

Psychology and Law Firm Marketing: Persuading the Prospective Client

Friday, April 5, 2019

Do you want more clients? If so, you'll need to reach prospects with effective messaging. If it strikes a chord with your targeted audiences, they will reach out to you. If the prospect is a good fit with your brand, he or she will agree to retain you.

This will take some persuasion on your part during the process, so you will have to be a good listener and know the prospect well. With some knowledge of psychology and how people make decisions, you can craft messages that may increase your success rate.

Many factors go into writing effective law firm website content and marketing material. These can include search engine optimization (SEO), the tone a law firm seeks and the target audience, as well as practical issues like how long the piece should be. No matter what it's about or the intended readers, flavoring written material with language that could tug on the reader's psyche is a good idea.

How we make decisions

We don't normally make decisions in cold, logical, dispassionate ways. Most people use mental shortcuts, known as heuristics, to save time and our limited brain power. Simpler questions are preferred and in the long run, our experience may teach us that heuristics, as illogical as they may seem, result in positive outcomes most of the time.

As a practical example, we don't have the time or energy to study all the data before choosing what to eat for breakfast, so we use a shortcut. What do your friends eat for breakfast? Do you associate bagels with positive memories of having breakfast with your grandfather? These things may have more of an impact on what you eat in the morning than nutritional labels.

When people choose which attorney to hire and which ones to pass by, the decisions may have more to do with hunches, emotions and biases than objective, observable facts. Two heuristics that can come into play are fear of loss and social proof.

Fear of loss: the power of negative thinking

Psychological studies have shown that, generally, we will risk more to avoid a loss than to obtain a gain. Our fear of losing what we have is greater than our eagerness to gain something that we do not. (De Martino, B., Kumaran, D., Seymour, B., Dolan, R. Frames, Biases, and Rational Decision-Making in the Human Brain. *Science*. 2006; 313(7587):684-685).

Do we calculate all the possibilities to determine the chances of gaining or losing, then do the math to establish how much we are likely to lose or gain? For many of us the answer is no. We equate losing something we have as being worse than missing out on a gain.

This involves framing the issue in a way that emphasizes the potential loss over possible gain. An effective



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approach by a personal injury attorney could be to claim that an accident victim will lose out on a bigger settlement by trying to negotiate one on his or her own. Because of the person's ignorance of the law and how insurance companies handle these claims, a settlement may be less than one that could be obtained with an attorney's help.

Social proof

Social proof is a term used in the book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* by Robert Cialdini, PhD. It is why we ask friends to recommend a plumber, look at customer reviews when deciding which laptop to buy or use Chambers and Partners to narrow down which attorneys to hire. We rely on the experience of others and assume that if they've had a positive experience, chances are good that we will, too.

Instead of consuming information and doing the work necessary to decide rationally who should represent your business in an employment dispute, you seek out other business owners or attorneys to ask for suggestions. Might a recommended attorney do a terrible job? Yes, but we're willing to take that risk if it shortens and simplifies our search.

Rating sites, client testimonials (even though they might be limited by your state rules of professional conduct), testimonials by other attorneys and case studies are all examples of social proof that could be powerful tools to persuade a potential client to call your office or fill out your online contact form.

Conclusion

These are just a few ways that law firm marketing can leverage psychology to influence potential clients to act. Website content and marketing material can have many short-term goals, but, ultimately, if they don't persuade readers to at least consider your services, what's the point?

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