

# Marketing law firms online



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# Introduction

**CONICAL AND DISTINCTLY HAVE BOTH BEEN SUPPORTING LAW FIRMS WITH THEIR WEB, DIGITAL AND INTEGRATED MARKETING NEEDS FOR MANY YEARS.**

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN CO-AUTHORED BY PEOPLE WITHIN THESE TWO HIGHLY RESPECTED ORGANISATIONS. IT IS HOPED THAT THIS GUIDE WILL BE OF USE TO THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR MARKETING LAW FIRMS.



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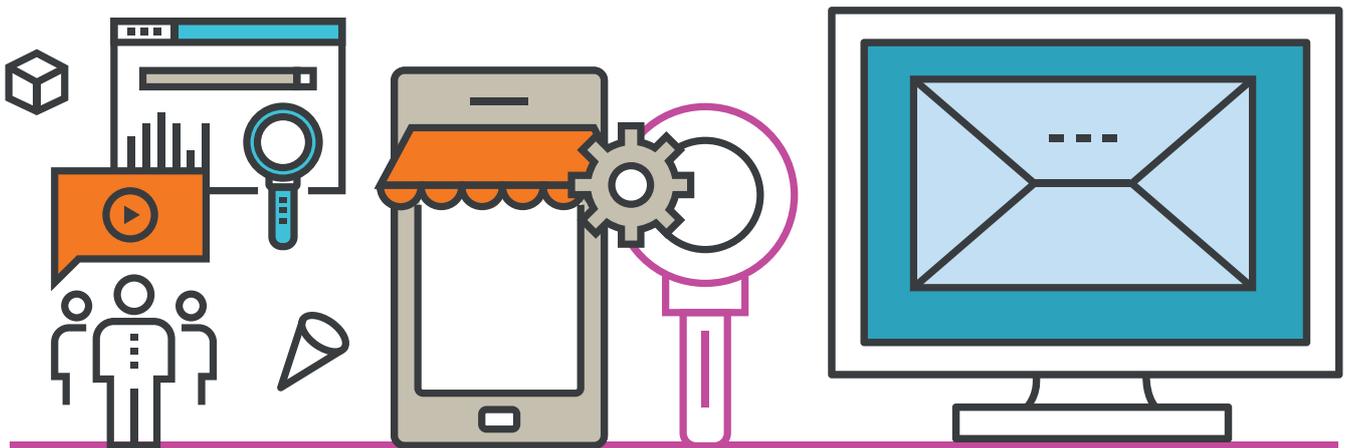
# Purpose

Many law firms have struggled to effectively use the digital marketing tools available to them. A mix of self-styled digital gurus and business to consumer thinking has left professionals in the legal sector with a confused approach to their digital marketing. With some strategic thinking and ensuring that the principals of professional services marketing are adhered to, digital marketing tools will increase in effectiveness.

This short guide is designed to give the reader a concentrated view into some of the key considerations to be taken account of when managing or building a new website.

Sites need to be regularly updated and reviewed and periodically major build projects are required. They do of course also need to be promoted. Without promotion it is somewhat like drafting an old style brochure and hiding it under a bush in the countryside....it looks great, but no one knows it is there!

The content here comes from pragmatic experience drawn from two organisations that specialise in supporting law firm marketing and site promotion. It is not a book and there is much more that could be said, but hopefully the content will prove to be helpful.



# Strategic considerations

Websites are a place where organisational strategy comes alive. It is not a case of posting strategic documentation, more a case of making that strategy meaningful in a digital environment.

Considerations such as, who are the target visitors for the site, what needs to be conveyed to them and how would we like them to interact with the site, are critical considerations.

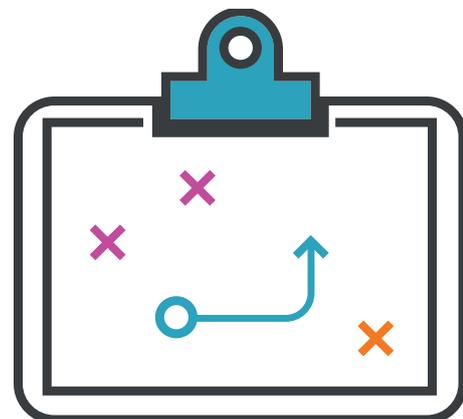
The target audience is an important factor. Law firms are most definitely not a one size fits all when it comes to marketing strategy. Some firms are highly niche in what they do, others

aim at high net-worth groups for a bespoke style of private client work, others may be purely commercial, others may offer a wide range of services to a wide (yet local) audience.

Inevitably, considerations about the target market and their expectations and needs will help determine not only the content of the site but also the way in which the brand is communicated in a digital environment. Visually, people will come to conclusions about what an organisation stands for very quickly. If initial impressions do not engage the target audience, they may well move on.

Websites operate in a highly competitive environment.

Organisations should assume that visitors will compare and contrast both the content and the look and feel, or 'brand emotion,' in a site to determine which organisation best fits their personal needs. As such, any site must be viewed in the context of the competition. Organisations now make regular changes to sites, which means that this competitive benchmarking is a fluid process but one that needs to be kept on top of.



# Fundamental issues

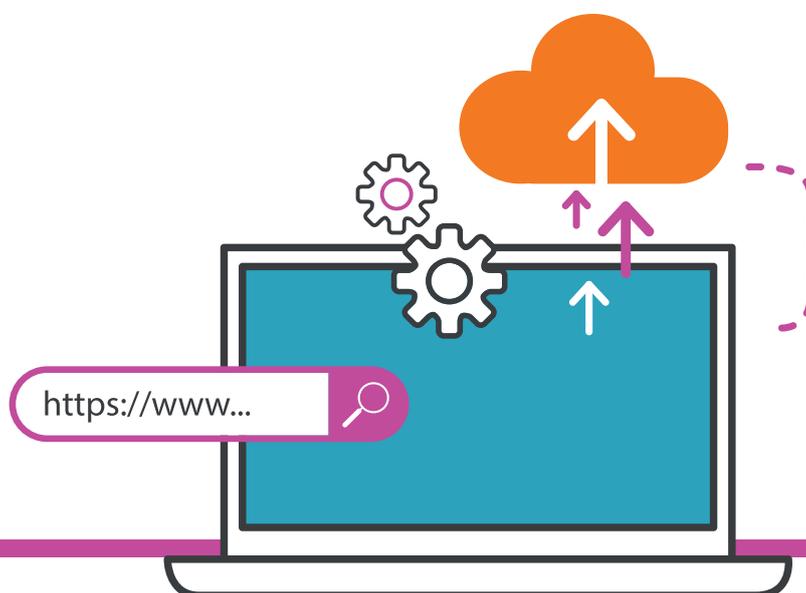
There are a few important fundamental issues that crop up when looking at website projects that can have strategic level consequences. One of the most significant is, who owns the domain name? This is not always as simple as it may seem. In the early days of domain registration, law firms may have asked a supplier, typically an IT firm, to register their domain name. Depending upon how this was done, the IT company could actually still own the domain name. This is rare now, but always worth a check. Another issue we have seen is where a Partner had personally registered the domain name and so remains the owner in the eyes of the registration body.

An increasingly important issue to consider is website backup, especially so given the level of malicious activity. Again, one might think this is a straightforward issue. Hosting packages may come with backup included, but although some of these will recover a server if it goes down they may not do so for an individual site, if it is maliciously damaged or if there is some kind of technical failure. Relying on the site designer to keep a copy is risky and of course the site will evolve over time.

One further factor to consider when building a site is whether or not you are putting your eggs in a very inflexible basket. There are some low cost solutions out there

for websites, but if they are built in a non-transferable environment you will not be able to move the programming content or the original design work should you wish to move supplier.

The link between the website and the wider strategic business plan of the firm should be a solid one. We are increasingly working with clients who see their business objectives closely linked to recruitment of new talent, often at a senior level, within the firm. The website is where many potential applicants will come to conclusions about a firm.



# Recruitment

Good quality potential recruits could be lost if the site does not communicate directly with them. It is sensible to segment potential recruits to a firm and provide appropriate content for them. For trainees, the site needs to reflect a whole different set of messages, as compared to experienced senior hires.

At the time of drafting this document, we are in an opportunity rich, candidate poor environment where there are more jobs than people suitable to fill those posts. Firms are being constrained by recruitment, yet their main window on the world, the website, does not address this issue. This is a major shortcoming amongst law firms and it needs to be addressed.



## To shop or to verify?

One observation made by some lawyers is that their clients do not 'shop them' through an internet search or even through direct access to their site. To a certain extent, these observations could be correct. Reputation and referral continue to be driving forces when it comes to new business generation, especially within commercial firms. This in itself is not the full story though. It is quite possible that referrals are being lost as a result of a poor

website, poor fee earner profiles, or an absence of specific content about the legal matter the referral source requires. In instances like these, new work will be lost without the firm knowing about it. This also applies to potential new recruits who view the firm remotely and conclude it is not the firm for them.

The website should always reflect the organisation it is representing. The brand in most law firms is not

the logo or the graphic design, more the distinctive culture of the organisation. Articulating this through design and programming is not easy, but worthwhile. There are too many me too sites out there that just look like every other law firm. These sites are full of service lists and plodding content. Potential clients are increasingly exposed to innovative and engaging web content and law firms have to step up to the mark in this respect.

# Project management

Before we move on to the design and build of the site, a quick observation about project management could be useful. In law firms, collegiate decision making is common, something that has been supported by partnership structures. At the outset, it is worth stating that not everyone can or should be involved in a web project.

The project needs a decentralised team with delegated authority that the senior members of the firm need to respect. Without this, projects can grind to a halt if one or a few powerful people in the hierarchy want to choose a different route. This is a cultural issue for many, but the parameters need to be established at the outset.



# Designing a site

Designing a website without considering the users is the first hurdle at which many law firms fall. There is a tendency to get caught up in look and feel, or even imagery at an early stage. Resisting this pitfall is essential for good design practice.

Design should only commence after strategic considerations are bottomed out. For example, a firm that places importance on face to face business development may consider employee verification a key strategic consideration for their website. In this instance, it would be pertinent to ensure that access to employee profiles is quick and intuitive.

This approach to website design is known as Information Architecture. Information is more abundant than ever before, with internet connected devices creeping in to all aspects of our everyday lives, from smart doorbells to sleep trackers. While all this information may

improve our lives, it also presents its challenges. It can at times be difficult to cut through all the noise to get to what's relevant. Information Architecture is a design discipline that focuses on making the relevant information findable. Users come to the firm's website with different expectations and the website should ensure that it is optimised for findability and understandability.

This is not always as simple as planning out a neat list of services or departments. Many users simply will not be familiar with the services on offer, or even know the services they need. In order to plan successfully, firms must consider who their website users are and how they interact with law firm websites. To successfully do this, we must not make assumptions about users, but instead seek measurable statistics to inform planning. Tools such as Google Analytics and Crazy Egg

provide insight into how users explore a website – it is therefore important to fully understand the performance of the current website before committing to the design of a new one.

It is only after the information has been structured and labelled that the firm should start to consider the actual appearance of the website. Again, the user should be placed at the centre of this rather than the opinions and assumptions of the firm. The goal of this process is to produce a website that the user enjoys using and provides them with all the experience they need to build trust in the firm.

Clear strategic marketing objectives should inform the choices of imagery and wording. Some firms are tempted to choose imagery based on current trends from consumer brands, however the user is often reassured by a more professional look and feel.



# Building the site

It is very rare for a law firm to have in house website development capability or understanding, so inevitably firms pick an agency or freelancer to develop their website. It is important to understand that there is no one set way to build a website and many agencies will have their preferred way of working.

The firm may be tempted to select their agency or freelancer based purely on cost. However, without fully specifying how you want the website constructed, no two quotes will actually be for the same thing.

Before build commences, it is important to create a detailed functional specification document. This is a document that outlines the aims and strategy of the website as well as how the website is to be built and what content management system (if any) the website will use. All of these specifications will impact the ultimate successes of the website.

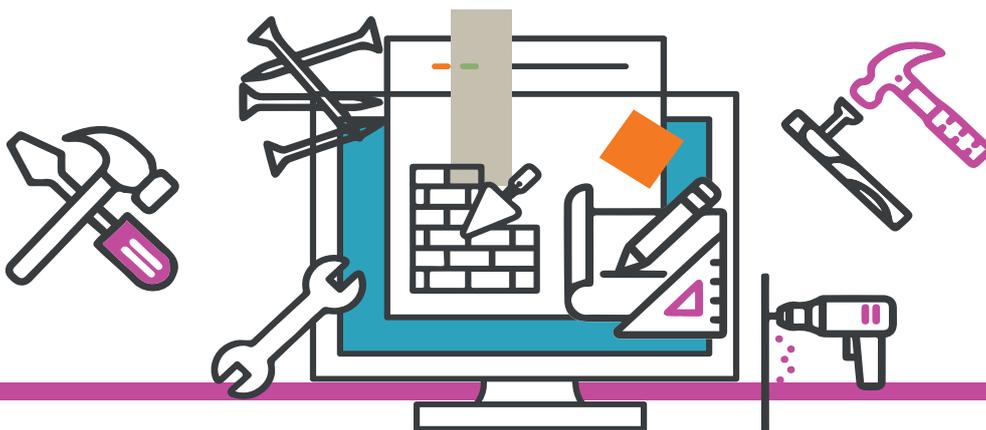
For example, if the marketing strategy determines that search engine traffic is important for the firm, then the website will have to be built with capabilities to manage search engine optimisation. Some platforms such as Wix or Squarespace are notoriously inadequate for this.

Once a functional specification has been agreed, ensure that the agency or freelancer appointed has adequate capacity to fulfil the specification. The firm can do this by asking for references, or by analysing previous projects.

It may be important to consider transferability when appointing an agency, so that if the relationship breaks down the firm can seamlessly appoint another agency to handle the maintenance of their site. Things can become even more complex with a freelancer, as your website is in

the hands on one person who may move on to other projects, or take a full-time job. This leaves the firm with a support gap.

Transferability is not only dependent on the firm retaining control of their hosting arrangements, but also on the platform or content management system on which the website has been built. Wordpress is a popular content management system, so easier to transfer; using a less popular content management system like Radiant may prove difficult to find another agency to take over.



# Website marketing

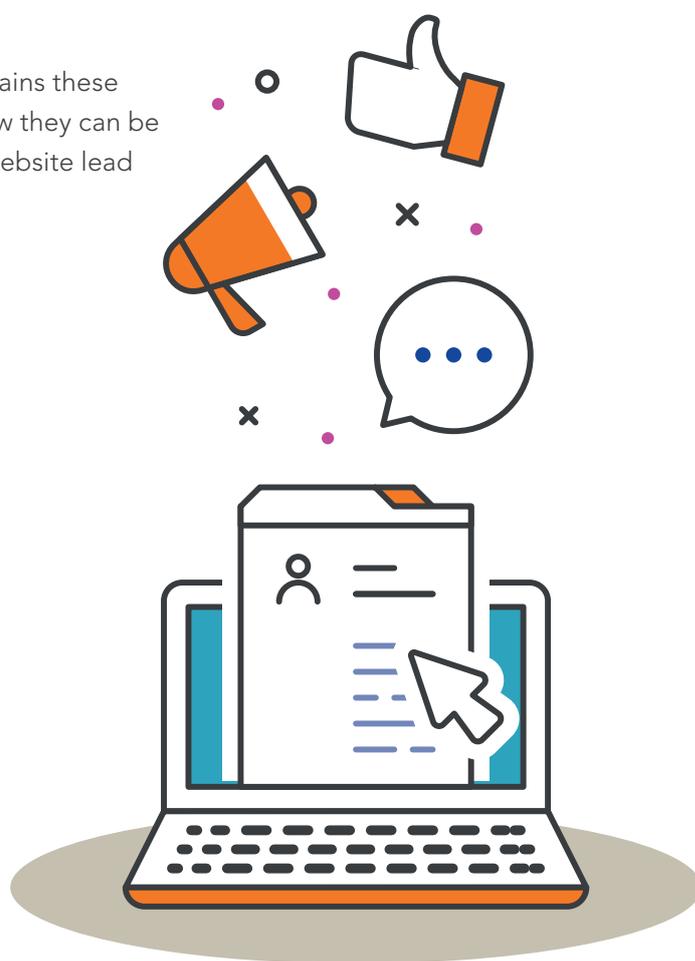
No matter how strong the service offering or how good the website looks, without active promotion it's unlikely to be seen by many people, which in turn diminishes the return from the investment made.

Law firms are often behind the curve when it comes to website promotion. Historically, law firms generate new business through professional contacts and referrals and may not have the desire to use digital marketing methods, particularly those that are deemed unproven. The reputation and referral process continues to be incredibly important but firms should not underestimate the role of a site and the promotion of that site when it comes to verification and reinforcement.

Law firms that embrace digital marketing can help build on their traditional business generation methods and open up newer channels. In short, it is not an either or. The methodology used will vary depending upon the target market for the firm and its service package.

The most popular forms of digital marketing for legal firms are search engine optimisation (SEO) and pay per click (PPC) advertising (which encompasses Google Ads, Facebook advertising and other social networks).

The following explains these disciplines and how they can be used to increase website lead generation.



# Keyword research

The foundations of any SEO or Google Ads search campaign is keyword research. This is the process of identifying keywords (search terms) that your target audience may use. Google provides data as to how many times per month any keyword or phrase is searched. Whilst it's important to target keywords that get relatively strong monthly search volumes, understanding the user intent behind each keyword is vital when deciding if it is a suitable target. Keywords typically fall into two categories:

- High intent / low volume - these often include 'solicitors' or similar which identifies the searcher as someone who is looking to engage with a solicitor e.g. 'divorce solicitor London'
- Low intent / high volume - these informational searches are often made by someone before they are at the buying stage e.g. 'what is a decree nisi?'

Each group of keywords serves a different role in an SEO strategy. High intent / low volume keywords will generate highly convertible traffic and it is important to note that a website's sitemap and structure should be created to facilitate service pages around these keywords. These keywords are typically used in Google Ads search campaigns.

Low intent / high volume keywords are typically less competitive than the above and easier to achieve strong ranks for in short time frames. Ranking for these terms can position a firm as thought leader. This improves brand recognition both to end clients and also professional referrers, validating their decision to refer work to you. Due to the low intent of users using these keywords, they do not warrant the return on investment to be used in Google Ads search campaigns.

# SEO

Search engine optimisation is the process of making your website more appealing to Google through improving its design, content and code quality. Historically, there was a discrepancy between what Google wanted to see from a website and what users wanted to see. This led to a number of suspect practices such as keyword stuffing (re-using the same word or phrase over and over again), white text on white background etc.

Fortunately Google's algorithms have significantly advanced since then and are now much more closely aligned with what a user wants from a website - fast page load times, detailed and informative content that is updated frequently, logical navigation and clear calls to action.





## Local search

Formerly Google Places, Google My Business profiles are visible within the Google Maps listings. Historically, 7 businesses were listed for each query, but in 2017 this was reduced to 3 making it more challenging to appear.

Google Maps listings are typically returned when users include a location in their search term. Google chooses which listings to

return based on the optimisation of the Google My Business profile, the proximity of the business to the location searched and the number of positive reviews a listing has.

Devising a strategy to encourage positive reviews from clients has a huge impact on the visibility of a Google My Business profile, and can drive significant numbers of leads.

## Content strategy

Producing regular, informative content can have a huge impact on the online visibility of a practice. Legal firms typically make two mistakes in this area when using content to attract new business and profile raising:

- Content is centred on themselves, such as networking events and new hires. This will be of interest to people once they reach the site but will not attract new visitors from Google.
- Fee earners are charged with writing industry-relevant pieces. This is generally (and quite rightly) a low value task for them and as such it is low priority and rarely gets produced.
- When content is produced, it is often on topics that the partner deems interesting but without any keyword research being performed. Such content will also perform poorly from an SEO perspective therefore wasting the time the partner has spent on it.
- It is imperative that every blog post has keyword research performed for it to ensure there are people searching for the topic and that the competition is such that rankings can be realistically achieved.

# What is an optimised website?

THE 2 MAIN FACTORS OF AN OPTIMISED WEBSITE ARE:

## 1. Onpage optimisation

The process of reflecting the keywords identified in the keyword research on each page. Google ranks pages, not websites, so each page needs to be constructed around a tightly themed group of keywords.

Google reads pages as we would - from top left to bottom right - and therefore assumes that the nearer the start of the content keywords are used, the more relevant they are to the page.

Other areas of onpage optimisation that require particular attention are:

- Title tags - these appear at the very top of each page and are also the blue link in the Google search results
- Heading tags - each page should have one h1 tag which includes the main keyword, and several h2s throughout the copy that cover other keywords
- Meta descriptions - a meta description is the text that appears underneath each search result although not part of the ranking algorithm
- Internal links - Google uses internal links to understand which pages on a site are important and therefore which should rank

## 2. Speed

The quicker a website loads, the better it will rank and the more likely users are to convert. The speed of a website can be affected by the quality of the hosting - the cheaper the hosting, the more likely it is to be shared with other websites. When these other websites get surges of traffic, it can negatively impact your website.

There are numerous other website settings that can improve page loads speeds. Compressing images to the correct size for the internet is probably the quickest win.

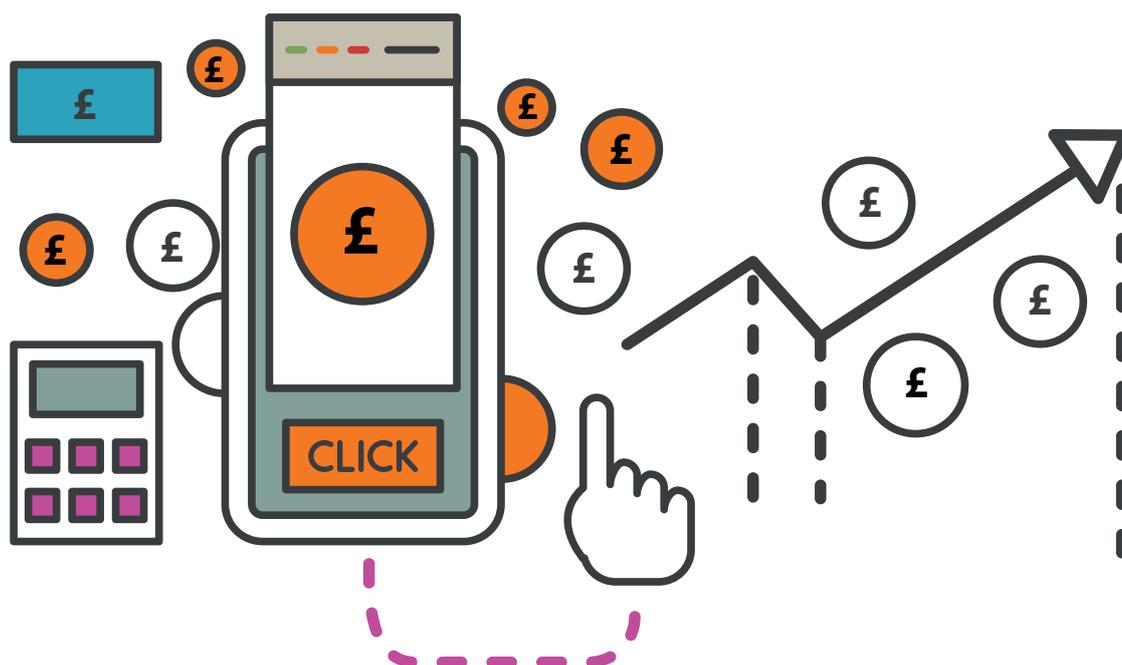
# Lead generation via PPC

Pay-Per-Click or PPC is a form of digital advertising on search platforms such as Google Ads and social networks like Facebook. It's a highly flexible form of marketing, with the ability to move budget between campaigns in real time based on performance.

Leads can be tracked back to a very granular level, to help build a profile of your ideal customer and then target them more aggressively, as well as making it possible to see detailed return on investment for your spend. While

historically it used to be a case of having a bigger budget meant you had priority placement, more recently all PPC platforms have moved towards a reward system based on the quality and relevance of your adverts, combined with your bids and budget.

While visibility can be achieved immediately with PPC, optimising the campaigns to their fullest potential takes many months, with daily changes to bids and A/B testing.





# Google Ads

Google Ads is an auction-based platform, where you bid on the terms or keywords users are searching for each day, and serve them text adverts that are relevant to their query. Logically, the more search volume a keyword has, the more desirable it is, however the difference between a successful and unsuccessful campaign often lies in understanding the user's intent when searching.

It is those keywords that show clear intent to convert that are most desirable for advertisers, and often lead to the highest cost per clicks due to competition for them. For example, see the table below of sample keywords, their monthly search volumes and cost per clicks:

Keyword	Monthly Search Volume (UK)*	Estimated Cost Per Click*
solicitor	33,100	£2.52
divorce solicitors London	390	£10.75
personal injury solicitors	2,400	£24.62
professional negligence solicitors	350	£9.96

*\*Data taken from Google Ads Keyword Planner. It is correct as of January 2019*

“Solicitor” as a keyword has much more search volume than anything else, but it's very broad and doesn't tell you anything about what type of solicitor they are looking for, or where. Therefore the cost per click is a lot lower than those keywords that are more specific on these

aspects, where cost per clicks can be anywhere between £5-30, but the conversion rates will be much higher.

Google Ad campaigns can also be tailored in many other ways, such as the time of day or day of the week someone searches,

their age and gender, what device they are using and where they are in the country. By constantly refining your target audience by performance, you can increase return on investment and save budget for use in other areas.



# Facebook advertising

Advertising on Facebook often gets confused with promoting your services organically via the platform, in order to attract likes and comments on a business page.

Being active on Facebook by publishing regular posts is now a largely redundant form of marketing, due to the way Facebook has evolved over the past few years, meaning any posts you make now only reach a small fraction of your audience, making it an inefficient use of time.

Facebook PPC however has gone from strength to strength in recent times, with an expanding portfolio of campaign types available, and a unique cross-section of targeting options that sets it apart from other social networks.

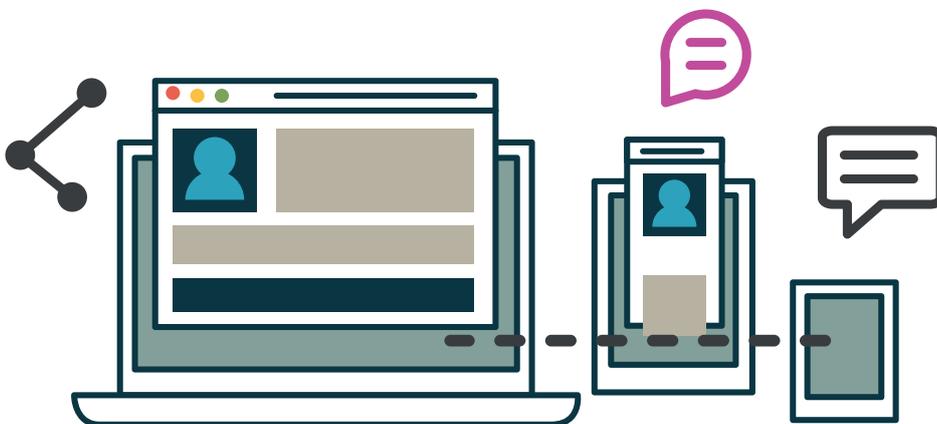
One key difference between Facebook and a platform such as Google is a user's likelihood of converting straight away after seeing an advert. When someone is on Facebook, they aren't actively looking for a product or service, and therefore the types of messaging they are receptive to also changes. Video adverts and boosted page content for example tend to work better than a straightforward text and image ad that is more aggressively trying to get someone to visit the advertiser's website.

This means that Facebook is most frequently used as a marketing tool for people who sit in the awareness stage of a conversion cycle. The objective of this type of campaign therefore can't only be lead generation, it has to be, for

example, content consumption, the download of a guide or case study, or to simply finish watching a certain percentage of a video. You can then utilise Facebook's native remarketing functionality to build an audience list of users who have finished this first step of awareness, and retarget them with a more tailored advert that prompts them to get in touch.

The types of targeting options available on Facebook include (but are not limited to):

- Geographic - down to a particular postcode
- Demographic - age, gender, relationship status, number of children, residential status, job title, anniversaries
- Interests - food and drink, travel, pets, technology, shopping, events, movies, music, tv, fitness and wellbeing, sports



# Landing pages

Due to the variety of messages legal practices will want to convey via PPC (depending on the platform and audience), and the necessity for the website to not be subject to various A/B testing of copy, images and calls to action, it is advisable to use bespoke PPC landing pages for this activity.

By funnelling users into a very specific landing page that has no navigation and a very clear call to action, it's surprising how much higher conversion rates can be without any distractions available. There are various technologies available to produce dedicated PPC landing pages, such as Instapage and Unbounce, and they run off a subdomain via the

main website address. The key benefit of such technology is the ability to tailor the wording for higher relevancy scores, as well as being able to test different elements of the page for best conversion rates. Unsure whether a friendly image of a family will work better than a solicitor talking things through over a desk? Just run a 50/50 split test to find out.

# Measurement

A key element of any digital marketing activity is being able to track results. What happens after a user clicks through an advert or an organic link on Google? Using Google Analytics, a free website reporting tool, you can see detailed data about who is visiting your site, what pages they visit and whether they have taken a key action such as filling in a form or making a call. This

information can then be utilised to build up a profile of your ideal target market, and then fed back into your campaigns. It can also be analysed in order to make adjustments to the website and improve conversion rates.

Key metrics such as average time on site and the rate at which users simply bounce off without doing anything can be really

useful, especially when broken down by traffic source. Google Analytics not only tracks paid for activity, but all users who visit your website, meaning overall trends can be identified in terms of geographic conversion rates, top performing devices and what pages people typically convert on. It also helps benchmark website performance, so that changes can be monitored for improvements.

# Summing up

TAKING A CONSIDERED AND THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO HOW CLIENTS, TARGETS, REFERRAL BODIES, POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES AND PERHAPS STAFF USE A SITE IS VERY IMPORTANT. WEBSITES ARE OBVIOUSLY THE SHOP WINDOW FOR MANY FIRMS NOW. SOME FIRMS ARE BUILDING ONLINE PRACTICES AND CHANGING THE CLIENT ENGAGEMENT MODEL, WHILST OTHERS USE SITES PRIMARILY AS A VERIFICATION RESOURCE.

AS WITH ALL MARKETING A STRATEGIC MINDSET IS IMPORTANT WHEN PLANNING ACTIVITY, CAMPAIGNS AND ON-GOING MESSAGING. THIS IS MOST DEFINITELY NOT A ONE CAMPAIGN FITS ALL SCENARIO. AS EVER GAINING ADVICE FROM PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND THE SECTOR AND THE TOOLS AVAILABLE CAN PAY SUBSTANTIAL DIVIDENDS WHEN IT COMES TO OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS.



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