

Managing a Law Firm Sales Pipeline: An Attorney's Guide

Article By:

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Most law firms have an ebb and a flow when attracting and retaining new clients. However, when an ebb drags on a little longer than anticipated, firms often begin to panic, wondering how they're going to bring in new leads and, with another payday approaching, how they will meet their obligations.

If you have been losing sleep due to the financial burden of running a law firm, you're not alone. Sales is an integral part of running a business. No matter their size, solo, small, and larger firms are all businesses. Yet, managers often wonder how they should approach sales, how it plays into the staff dynamic, and whether technology should play a significant role.

Operating a law firm without a sales pipeline is a little like running a retail business without a physical or online presence – nobody is going to know you are there unless they stumble upon you by accident, and if they do, they're likely going to be unfamiliar with what you have to offer. This is not a sustainable way to run a profitable law firm.

For decades, lawyers have relied on business cards, yellow page ads, word of mouth, and maybe a basic website to advertise their firm. However, in this increasingly competitive legal environment, these methods are no longer effective, at least not by themselves. There are many ways to market a law firm, but you risk spending time and money on maneuvers that don't fit their needs or type of client without one dedicated strategy in place. The law firm sales pipeline is an effective way to create and organize the marketing activities most relevant to your firm and get the right clients closer to hiring you.

What is a Law Firm Sales Pipeline, and What Should it Look Like?

A law firm's sales pipeline is a list of your process for pinpointing new leads and qualifying them, showcasing your firm's value, selling your services, and asking for referrals. Although there is more than one way to build a law firm's sales pipeline, most are made up of several stages.

1 Attract

The first step in most law firm sales pipelines involves attracting ideal clients. Legal consumers in this stage are actively searching for an attorney, and a law firm's job is to pursue activities that will gain exposure and grab the attention of these potential clients. Some examples of ways to attract clients

at this stage of the sales pipeline include running creative and effective television ads, engaging in online marketing activities with regular presence on social media platforms, and featuring an easy to navigate website can help a firm reach a wider audience and attract more relevant clients.

2 Convince

After you've grabbed a potential client's attention, the next step is to convince them that you're the right lawyer to handle their needs. This is where effective website landing pages, client testimonials, and thought-provoking content are all excellent ways to achieve this. However, no matter which method you choose, the goal is to offer proof regarding why your firm is the answer to potential clients' legal issues. This will often be enough to motivate them to reach out by calling you on the phone or filling out your website's online form.

3 Convert

This crucial part of the sales pipeline is where potential firm clients are transformed into leads. During this stage, law firms must make it easy for people to contact them once they have decided that they are interested in hiring one of their attorneys. However, this critical stage is where many firms fail to convert these valuable leads due to the lack of an efficient intake management system, the failure to follow up, and a general lack of awareness of what is at stake – a new client.

No matter how you decide to set up your law firm's sales pipeline, the result should look the same: a clear pathway to guide potential clients from the moment they hear about your services online to when they decide to give you a call.

How to Staff for Sales - or Assign Sales to an Existing Role

The lawyers who are best able to build a successful law practice never discount the importance of marketing their practices. However, most are so busy serving clients, working on cases, and appearing in court that they neglect their sales pipeline. Although many attorneys think their firm is too small to warrant a sales team, it's not about firm size. Whether your firm is small or large, you need a dedicated person (or team) to manage your unconverted leads.

Your sales department can be made up of existing team members or salespeople (nonlawyers) acting on your behalf. With some limited exceptions, most lawyers dislike selling and are typically not as good at it as a trained sales professional. An externally focused, client-centered sales professional with experience marketing law firms can help any firm drive more revenue, retain more clients, and lighten the pressure that legal professionals face related to increasing business. When collaborating on a team with legal professionals who can provide an understanding of substantive law, sales pros know precisely how to move the sales process along, attract the right clients, and win business.

How to Track Your Leads and Follow Up

Law firms must find better ways to reach new clients and create more sophisticated promotions to make the most of their marketing budget and use it strategically. However, the most outstanding marketing campaign won't do any good if the firm doesn't take advantage of the leads it generates.

Unfortunately, law firms are often resistant to the lead tracking methods used by other industries. As a result, many people who contact an attorney are left to wait days for a callback, and some never

hear back at all. But fortunately, some new tools and techniques are now available to help law firms boost their client retention rates. Here are seven ways to improve lead tracking in your firm:

1. **Capture.** A systematic approach is necessary to obtain the full benefits of lead tracking. Consider the many ways someone can become a lead for your firm: email, phone call, web form, referral, and social media messaging, to name just a few. With cloud-based lead tracking software, you can automatically track all these types of leads, nurturing and engaging them every step of the way to drive sales, scale business, and increase revenue for all firms, no matter their size.
2. **Follow up.** We live in an instant gratification society. Legal consumers expect an immediate response to their requests, yet one [ABA study](#) found that 42 percent of the time, law firms take three or more days to reply to a voicemail or web-generated form from a prospective client. This delayed response often proves to be harmful when building a relationship with a client – particularly during their early interactions with your law firm.
3. **Automate.** To capture every incoming lead that comes your way, consider using automation software. Rather than personally addressing each lead at every stage, automation technology allows firms to set up custom templates and let the software take it from there. Templates enable firms to create, schedule, and send automated client communications to improve organization, streamline your workflow, account for every detail from lead to conversion, and keep everyone on the same page.
4. **Speak your clients' language.** Know how to best communicate with your potential clients. Some appreciate phone calls and emails (although some ignore calls from unknown numbers and only occasionally give their email a quick skim), but almost everyone regularly reads their text messages. Why do people seem to prefer texting to other forms of communication? It's fast, easy, and feels personal. It can lead to greater success when communicating with potential clients, is helpful throughout the intake process, and enhances your entire operation.
5. **Track sources.** With so many marketing strategies, law firms can be hard pressed to keep track of all their lead sources, yet they must do so to allow teams to make smarter decisions down the road. For example, you can ask leads how they found you, use specific phone numbers for certain campaigns, or utilize specialized software known as a legal customer relationship manager (CRM). A legal CRM gives lawyers a clear view of where each prospect stands in their journey toward becoming a client and beyond.
6. **Make better decisions.** How many of your leads eventually become clients? How do your client acquisition rates change over time? Do certain staff members or lawyers affect your firm's conversion rates? Which of your firm's marketing efforts is leading to the best outcomes? You need to know the answers to these questions to attract and retain the most clients, and you can, with a centralized system keeping track of lead sources and outcomes. These systems generate the numbers automatically, from the first interaction with a potential client to the case's outcome.

Once you're tracking your leads, you need to ensure that you are at the top of the list of lawyers a client is considering retaining. To keep the sale moving down the sales pipeline, you'll need to focus on educating the potential client, possibly by offering a free consultation or sharing helpful information pertinent to their case. Finally, encourage the client to act by asking for their business – in other words, sign the retainer agreement and move forward with the intake process.

Why Legal Technology is Crucial in Law Firm Sales

Modern legal marketing and digital marketing are now the same. Over the past twenty years, law firm marketing has been driven by emerging new technologies that have profoundly changed how firms

can locate, engage, and track prospective clients. The [2021 LexisNexis InterAction Marketing & Business Development Survey](#) found that “high growth” law firms (those that grew more than 20 percent in 2020) were four times more likely to track metrics for marketing and business development efforts than slower-growing firms. Moreover, this metrics-led marketing is much more likely to succeed when firms leverage the right emerging technology tools to help make their efforts more precise, efficient, and targeted.

Most lawyers understand that technology is vital to efficiently perform routine legal services like automating document creation, tracking critical deadlines, and streamlining practice management functions. But what about law firm sales? According to the [Legal Sales and Service Organization's annual report](#), 80 percent of legal sales professionals impact revenue through sales, yet only 14 percent of those responding said they have a marketing, sales, or business development position on their firm's management committee.

Technology can help law firms without a formal sales and marketing team reach prospective clients. For example, law firms now have access to CRM software to automate the lead generation and analysis process, capture and track leads, track where a lead is in the sales pipeline, follow up with prospective clients, and assist with the client intake process. When law firms embrace technology, the overall client experience improves dramatically. With the help of a few tools, such as a CRM platform, firms can automate their sales pipeline to reach and convert more clients while focusing on what they do best: practicing law.

Above post written by Jan Hill

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