

The ABA Reports on Lawyer Websites and Lawyer Marketing

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We always look forward to the ABA Legal Technology Resource Center's Annual Legal Technology Survey Report on the use of technology in the legal profession. The summary of the "[Marketing and Communication](#)" portion of the 2019 survey was recently published. It was written by our good friend Allison Shields and contains some fascinating (and worrisome) statistics.

Respondents to the 2019 Survey segment covering websites and law firm marketing were mostly solos or from smaller firms, consisting of 27% solos, 29% lawyers in firms of 2-9 lawyers, 18% from firms of 10-49 lawyers, 11% from firms of between 100-499 lawyers, 10% from firms with 500+ lawyers, and 5% from firms with 50-99 lawyers. The average age of respondents was 58 years old, with 55% of respondents identifying as 60+ years old, and another 24% between 50-59 years old. Wow, the graying of the profession is noteworthy – or do younger lawyers not participate in surveys?

The summary focuses on marketing and website trends mainly among firms with fewer than 50 lawyers. We think the survey is troubling in that it seems that many solo and small firm attorneys engage in "random acts of marketing" rather than having a cohesive marketing plan.

According to the 2019 Survey, only 47% of firms overall have a marketing budget. The largest firms are the most likely to report having such a budget (94% of those from firms of 100+ lawyers), and 61% from firms of 10-49 lawyers. However, only 31% of firms from 2-9 lawyers and 17% of solo respondents have firm marketing budgets.

From our foxhole, these stats are pretty much reflective of what we see in the real world. Solos and small firm lawyers struggle to keep their fundamental technology "semi" up-to-date. Their revenues just don't seem to permit the luxury of having a marketing budget.

The leading channels for marketing across all firm sizes are email (41%), Facebook (30%), and direct mail (19%). Fewer than 15% of respondents overall report their

firms use Avvo, Findlaw, Lawyers.com, or the Yellow Pages to market their practices, however, 25% of solos report using Avvo.

Frankly, we think Avvo may have peaked. It will be interesting to see next year's numbers. Consistently, solo and small firm lawyers have reported aggressive marketing by Avvo which may contribute to the number of lawyers using it.

Solos most often use email (40%) for their marketing, followed by Facebook (26%) and Avvo (25%). Facebook was the most popular for lawyers from firms of 2-9 lawyers at 39%, followed by print at 33%. In firms of 10-49 lawyers, respondents reported using email most often (47%), followed by print (41%). LinkedIn was not included as one of the channels in this survey question, which we find odd. When we poll audiences, LinkedIn is frequently mentioned as a valuable marketing tool.

Only 57% of solos have a firm website, while over 90% of respondents in all other firm sizes report having a firm website. This is disturbing in a time when prospective clients are often searching online (via their computer or smartphone). Of those solos who do have a website, we think it's a good bet that many of those websites are not optimized for mobile device display, which is all but required in today's world.

Although most firms report they have not used video in their marketing, the numbers show an increase in the adoption of video. 26% of respondents said their firms use video as part of their marketing, and 65% have not yet adopted video marketing. Naturally, the largest firms (100+ attorneys) are most likely to use video – but then of course they have the budget for it. Only 4% of solos use video – and the quality tends to be low among smaller firms.

30% reported this year that their firm has a blog. Only 9% of solos have a blog. Our guess is only the big firms (in general) tend to have regular posts. There are many, many legal blogs where the last post was made months ago – not a good reflection on the firm. The survey reports that 56% update their blogs monthly and 18% update it weekly. 21% have stopped updating their blog completely and some have others do their blog posts for them.

80% of firms have a presence on social media. LinkedIn leads at 79%, followed by Facebook (54%), Martindale (38%), and Avvo (23%). Reported use of Facebook and Avvo has declined over the past year; in 2018, 63% of respondents reported

their firms maintained a Facebook presence, and 36% maintained a presence on Avvo.

80% of respondents use social media themselves for professional purposes, including 67% of solos, 83% of lawyers in firms of 2-9 lawyers, and 86% of lawyers in firms with 10-49 lawyers. LinkedIn is the leading platform - 73% of all respondents maintain a LinkedIn presence.

Overall, only 39% of respondents who participate in social media report using Facebook (that's a significant drop from 47% in 2018). Solos and small firm lawyers use Facebook for professional purposes more often than lawyers in larger firms; 50% of solos and 48% of lawyers in firms with 2-9 lawyers report using the platform, as compared with only 26% of lawyers in firms with 10-49 lawyers.

Just 28% of respondents report using Twitter, including 31% of lawyers from firms between 10-49 lawyers, 28% of lawyers in firms with 2-9 lawyers, and only 19% of solos reported using the platform.

"Handling" marketing still lies largely with the attorneys themselves. 59% of respondents, including 60% of solos, said attorneys perform these functions within the firm. Only 31% of firms overall have internal marketing staff, and 17% use outside consultants, while 16% report that administrative staff performs marketing functions for the firm. 13% of respondents say "no one" is responsible for marketing in their firms, including 30% of solos and 13% of respondents in firms of 2-9 lawyers.

Only 7% of all respondents indicated that their firms were using AdWords (that certainly proved to be pouring money down a rathole for us). Overall, 59% of respondents report that their firms do not use a consultant for SEO, AdWords/PPC (Pay Per Click), or social media.

Why do lawyers blog and use social media? Pretty much the same answers – 67% said they did these things for career development and networking and 49% said for client development. Thirty-eight percent of respondents say they have access to analytics or reports to monitor the effectiveness of their website or blog. 41% do not have such access and 21% do not know. Our own experience with clients is that very few monitor the SEO effectiveness of their blog or website, especially at the solo/small firm level.

Of those respondents who report maintaining a legal topic blog, 49% have gotten clients as a result of blogging and another 34% do not know whether they have gotten a client or not. Of those who used social media for professional purposes this year, 31% report having gotten clients as a result, 44% say they did not, and 24% did not know. Solos (35%) and lawyers from firms of 2-9 lawyers (34%) were the most likely to report having gotten clients through social media, followed by lawyers from firms of 10-49 lawyers (28%) and firms of 100+ lawyers (29%). Only 3% of Twitter users reported getting clients from their use of Twitter.

Overall, across all firm sizes, on a scale of 1 (not at all confident) to 5 (very confident), respondents placed their level of confidence in their firm's marketing efforts at 2.9. We would have said that the confidence level is lower than that!

It amazes us how many people leave marketing to others. We suppose time constraints are one huge reason. The outsourced efforts often seem to falter without attorneys closely managing them – which of course defeats part of the purpose of outsourcing. And firms are just terrible at tracking the return on their investment of both time and money.

In a highly competitive marketplace, solos and small firms have a long way to go, a fact underscored in the survey. We recommend that law firms schedule regular marketing meetings and develop a cohesive plan – and then follow it. We flounder ourselves now and again when the workload is overwhelming, so we understand how hard it is to keep one's nose to the ground – but organized marketing always pays off!

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