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B2C Lawyers Create Online Trust With Client Reviews

A thoughtful, thorough review process not only says you understand consumers' need to get a sense of who you are and how you work; it also provides an opportunity to shape visitors' first impression of you and your firm.

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By Carol Schiro Greenwald

People hire people they know, like and trust. But, suppose you don't know anyone who can resolve your problem? Today's answer is client reviews—relying on what others with the same problem think about their problem-solver. If an unknown lawyer has a number of current, positive, 4 or 5 star reviews, the online prospect accepts that client consensus as a stand-in for “know, like and trust.”

According to BrightLocal's 2020 survey of consumer attitudes toward online reviews,

- 97% read both reviews and the accompanying lawyer responses.
- Positive reviews influence 94% to select that attorney.
- 87% of consumers searching for legal advice check online reviews during their vetting process.
- 73% pay attention only to reviews written in the past month.

When I asked my panelists about how they handled client reviews, responses came from those with B2C practices such as Social Security disability law, personal injury, family law and employment law. Panelists with business-focused practices said that they do not ask for or get reviews. They focus instead on networking and referral relationships with clients and colleagues.

When and how do you ask for online reviews? The “when” is almost unanimous: Most ask for reviews at the completion of the engagement.

- “Usually when they send us an email, as often happens, thanking us for a job well done, we respond by asking for a review.” Alla Roytberg, [Roytberg Traum Law and Mediation P.C.](#)

- “Typically, I ask clients for reviews by phone, email or text. I usually try to get a sense from the client during a closing phone call as to whether they are satisfied with their result and our representation before asking for a review.” Howard Schragin, [Sapir Schragin LLP.](#)

- “Recently we have begun using a program to send a one-time text message directly to the clients’ cell phone. This provides them with a link that will take them directly to our “Leave a Review” landing page on Google. We find this is more effective for capturing their attention and is more likely to result in them taking the time to leave a review.” Annamarie Bondi-Stoddard, [Pegalis Law Group.](#)

- “I always ask for an online review from my client’s following the resolution of their case. Whether it was favorable or not, I always ask and I have yet to receive anything other than a very positive review.” Crysti Farra, [Law Office of Crysti D. Farra.](#)

Where do you put the reviews? The short answer should be: where your prospects go to look for lawyers. Most panelists follow this advice and focus on Google My Business, followed by Avvo and Instagram plus their own website. None of the respondents mentioned LinkedIn.

- “Some reviews are on the firm’s website; most are uploaded by clients and colleagues to social media and third-party websites.” Barry Heyman, [Heyman Law.](#)

- “We put reviews everywhere we think they are appropriate, such as Facebook, Instagram, and in networking promos. Sometimes, after giving an example of the successful conclusion of a particular legal matter, we include a quote from the satisfied client.” Alan Schwartz, [Law Offices of Alan J. Schwartz.](#)

How important do you think reviews are in influencing a prospect's decision to hire you? Almost unanimously, the panelists agree that positive reviews are crucial marketing and branding pieces. Online buyers have learned from Amazon that you can trust the consensus opinion of previous customers. Once reviews applied only to inanimate objects; now they include service providers too.

- “In today’s world, this is incredibly important; be it that the prospective client found us in an Internet search, or a qualified lead is seeking to gather more information about us before deciding to contact us.” Vincent Russo, [Russo Law Group](#).

- “Previously we were hesitant in asking for reviews, but after clients left some spontaneous reviews and we received feedback that new clients chose us because they liked the reviews, we started to selectively ask some clients.” Alla Roytberg.

- “I think it is important for potential clients to get independent confirmation via client reviews about our firm, our attorneys, how we practice and the results we can achieve for them.” Howard Schragin.

- “Reviews are extremely useful to bring in new clients. The prospective client wants to know they can trust the law firm they are looking to hire. The experiences of a firm’s past clients can give them an idea of what they can expect and sow the seeds of trust before contact is even made.” Annamarie Bondi-Stoddard.

How do you thank for a review? Thanking is assumed by consumers. 77% expect a response to their review. They equate the courtesy of a review thank you to the courtesy you would show them if they hired you. Yet many lawyers do not give this final phase of the review process sufficient attention.

- “I thank them individually. Google allows you to reply and to thank the reviewer publicly on the review. I usually say, “Thank you, Ms. Jones, for the kind comments. It was an honor having you as a client.” Mark Seitelman, [Mark E. Seitelman Law Offices](#).

- “Depending on the situation, we contact them by phone, by email. We are working on making our thank you process more robust.” Vincent Russo.

- “A simple ‘Thank You’ note can go a long way in terms of client satisfaction. It shows that you value your relationship with the client. It can promote future business with them, as well as increase the likelihood of future recommendations from them.” Annamarie Bondi-Stoddard.

If you’ve gotten a negative review, how did you handle it? Fear of negative reviews is often the bogeyman that keeps lawyers from encouraging reviews. Yet negative reviews often serve to highlight the positive ones, and make them appear more genuine. Responding to them offers the lawyer a chance to resolve misunderstandings. A reply that is polite, timely, well-written and respectful reinforces a lawyer’s professionalism. According to BrightLocal, 89% of consumers would consider editing or removing a negative review based on the lawyer’s response.

- “While I haven’t received a negative review, if I did receive a review with criticism, I would potentially reach out to see if I could provide a better experience.” Barry Heyman.

- “Every business gets a negative review from time to time. The medical malpractice cases our firm handles are contingent upon permanent, life-altering injuries, which are not always present. As a result, our attorneys must occasionally inform the client that their case cannot be pursued. This honest assessment may be received negatively by some callers who then post a negative review. It is important to follow up with the person and to make amends where you can, often by referring them to another attorney, who may be better suited for their case.” Annamarie Bondi-Stoddard.

- “If we receive a negative review, we immediately contact the reviewer and take every step to understand why we have received a negative review, respond to their concerns and turn it into a positive review. Generally, we have been successful in turning negative reviews around.” Vincent Russo.

Several lawyers have received negative reviews from unknown sources.

- “We received a bad review from someone who said he was a client, but it turned out it wasn’t a real client. We tried to respond, but there was nothing to identify the imposter as a real person. It may have been a competitor, someone who was on the other side of a case or, perhaps, even someone who was soliciting for a “reviews or reputation” service. What was clear, however, is that this was not anyone we have ever represented. We specifically responded to the post with our explanation.” Alla Roytberg.
- “Once. We determined it to be fictitious, malicious and by a competitor, and dealt with it appropriately.” Alan Schwartz.
- “I provide a reply explaining that we did all that was possible within the limitations of the law and the facts. The review system, where everyone thinks of himself as a critic, is unfair in that we have people who have not been clients post a review. E.g., one did not like how we answered the phone, so they never became a client but they posted the comment.” Mark Seitelman.

Concluding Thoughts. A thoughtful, thorough review process not only says you understand consumers’ need to get a sense of who you are and how you work; it also provides an opportunity to shape visitors’ first impression of you and your firm. Reviews offer “social proof” of your capabilities and service posture, and give you real, actionable feedback. Even negative reviews when handled properly won’t hurt, so why not use reviews to build credibility, authenticity and trust.

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