

Online Marketing Secrets for Plaintiff's Lawyers:

Strategies to Increase Leads
and Stretch Your Marketing Budget

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." – Charles Darwin



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A Brief Overview

Have you ever wondered what sets the most prominent and successful trial lawyers apart from their competition? By now, you probably have come to realize that legal expertise is only part of the answer. Today, to be among the ranks of the top plaintiff's law firms, you have to have both marketing expertise and business savvy... and sometimes a bit of luck helps also.

Most lawyers do not have formal marketing training and a majority of their experience comes from other practitioners, by reading books, browsing the Web and by applying practical solutions to business needs. A lawyer maintaining a practice is typically so busy keeping up with the demands of running it and staying apprised of legal trends that he, or she is rarely able to keep up with changing marketing innovations and best practices.

Enter the recession. Insurance companies and corporations are bleeding and they are in no hurry to settle cases and part with their capital. In fact, for those who may not be aware of this phenomenon, many insurance companies make a majority of their profits on the investment income from premiums. Until the market rebounds, CFOs, heads of claims and General Counsel are committed to being even more rigid on settlement payouts than they have been in the past and you and your clients will be taken for a longer ride.

As a result, many plaintiffs' law firms are seeing increased cash flow constraints and some will fall into a common trap – reducing their overall marketing efforts. Aggressive competitors leverage this misstep to steal business away by finding ways to maintain, or even increase their marketing, and doing so with less capital invested than their competitors. The recession is creating greater opportunities than ever for plaintiff's lawyers, and those who spend their dollars strategically will prosper, while their competitors will falter.

What exactly is it that makes a law firm a strong marketer?

Three simple letters are the keys to marketing success in any business: R.O.I. – Return on Investment. If you think about it, marketing touches everything you do in your business. Everyone views a television, or yellow page ad as marketing, but sending a thank you note to client and explaining to an old colleague what type of law your specialize in is also marketing. Everything you do takes time, money, or both. Marketing success is about achieving the greatest financial outcomes for your firm, for the amount of capital / time that you are investing in whatever type of marketing your firm decides to engage in.

What type of marketing works?

The leading legal experts (former heads of personal injury firm marketing, top legal marketing consultants, etc...) seem to agree on a number of methods that have worked for the leading firms. While there are many proven tactics to market a plaintiff's practice, here are some of the common ones

- 1) **Public Exposure** – If you are a talented lawyer like Johnnie Cochran, who attains national television exposure, your name becomes an instant brand. The same occurrence holds true when major mass tort cases that one lawyer is associated with lead to an influx of referrals from peers. An example of this is Mark Lanier and his Vioxx litigation success. Some lawyers have local television or radio shows that have been a tremendous source of business leads. Most marketing experts agree though, that spending on public relations capabilities does not generally yield the expected case volume return. Newsworthy cases tend to independently achieve media coverage, even absent a public relations push and non-newsworthy cases, well – they usually find the pinnacle of their glory in a press release, or on a Web site.



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- 2) **Television** – Most experts seem to agree that television advertising works. Injured claimants in hospitals are typically watching television, they are up at night because they are unable to sleep, etc... With television however, there is much clutter and there are legal advertising companies that can achieve a higher return on investment than your firm would be able to directly because they buy the media in bulk and only produce the ads once. Some firms have established new business models by evolving into marketing / lead generation centers that refer cases to affiliated firms throughout the country. As a result, it may be challenging to compete with them on television in broader markets.
- 3) **Yellow pages** – There's no real secret here. Everyone bids for yellow page ads and the more visible and prominent your firm is, the more leads you achieve. The yellow pages are traditionally a great place for getting new business, but are highly saturated today and becoming increasingly more difficult to achieve a return on investment. Here, once again large firms that can outspend the competition have considerable advantage.
- 4) **Referrals** – Most experts agree that this is a huge opportunity. Not only building a strong lawyer referral network, but also leveraging all relationships as potential lead referral sources and reminding them of the area of practice that you handle. Many professionals have Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter networks with hundreds of contacts. Sharing the outcome of a lawsuit, or important legal developments, instantly reaffirms you as an expert in the space and reminds your contacts where to send their injured friends and family members for advice.
- 5) **The Internet** – By now you are probably well aware that most newspapers are on their last breath. Trade journals are going in this direction also. Did you also know that consumers from all walks now spend more time online than they do watching television? Do you remember the days when a college student would put up a Web site for a firm and this would amount to an "online presence"? Now, the Internet is about connecting with prospective and existing customers. The Internet is evolving at such a rapid pace that even Internet marketing experts have to rely on subject matter gurus in specific areas of expertise. Most legal marketers agree that the Internet is **the single biggest** opportunity for competitive differentiation through marketing for law firms looking to grow, or maintain their business and is becoming increasingly dominant, with each day that passes.

How does a lawyer or firm excel in this complex online marketing world?

Unfortunately, as with any industry, there are questionable marketers out there who are taking advantage of the huge online marketing opportunities to sell law firms on why they should be spending huge dollars on all the latest online marketing gimmicks. Many lawyers have no idea what works and what does not in online marketing and they rely on expertise from marketing firms, many of which are more concerned with short-term profits than they are with their client's business and establishing a long term, mutually beneficial relationship. What they often end up with is an expensive Web site with lots of flashy graphics and videos, equally expensive directory listings, a non-optimized, non-monitored, overly broad pay per click campaign, search engine optimization efforts based on strategies that may have worked 5 years ago, and no significant returns on their investment.

It is not just "fly by night" marketers that are doing this. Many established Internet marketing firms have considerable sales, marketing and delivery costs that they need to pass on to you, so often the focus on delivering value to your firm is overshadowed by the need to sell expensive solutions that cover the overhead.

Most law firms, even larger firms with internal marketing resources do not have the capability to stay apprised of all relevant online marketing trends and best practices. For example, no marketing coordinator and certainly no attorney in charge of marketing can be a true expert, in each of the following areas: Web site meta tags for search engine optimization, free online directory listings, pay per click optimization, Web site content optimization, Google AdSense, keyword traffic analysis, link building, online yellow pages, blogs, social media marketing, etc...



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However, there are individuals out there who are experts in each of the above areas. They do nothing else but this – all day - working with top companies in industries that are even more competitive and aggressive online than plaintiff's personal injury firms are. The key to online marketing dominance is to cost-effectively leverage specialized expertise in areas that can make a difference and drive qualified leads.

So what should you look for when selecting an online marketing partner?

- 1) Look for **value**. Find top caliber resources that can achieve better results than your competition has access to and look to obtain this at a fraction of the cost offered by large firms. Remember, if you spend \$2,000 for \$4,000 in profits, your return on investment (ROI) is 200%. If you spend \$1,000 for \$4,000 in profits, your ROI is 400%.
- 2) Look for **competence** in the delivery resources that will be handling your work. Not all online marketing firms are created the same. Learn about what makes a particular firm qualified and competent to handle your business. Is online marketing a top core competency, or is it one of 12 things that they do? Will you work with one person that handles everything, or do you have access to best in class experts in every area of expertise and cutting edge technological capabilities.
- 3) Look for **trust**. Sometimes, you have to follow your instinct. Does everything make sense? Does the arrangement seem logical and fair, or is this person looking to sell me the Brooklyn Bridge. Will a \$50,000 Web site really make a \$50,000 difference? Ever notice that the top national lead referral firms have no fancy sites, or online videos, just direct intake forms? Are firms guaranteeing search engine position for key words that will never drive any meaningful traffic, just to get my business? Do I want to develop a long-term relationship with a firm that uses gimmicky marketing practices to hook me in, or do I prefer a company that is up front about everything with me and uses value to get my attention? Can a firm handling search engine optimization and directory listings for 100 plaintiff firm clients, all in the NYC metro area, really look out for each of their interests? Ask lots of questions and be prepared to learn – you are spending your valuable resources.

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Once your marketing campaign is in full swing, continually measure the return on your investment – how much are you spending, versus how many business leads are directly and indirectly generated this way. This is not as difficult as you may think - just ask all of your client intakes how they first heard about your firm. Most online traffic can be tracked easily with available software.

There are many companies leveraging bulk-buying power to compete for keywords online and focus their success on PPC (pay per click). While the lead gratification with PPC is more immediate, the end outcome of this type of marketing is that Google and Yahoo always win and the top bidders inevitably see grossly diminished returns. For example, national advertising firms are paying huge dollars per click for top Google ads for terms like "asbestos lawyer" or "birth injury." They know that out of every X number of click-throughs, one will turn into a major case. Unfortunately, they are not the only ones – firms are getting smarter and smarter about marketing, so succeeding means staying one step ahead.

This means better results in organic / natural search rankings (something most lawyers do not have the patience nor the expertise for), but can deliver the highest ROI of any major marketing initiative when it is done right. This means being nimble, not necessarily going head to head with major firms for #1 position on the most popular keywords, but finding alternative keywords, mathematically calculated lower rankings and focusing on more targeted regional, or local clients, where the quality of the leads is superior and so is the ROI.

Small and mid-size firms have the advantage of being nimble. They do not have to win every battle; they simply have to win the battle of ROI. Many large firms have such considerable budgets and such a large influx of leads from various sources that they may not be focused on how targeted their online marketing is. If their overall marketing efforts are successful and cases are coming in, many do not realize that they can obtain comparable, or better online results at a fraction of the cost that they are paying today.



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The future of online marketing

Law firms that are not competitive in their online marketing efforts will inevitably lose ground and business. The Internet is giving tremendous power back to the consumer. Claimants can blog, or use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to tell hundreds, or thousands of peers how successful or unsuccessful they perceived the quality of representation, or responsiveness during a case to be. Plaintiff's lawyers will be held to higher standards of customer service and will have to leverage innovative and cost-effective methods of communicating with clients and sharing information.

Every additional minute that consumers spend online, instead of watching television, listening to the radio, or looking through magazines reduces the return on investment of traditional marketing initiatives and increases the return on investment of online marketing. Law firms that do not have solid online marketing programs today because they are not comfortable with the medium must learn to become comfortable with it and discover what type of online marketing works for them in order to remain competitive.

Law firms seeking a considerable online presence will generate high quantities of subject matter relevant content through blogs, articles, and even client contributions.

SEO and PPC technologies will continue to evolve and allow online marketers to make more effective decisions for clients. The online marketing companies with access to cutting edge technological capabilities will be in greater synch with search engine algorithms and will be able to get the most out of their time and efforts.

Law firms will gravitate toward the online marketing firms that are most capable of delivering the best caliber results at the lowest prices. Large online marketing companies with powerful brands may not be able to compete in the long term with smaller firms that leverage the power of the Internet to offer low overhead and transfer greater savings and value to their customers.

How can LitigatorEdge help?

We have revolutionized plaintiff lawyer marketing through a breakthrough approach. We couple U.S. account management with over 120 top offshore online marketing and technology delivery experts to deliver maximum lead generation impact, at costs that are 50%+ lower than comparable services. Using state of the art patent-pending technology that no other marketing firms in the legal domain possess today, we help clients outsmart, when they are unable to outspend their competition online. With LitigatorEdge, you do not have access to just one individual with online marketing expertise – you can leverage subject matter experts in a broad range of functional areas including:

- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Pay per click (PPC) management
- Link building
- Web design, development and maintenance
- Blog Management & link building
- Social network profile management
- E-mail campaign / database management
- Online Advertising
- Targeted demographic marketing

You only pay for what you use, but know that you always have a team of experts on your side that knows the latest marketing tricks, trends and Google algorithms. Remember, offshore firms have no way to market to the U.S. other than the Internet. They have been forced to adapt and are online marketing experts, serving leading e-commerce businesses and other highly competitive online marketplaces. Having these resources available to you, under the management of a U.S. legal marketing expert, means that you are getting the best value for your money (50%+ lower rates) and access to world class online marketing talent and technology. This arrangement also means that



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you will have U.S. accountability for results, never have to deal with an offshore firm's accent limitations, or overseas billing concerns.

Remember, when a firm spends money to bring 5 sales reps to a conference to explain their service in person, guess who has to ultimately foot that bill? Paying overhead becomes that company's number one concern, not your firm's marketing ROI. Wouldn't you rather pay for higher caliber delivery staff that will focus on getting better results for your money?

Large legal referral companies are concerned with the overall number of leads they generate and how many affiliates they sign up. If some of their affiliates are doing well, they accept that they will turn over many other affiliates not seeing results, as a part of doing business. As a result, many firms have high client turnover and put considerable marketing dollars into Google's and Yahoo's coffers, without the corresponding financial return for their clients.

Every single client matters to us and our business model does not revolve around frequent changes in dance partners. We partner with law firms for the long term and grow our business as they grow theirs. We are passionate about helping our clients beat their competition and your business success, is our business success.

For more information on how your firm can maximize its online marketing ROI, please visit www.litigatoredege.com, e-mail us at info@litigatoredege.com or call (917) 378-3378.

CONTACT US TODAY FOR A FREE KEYWORD & COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

About

LitigatorEdge was founded by John N. Zissu, Esq., a NY lawyer, Fordham University Law School graduate and career legal industry marketer. In the late 1990s, John managed online marketing for Attorney Advantage, a leading U.S. lawyer advertising company focusing on birth trauma litigation, where he was directly responsible for online lead generation campaigns that connected thousands of prospective claimants with top plaintiff's lawyers. The cases that were later filed by the firms resulted in tens of millions of dollars in verdict and settlement awards.

Thereafter, he helped launch Cybersettle, where he led marketing efforts for 10 years, most recently as its Vice President of Sales and Marketing, growing the company into a world leader in Web assisted insurance claim resolution, with over 30,000 plaintiff's lawyer clients and over \$1.6 Billion in online settlements facilitated. Over the past 10 years, John has participated in numerous AAJ, NYSTLA and other trial lawyer events and has been featured in multiple legal and business publications.

Immediately prior to launching LitigatorEdge, John was a marketing consultant for multiple law firms and vendors in the legal space, including a role as the executive marketing consultant to the CEO of Law Allies, the leader in operational consulting, legal outsourcing and technology for small and mid-size litigation firms. John's past consulting assignments include a prestigious engagement with the Rockefeller companies, which called for the management of all marketing promotion and logistics for ROC'08, the organizations' inaugural Global Wealth Management Forum for the ultra high net worth.

John is the author of a marketing blog for litigation firms that may be found on the LitigatorEdge Web site www.litigatoredege.com. John has profiles on the major online social networks and accepts all invitations from lawyers seeking tips to improve their firms' marketing performance.



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