

How Attorneys Can Make the Most of Online Reviews

Consumers today have an abundance of ways to make their voices heard.

They can take to apps and websites like Yelp®, Facebook®, Twitter® and more to register their complaints and compliments about everything from uncomfortable pillows in their hotel rooms to the latest Marvel movie to the integrity of a local auto mechanic. Businesses that don't pay attention to what is being said about them on the internet run the risk of losing existing customers and turning off potential patrons.

Like every sushi joint in the 25-mile radius around your current location, lawyers are now subject to the collective online wisdom of crowds via Yelp-like websites. One of the most well-known sites, Avvo.com, promises users access to ratings, reviews and disciplinary records for lawyers in every state. Users can also write reviews of their own to help inform would-be clients about lawyers' pros and cons. Other sites with consumer reviews of lawyers include Lawyers.com, which is integrated with Martindale-Hubbell®, a longstanding peer-review service, and well-known and broad-based stalwarts such as Google and Yelp.

For many lawyers, including independent practitioners, the prospect of having scathing comments next to their names—let alone that hideous headshot from five years ago—sounds like a nightmare. On the other hand, the reality is that consumers now **put nearly as much stock** in online reviews as they do in referrals from their friends, colleagues and acquaintances; and research indicates that 75 percent of individuals seeking attorneys to represent them use online resources in their searches. That means review sites can provide an invaluable way for small law practices to promote themselves.

Here are a few tips to help attorneys and their firms take full advantage of online reviews.

Dealing with Negative Reviews

Avvo® has **safeguards** in place to ensure users aren't abusing the site, which include checking all reviews to ensure they adhere to its **community guidelines** for posting. Additionally, Avvo has protocols in place that allow lawyers to dispute the validity of reviews they don't believe to be written by actual clients.

Attorneys also have the option to respond to reviews on Avvo, enabling them to address reviewers' criticisms. Avvo guidance notes that "the most effective responses to negative feedback online can be a simple comment. This also sends a powerful message to potential clients about your professionalism and interest in feedback."

Listen to the Feedback

Rather than bristling at unflattering online reviews, many business owners use them as **constructive feedback**. When the same issues with a restaurant come up repeatedly, the clientele is sending a message.

The same goes for a lawyer. Don't ignore the criticisms in online reviews. Focus instead on using that feedback to improve.

Do Not Post Fake Reviews

It's an unfortunate fact that some firms, like other businesses, have attempted to game the system by submitting fake positive reviews of themselves. Don't do it.

Consider How You Want to Ask Clients for Reviews

Asking clients to recommend you to others can be uncomfortable for people in any profession, but it's a necessity as online searches and reviews take on a more prominent role in decision making. Seven in 10 people say they will leave reviews if asked, according to online marketing firm [Broadly](#)[®]. How attorneys ask for clients to review their work can have a big effect on the quality and effectiveness of a review, let alone if the clients actually do it.

Some lawyers might not feel so pushy if they ask in person if they can send clients an email at a later date that walks them through the process of filling out a review. For lawyers and firms that maintain a robust online presence, a link or button on their website to a review site is an option.

There are any number of other ways for attorneys to solicit reviews. Knowing what works best for you ahead of time should make it easier to ask.

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