

# Online Legal Advertising: What Works and What Doesn't

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**T**here are numerous online marketing options currently available to lawyers, including directories, search engines, banners and video advertising. They each have their purpose: some advertising channels are good for branding purposes, others for direct lead generation.

With more choices coming online each month, how is a lawyer who is targeting local legal consumers to make the best use of a limited marketing investment? This article highlights what I believe are marketing opportunities that work, while dispelling others as ineffective for lead generation.

Below is a description of each advertising medium, in order of what I have found to be most effective to steer you towards what works and steer you away from what may be a less than optimal use of your investment. We cover only paid advertising in this article and reserve for another time a comparable comparison of other sometimes-effective marketing opportunities like e-newsletters and guest-blogging.

## Google advertising

When done well, Google advertising delivers, plain and simple. You bid on phrases like "Akron injury lawyer" and Google shows your ad on that search. When someone clicks on it, you owe Google a sum of money based on your bid. The result is that you have a legal consumer who is searching for a divorce lawyer in Akron on the divorce page on your website.

An exciting new "Call-only" ads allow you to run ads only on smartphones and you

owe Google only when someone actually calls you. The downside is that the learning curve on this kind of advertising is staggering and it is recommended that you outsource the account management to a competent professional.

On the bang-for-your-buck scale, Google wins.

## Bing/Yahoo advertising

Comparable to Google advertising, you can bid on phrases in Bing and Yahoo too. The clicks are generally cheaper than in Google but for some reason I have found website inquiries through these search engines to be a lower percentage that from Google. Smartphone advertising is available from Bing but not to much effect: Google has a near monopoly for smartphone search, as it is the default search engine on both Androids and iPhones.

The learning curve is steep with Bing's advertising dashboard nearly identical to Google's. The Yahoo Gemini advertising platform is an unfortunate mess, usable by only the most patient of advertising professionals, all of whom probably have Yahoo Support speed-dialed. I normally recommend against Bing/Yahoo advertising unless you're already spending as much as you can in Google, which for many practice areas is a significant investment.

In sum, Bing/Yahoo works for lead generation but not as well as Google.

## LinkedIn advertising

LinkedIn advertising is a unique opportu-

nity for lawyers who represent businesses and other professionals. Through it you can reach LinkedIn members by a variety of means including job title, user groups and keywords.

LinkedIn advertising is beyond the scope of this article but definitely worth exploring for B2B law firms.

### **Yelp advertising**

Like Google and Bing, you can bid on a pay-per-click basis for top listings when people in Yelp are searching for reviews about lawyers. Yelp users who are reading reviews of lawyers are presumed to be at an advanced stage of the buying process so they can be a valuable group to target.

Through Yelp's "Self-serve" ads, you don't have to buy an expensive "Enhanced Listing" nor do you have to lock yourself into a 12-month commitment. An advantage of Yelp advertising over Google and Bing advertising is that it is easy to set up and it can be a set-it-and-forget-it tool.

There are several shortcomings when it comes to Yelp advertising. You can only target broad categories like "Lawyers" rather than specific searches like "Akron accident lawyers;" you cannot set your own bids (and based on what I've seen, your average cost per click will be higher than it is at Google and Bing); and the ads take consumers to your Yelp profile, not to your website.

There's a circumstantial component, too: you should never run ads in Yelp if you have a low star rating. Negative reviews from former clients will dissuade Yelp users from making contact with you.

I often recommend against Yelp advertising unless you're already spending a lot in Google and Bing and/or you want to show off a large number of 5-star reviews. It's cheaper and more effective to invest that money in Google.

### **YouTube advertising**

Not many people realize that YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world and has hundreds of thousands of law-related searches each month. In YouTube you can show your videos "In-stream" as a commercial preceding the user's desired video content and on other websites too, targeting keywords like "divorce" as well as demographics like location, age and gender.

Advertising in YouTube is managed through your Google advertising account and is astonishingly cheap at about \$0.08 per view.

As a preliminary matter, you need a high-quality video ideally less than 30 seconds in length. I've served up thousands of video views for different law firms and return on investment is difficult to measure.

As with other types of Google advertising, this is probably something you don't want to run in-house.

For a budget of maybe \$2.50 per day, it can be cheap exposure for lawyers who have a good video. My reservation being that it probably won't generate many leads.

### **Facebook advertising**

Facebook allows you to run "Sponsored Posts" from your law firm's "Fan" page in the timeline of Facebook users.

For lead generation, I have found Facebook advertising to be ineffective. It can be useful for promoting a specific post, getting more "Likes" for your Fan page, and generally raising awareness of your law firm, but people are not in Facebook looking for legal help.

Facebook does not allow advertisers to target keywords, like you can in Google, Bing, Yahoo and Twitter. Your options are demographics like age, location and interests. It's

surprisingly inexpensive. Facebook brings several important benefits to your online ecosystem and your law firm should be active in Facebook, but I usually recommend against Facebook advertising except to get more “Likes” for your Fan page if you need them.

### Twitter advertising

Twitter advertising, like Facebook, allows you to display a post from your Twitter account as a “Promoted Tweet.” Its advertising is keyword targeted so you can show your ads when someone is tweeting about lawyers making it more targeted than Facebook advertising. However, as with Facebook advertising, I have found Twitter advertising ineffective for lead generation. A recent study also found that Twitter users are irritated by the ads in their feeds.

The advertising can be useful in raising awareness of your Twitter account or specific Twitter posts and can help get “Followers” but Twitter users are not there to hire lawyers.

I usually recommend against Twitter advertising for lead generation, unless you're already spending a lot in Google, Bing and Yelp.

### Paid directories

There's often a disconnect between what legal directories charge for a listing and the traffic you get in return. These listings have a calculable value and on the occasions I've had a chance to pour through data for my clients, I have found the listings to usually be worth about a third of what is charged. There are exceptions where the value of the listing is equal to or greater than the cost and it's a case-by-case calculation.

Keeping in mind that there are exceptions, I have found listings on the major national legal directories to be overpriced and I usually recommend against.

### Banner advertising on local websites

Banner advertising on local websites like radio station websites or online newspapers are often delivered by Google. In the event that a local website is offering to sell you a banner on their website independent of Google, then it is a matter of traffic and cost.

This is a case-by-case situation. Sometimes it's a value, other times it's cheaper to run your banners directly through your Google advertising.

### Conclusion

It is hoped that this article will help focus your current marketing investment. The Internet is crowded with marketing options and separating the fruitful from the wasteful is not easy. My data and years of experience marketing attorneys supports what I've written here, but it's always worth noting that other marketing professionals may have different opinions. As you formulate or refine your marketing plan, please do your research, invest wisely and make the second half of 2016 a period of growth for your firm.

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