGAL CONSUMERS ARE YOURS TO LOSE

64%

CONTACT ONLY ONE ATTORNEY



87%

WILL HIRE THAT ATTORNEY

In a very real sense, if yours is the law firm the consumer calls, this is business that's yours to lose. Therefore, you must provide consumers the information they value — your experience, expertise and certifications — and convey it in a way that builds credibility and trust.

Once consumers have identified an attorney to consider, they continue to move fast: 58 percent make contact within a week, with more than a third of those following up within a day. This is not surprising given the strong emotional motivators behind the desire to address the legal problem. Indeed, there has been a trend toward taking action more quickly over the past five years that FindLaw has conducted the Consumer Legal Needs Survey.

Once they've made their decision, consumers overwhelmingly prefer to contact the attorney by

phone, either by landline (40 percent) or mobile (32 percent). The next most common connection methods are in-person visits and email, at 11 percent each. Most respondents tend to contact law firms during standard business hours.

If you're the legal representative who's chosen, it's your turn to act quickly. Respond slowly and you diminish your chances to turn the consumer into a client. Firms should respond to contacts from consumers, whether they come in via phone, email or chat, within no more than 24 hours and ideally within four hours. No message should go unreturned. Even those contacts who don't represent good business opportunities may be willing to one day recommend your firm if you provide helpful information and guidance.

In interacting with consumers, you must reassure them that their problem can be addressed and

that you are the person to do so. Potential clients want a legal representative who can demonstrate empathy and build trust. A prompt, substantive response on your part shows that you're indeed an attorney worthy of their trust.

Remember the stressors legal consumers are going through. They're worried about potential losses, and they're in "get-it-done" mode. They've chosen you because they need someone they can trust. And they believe you're credible based on referrals from friends or your effective marketing message.

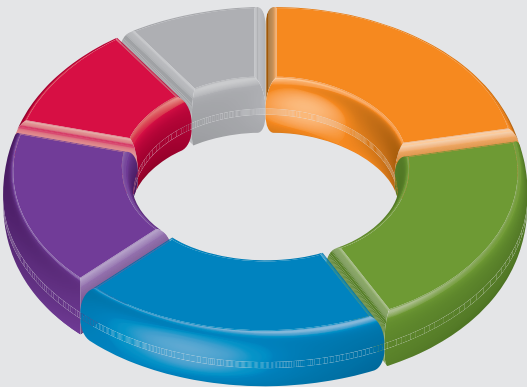
The Takeaway: Be Ready To Act Fast.

Once a legal consumer decides to contact your firm, they're practically already a client. Taking advantage of this behavior depends on your urgency, empathy, tenacity and solid data collection processes — all items addressed in our white paper, [Failing At The Finish Line](#).



CAUTIOUS CONSUMERS

As we've noted throughout this paper, consumers typically move fast to determine their legal needs. But what about those legal consumers who don't move quickly?



21%	Handle Situation on Their Own
20%	Consult Friends/Family/Coworkers, Etc.
19%	Research Free Information/Products
16%	Contact A Non-legal Professional
11%	Work With A Free Legal Aid Provider
9%	Research Paid Software

So is this group a lost cause as a pool for potential business? Not necessarily. For those who followed up their recognition of legal need by conducting further research, 42 percent ultimately contacted an attorney. Even 35 percent of those who sought do-it-yourself products ended up calling a lawyer. You can increase this percentage by providing information that helps answer the questions of these more cautious consumers, while educating them about the potential value of hiring a qualified attorney. You also might consider offering certain DIY tools (wills, for instance) that fit in with your firm's specialties.

JOURNEY'S END

Let's look back on the journey the legal consumer has taken. Again, the typical consumer like Angela — our car accident victim — has an urgent desire to address a legal need and is driven by strong emotions. She wants to hire an attorney right away to help solve her legal problem. And she will likely make a rapid decision to hire the first attorney communicating the credentials and credibility to handle her matter. To become the attorney she hires, you need to appear where she's looking.

In today's digital landscape, consumers will search far and wide for the right attorney. It's not enough to have a good website. Consumers are also looking in new and more places for validation that an attorney is capable, trustworthy and caring. To be perceived as that attorney, you need a marketing program that integrates as many platforms as possible — print, Web and social media. And again, evaluation is now part of search where social media and reviews play a major role. Maintaining your reputation for legal skill, responsiveness and trustworthiness requires your vigilance both online and offline.

If you do these things, and do them right, you stand to significantly increase your business. And earn the business — and gratitude — of the legal consumer in need.

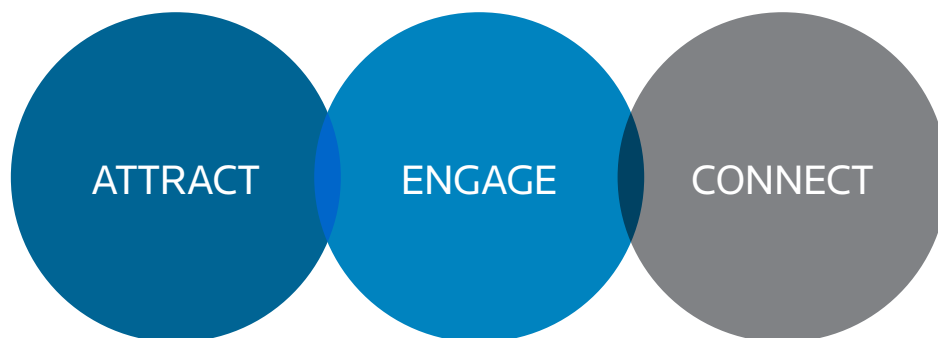
CONTRIBUTORS

This paper reflects the expertise and contributions of several individuals within FindLaw. Tina Johnston oversaw market research, along with Sean Carter, who also supported content development with Mark Jacobsen. Sean Sands contributed editorial oversight while Mark Jacobsen, Drew Swain and Brad Buelow provided leadership and guidance on the overall structure of the paper.



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