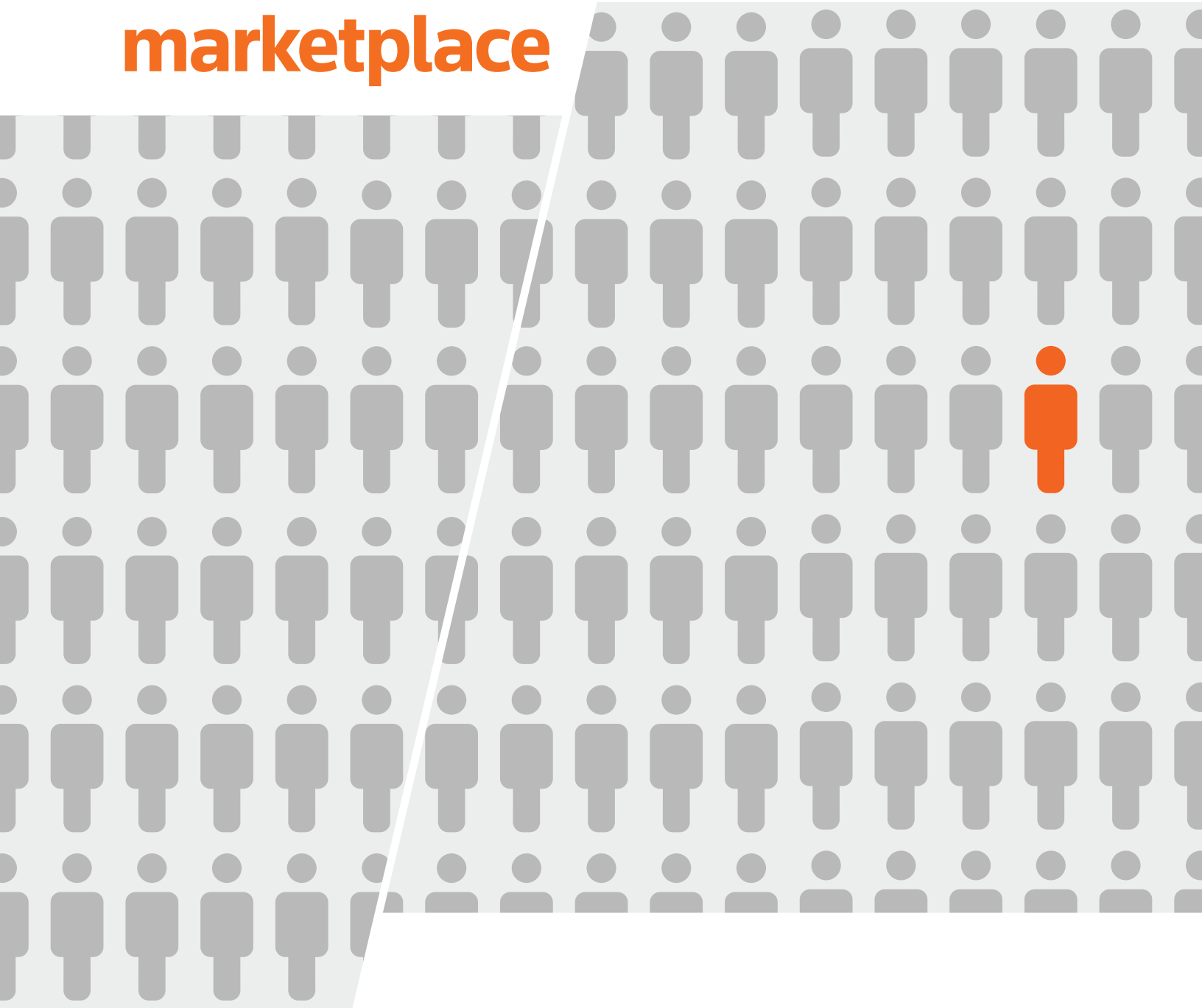


# Differentiating your solo firm in a crowded marketplace



If you're a solo attorney, chances are that when you started your practice, you did not think too much about how to market yourself and your services. After all, consumers need legal representation — what you are providing is necessary, so you should not have to sell it too hard. Chances are also that if this was your initial approach, it did not take you too long to realize why it falls short. In many markets across the country, attorneys are not in short supply, so setting yourself apart has not proven to be easy. On top of that, it may seem like lawyers with qualifications and services similar to yours are doing a much better job of standing out and drawing in new work. How?

This might leave you wondering how to best make up for lost time. What is the best way to get your name out there and bring paying clients in the door? If you would like to grow your solo practice, explore new marketing channels, or find the most effective marketing techniques to develop robust pipelines of leads and sources of new work, then this guide is for you.

In the coming pages, we will take a holistic look at legal marketing for your solo practice. By that, we mean we will take an end-to-end approach, starting with wide-scope, general thinking about how to present your solo law firm and then zeroing down to more targeted approaches. Ultimately, you will come away with a better sense of how to develop a marketing plan, calibrate your position in the market, select the most sensible marketing channel, and bring it all together to generate more work in a way that makes sense for the time, effort, and resources you have available.



## At the outset, what do you want consumers to know?

The first step in developing a marketing plan is to decide who you are and why someone should want to hire you. FindLaw® research has shown time and time again that many consumers with a legal need are unfamiliar with law as a field and perceive attorneys and law firms to be very comparable. In order to position your solo firm to its best advantage, you need to put yourself in the mindset of such a person and ask yourself, “What would make them want to hire me?” Luckily for you, some value propositions are part and parcel of being a solo attorney. They include:

### **Staffing: Lean and efficient comes standard**

Many a solo attorney feels overwhelmed because they have to do the work all alone. If you do not do it, it does not get done. As counterintuitive as this may seem, that can be one of the chief advantages of working with a solo attorney. Deservedly or undeservedly, large and midsized law firms have a reputation for overstaffing — stocking a team with junior partners or inexperienced associates, paralegals, and sometimes law firm professional staff to the point where someone outside looking in may think it seems excessive. That can create the perception that many hands are not making light work — they are making more work for themselves, with the client footing the bill.

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As a solo attorney, your clients and prospective clients never have to question whether there are too many hands on deck. You are doing it all, so there is no reason to worry about overstaffing to pad the final invoice. That can be a powerful message to a hesitant prospective client. Many consumers with a legal need are unfamiliar with the legal system and have never hired an attorney. They have heard that lawyers are expensive, and so cost weighs heavily on their mind. As a solo attorney, you are in the unique (and very advantageous) position of being able to say your client is paying only for what is necessary — no frills, add-ons, or unclear charges.

### **Billing: Clear and simple is always the case**

Today, large and midsized law firms often provide extremely detailed invoices, which is both good and bad. It is good in that the bill is not a single line item that says, “For services rendered” (which more experienced attorneys will tell you they did long ago). It is bad in that more detail sometimes makes the larger picture less clear. To revisit the example of many lawyers and legal professionals working on the same case, that can result in a final bill that is so detailed it is ultimately hard to make heads or tails of. Why did so many people handle this, and why are all of their rates different?

As a solo attorney, you do not have the problem. The final bill you provide your client can be both detailed and clear — it can spell out what you did and what you charged for it to a very specific degree — and that is a significant competitive advantage. Remember, many consumers with a legal need have not hired an attorney before, so they do not know what to expect. Your built-in ability to bill in a clear, straightforward way is appreciated more than you probably realize.

**Reporting: The buck stops here**

For all lawyers, whether they are at a large multinational law firm or are in solo practice, client communication can be burdensome. A lack of communication is one of the top complaints clients have about their attorneys, and it can seem like there is no end to the number of check-ins or updates needed to reassure clients. Once again, take this challenge and turn it into an opportunity. Because you are not part of a large, unwieldy team, you can put yourself in the driver's seat. You can, by and large, decide what message to deliver and when to deliver it.

The same is true outside of client communication, too. Whether you are conversing with a client, a co-defendant, or an adversary, you are the one who is the most fully informed and can be the most responsive. Take what could be an obstacle and turn it into an asset — you can give your clients what they want and would not get from other attorneys, and that is not something every other lawyer can say.

**Loyalty: Building bridges with less risk**

It is often said that clients hire an individual lawyer, not the law firm. Even sophisticated law firms with generous marketing budgets, polished customer-facing images, and strong brands cannot overcome the simple truth that people like people, not abstractions, and feel most comfortable when they are working with a known individual. In practical terms, that means clients like the attorney they work with more than they like (or care about) the law firm where their attorney works.

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*It is often said that clients hire an individual lawyer, not the law firm.*

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Furthermore, at large or midsized firms, it is a little too easy for someone other than you to impair your relationship with a client. Think an incorrect bill, a dud of a client event, or a misfired communication from the marketing department. Because you are fully in charge of all elements of your practice, you do not have to worry about this. You can forge strong relationships and sustain them (and if you question the importance of that, call to mind that old business world chestnut about the best client being one you already have). Furthermore, there is no risk that a conflict of interest will arise from another attorney and jeopardize your client relationship and billable hour quota. Yet another significant advantage of being in business with and for yourself.

**Brand positioning**

"I am a lawyer" is not nearly enough of a marketing message. What kind of lawyer are you? By that, we mean not only what types of cases you handle, but what it is like to work with you. Consumers with a legal need want to work with someone they can trust, and they cannot trust you if they do not know who you are. Because you are a solo attorney, you can decide on your own how to position your brand — no meetings, focus groups, or image consultants necessary. What you say goes.



## Marketing your message

Now that you have determined who you are and what you want prospective clients to know about you, it is time to get down to the nitty-gritty: How can you most effectively broadcast that message to the right audience? The right digital legal marketing strategy is very specific to your market and your practice, but in general, there are several best practices to follow:

### Aim for integration

Here is one thing many people do not realize — any marketing effort, even if it is successful on its own, is better when combined with other strategies. For example, a professional **website** with informative copy that is attractive to both human readers and search engines is going to yield a certain amount of payoff on its own. But it will perform even better if it is coupled with a blog that is regularly updated with engaging, search engine optimization-friendly posts. Here are some of the most effective digital legal marketing techniques, each of which does well alone but becomes amplified when paired with others:

- i. **Social media:** You probably use social media in your personal life. If you are not using it for business development as well, you are missing out on a popular and powerful marketing channel. FindLaw research has shown that many consumers with a legal need use social media to browse and/or verify their choice of attorney. In the most recent Thomson Reuters® U.S. Consumer Legal Needs Survey of 2,000 people who lived in a household where someone had experienced a legal need in the past 12 months, 25% of respondents at least consulted social media as part of their attorney search. Beyond providing one more potential point of first contact and proof that you are who you say you are, social media has the effect of humanizing you, and that is what many consumers with a legal need want — not just a law license, but a human being who will help them solve an issue.

In the most recent Thomson Reuters® U.S. Consumer Legal Needs Survey of 2,000 people who lived in a household where someone had experienced a legal need in the past 12 months,

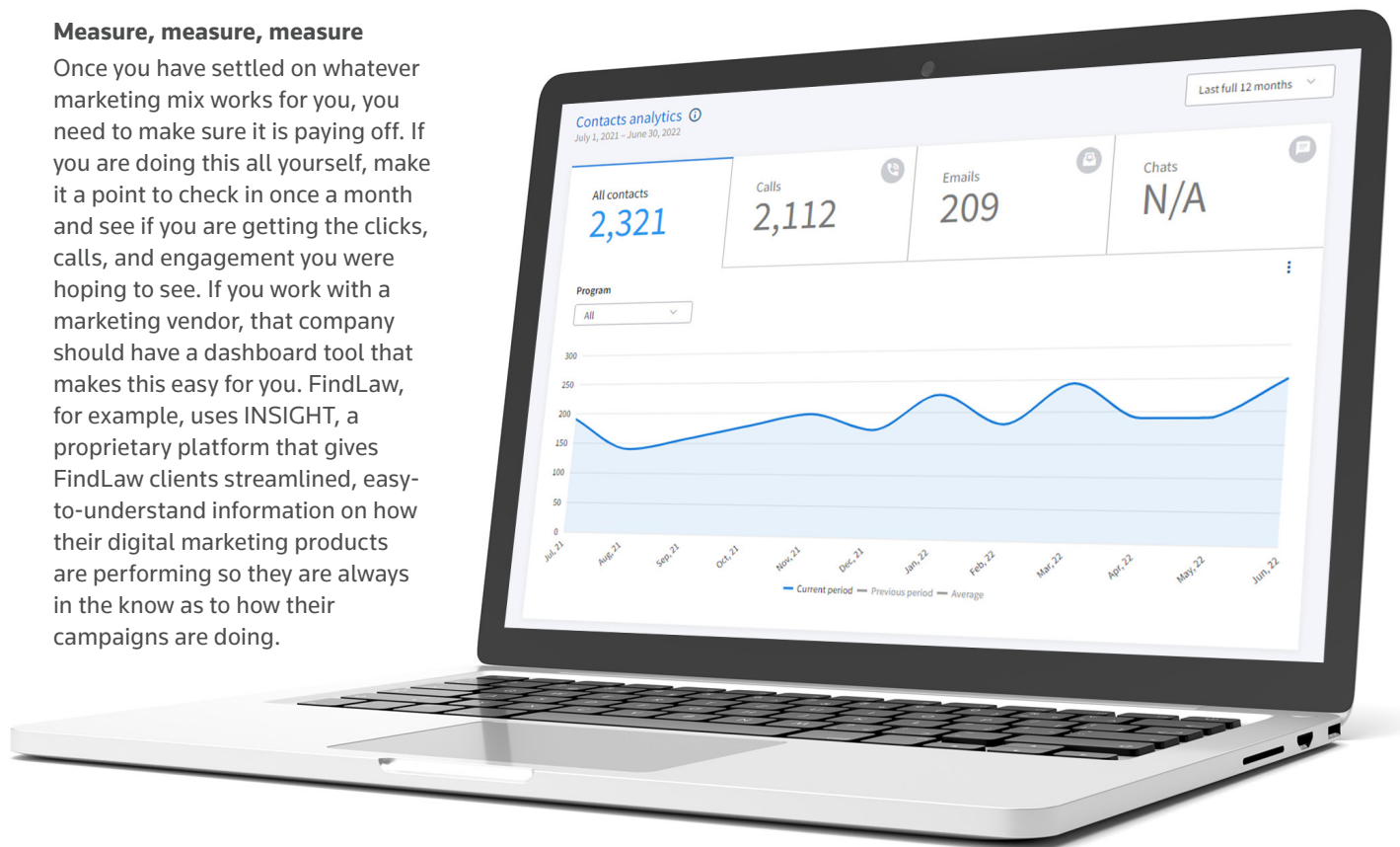


of respondents at least consulted social media as part of their attorney search.

- ii. **SEO:** Search engine optimization (SEO) is the art and science of writing website, blog, or social media copy that is both useful and interesting to people and catches the attention of search engines, which recognize it as valuable and so place it prominently in a search engine results page. SEO once was easy enough for a novice to do, but as technology has evolved, it has become easier and better to trust SEO optimization to professionals who are up-to-date with algorithm changes and can write copy that works without sounding like buzzword salad.
- iii. **PPC ads:** Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising is an attractive option for solo attorneys who have less marketing budget to work with than they would like. It works like this: A simple, no-frills ad is created and linked to search terms or categories, so that it appears when a user is looking for information. You pay only for the instances in which someone clicks on the ad, not for the times a user views the ad but takes no action.

### Measure, measure, measure

Once you have settled on whatever marketing mix works for you, you need to make sure it is paying off. If you are doing this all yourself, make it a point to check in once a month and see if you are getting the clicks, calls, and engagement you were hoping to see. If you work with a marketing vendor, that company should have a dashboard tool that makes this easy for you. FindLaw, for example, uses INSIGHT, a proprietary platform that gives FindLaw clients streamlined, easy-to-understand information on how their digital marketing products are performing so they are always in the know as to how their campaigns are doing.



### Prime the pump with referrals

Here is one area where digital and in-person marketing are better together. At the close of a matter, politely ask if the client would consider writing an online review for you. Reviews have emerged as one of the most powerful ways to valid future consumers' decision to hire you as an attorney — 37% of Thomson Reuters U.S. Consumer Legal Needs survey respondents used them — so you cannot afford to ignore them. Each and every positive review makes you look better in the eyes of someone thinking about hiring you, so the more you have, the better off you are.

### Polish up your client intake

FindLaw research found that one-third of law firms neglected phone call messages and half did not return an email within a 24-hour timeframe — which is not good, given that 67% of Thomson Reuters U.S. Consumer Legal Needs survey respondents who contacted an attorney did so via phone call during normal office hours. Those missed connections are people with a legal need who found your law firm and are taking the time to reach out, which is precisely what you are spending time and money to make happen.

Most people who need an attorney will only call one or two lawyers when they are mulling their options. When the phone rings or you see an email in your inbox, you need to treat it like any other important communication. Most people who contact an attorney end up hiring one, so every time you miss, you are only thwarting yourself.

## All about audience

At this point, you have an image of yourself and a sense of how to get that message out there. No marketing strategy is complete without a decent understanding of the intended recipient. To that end, here are some key features of today's average legal consumer:

### **They're DIY to a degree**

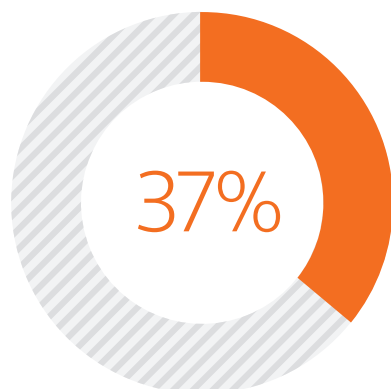
No surprise here — with a wealth of information a mere tap or two on a smartphone away, today's legal consumers can access information quickly and easily. That includes information about whom they may want to represent them as well as information on their particular legal issue. A smart solo attorney will assume his or her potential client is aware that multiple options for representation exist and has at least a basic understanding of the legal issue at hand.

### **...But they still want your help**

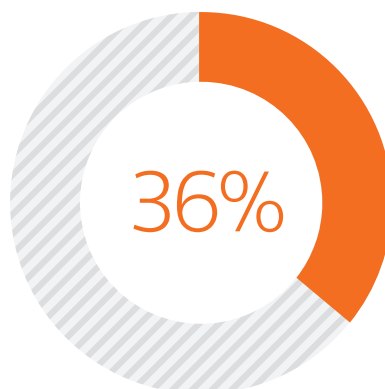
The reason we said today's consumer with a legal need is "DIY to a degree" is that FindLaw research has shown they are comfortable using the internet to inform themselves, but ultimately want the help of an educated, trained, and experienced attorney. Far fewer of them than you might think try to solve their issues independently using forms, templates, or pro se representation. One reason for that is legal consumers are aware of the gravity of their situation and are willing to do what it takes to achieve resolution. In the Thomson Reuters U.S. Consumer Legal Needs Survey, 37% of respondents said they took action "to avoid future legal difficulties" and 36% did so because they knew they "needed competent/skilled representation." Technology alone cannot give consumers the feeling of assurance and peace of mind that come from knowing their issue is being taken care of — only you, a human being, can do that.

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### According to the Thomson Reuters U.S. Consumer Legal Needs Survey



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36% of respondents took action because they knew they "needed competent/skilled representation."

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Ultimately, marketing your solo practice to ensure long-term success is a multi-layered, multi-level task that requires thought, conscientious and consistent effort, and a willingness to experiment and change if something is not working. You have to decide how you want the market to see you — that is, what sets you apart from the proverbial Law Firm Down the Street — and then effectively communicate and express that across the many channels where prospective clients might reasonably look for a solo attorney just like you.

If what we have described here seems like a lot, that is because it is. No one knows better than you that running a solo practice is not just a full-time job — it's several full-time jobs.

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***A final thought for you to bear in mind is that you do not have to market your solo practice all on your own.***

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A marketing vendor that works with law firms knows the ins and outs of what we have described here and should be able to create you a customized digital marketing plan.

**To find out how FindLaw can help your firm meet the demands of today's legal landscape, [contact us today.](#)**

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