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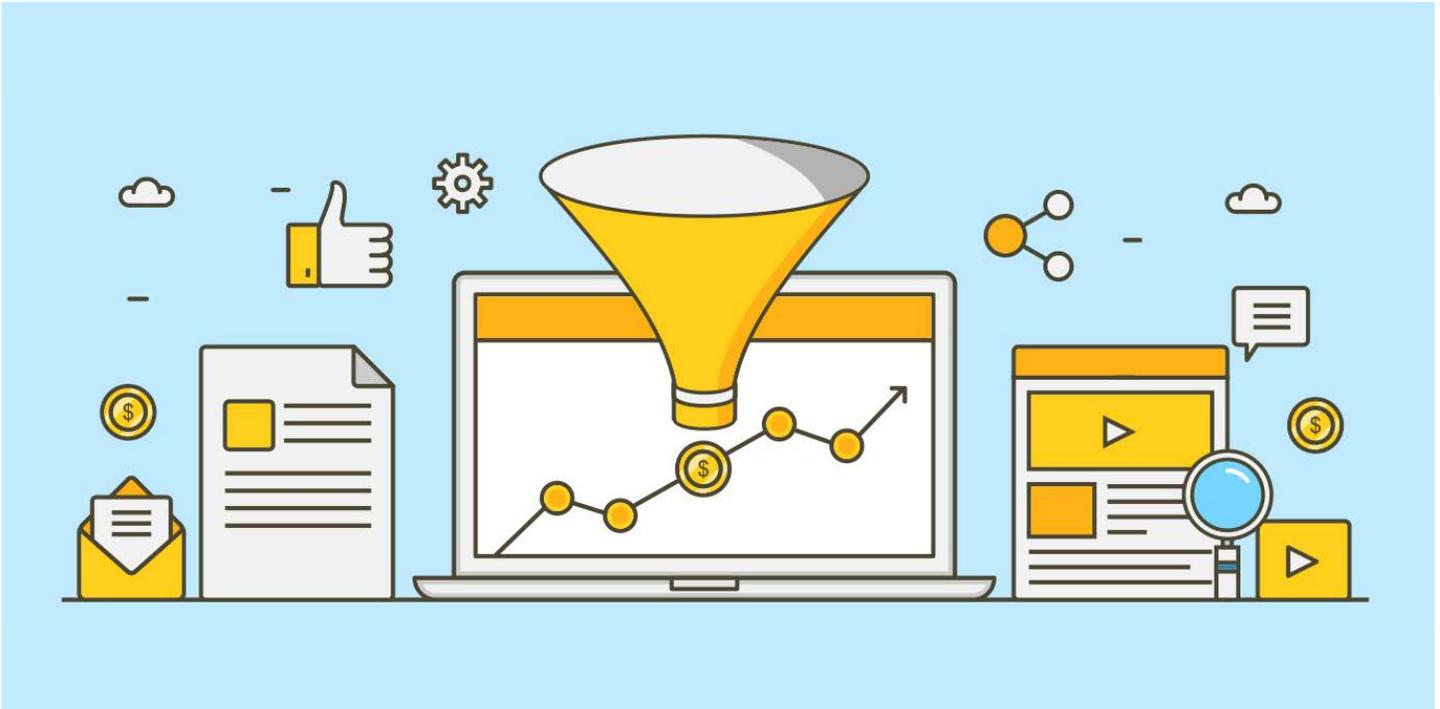
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**Or contact:**

Marco Maggio • [mmaggio@allcovered.com](mailto:mmaggio@allcovered.com)  
Zina Motley-Weaver • [zmotley@kmbs.konicaminolta.us](mailto:zmotley@kmbs.konicaminolta.us)





# Can't-Miss Lead Generation and Conversion Strategies

To locate and land new clients, you need a strong online presence, diverse contact list — and quick callbacks.



**ERIN BRERETON**  
Owner, Chicago Journalist Media

**In today's competitive market, finding potential clients isn't easy.**

Convincing them you're the best choice can prove even more challenging. The average consumer attorney converts just 5 to 15 percent of every 100 leads into paying clients, according to Stephen Fairley, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of legal marketing service The Rainmaker Institute.

"Many attorneys fall prey to the one-call-quote belief," Fairley says. "A prospective client calls, you talk to them for 5 to 25 minutes, pitch them, and the client signs up."

In reality, the process is often much longer and much more involved. To successfully convert promising leads into lucrative new business, firms need to have a solid marketing plan — and a thorough follow-up process in place.

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### GENERATING LEADS

In a recent study from the Legal Marketing Association and Bloomberg Law, 67 percent of firms said they were increasing their focus on business development and marketing. Internal pressure to generate revenue was the biggest reason.

To build business and profitability, firms may want to try ramping up efforts in the following areas:

**Online marketing:** The majority of consumers — 76 percent — who needed an attorney looked for one online, according to a Lexis-Nexis Martindale-Hubbell study.

The way a firm communicates with the leads its marketing and referral efforts generate can either earn it new business or end the relationship before it starts.

Driving traffic to the firm's website should be an obvious goal; however, because search engine algorithms change frequently, staying on top of search engine optimization (SEO) trends can be tricky, according to Fairley. He recommends hiring a professional with a proven legal industry track record.

In the past three to five years, he says, firms have also begun to see value in having more robust practice area-centric content.

"If you have two competitors in the same city, one has a 10-page website and the other has a 200-page site, Google will rank the 200-page site higher in its search results," Fairley says. "We have clients now who have several thousand pages of content on their website."

Offering more interactive content — a checklist, for example, compared to an article — and design that inspires users to take action can also help increase lead generation, according to Rita Chaires, Director of Web and Online Services at a membership-based practice management organization called the American Academy of Estate Planning Attorneys.

"If your site is static or a boring online brochure, it's not going to move anybody to pick up the phone and reach out," Chaires says. "Certain design elements should be tested. Does an orange button produce more clicks than a green button? Does a 'download now' option produce more clicks than a 'submit' one?"

Some industry members, according to Fairley, are using innovative tools like professionally produced videos to attract clients.

"There are a lot of misconceptions about what attorneys do, and consumers are more cynical and skeptical than before," he says. "If you've created a video about who you are, what you're like to work with, what results you've gotten for clients and why someone should hire your firm, that stands out from the competition."

**Referrals:** Roughly 40 percent of attorneys say referrals are responsible for more than 40 percent of their new business, according to a Super Lawyers survey.

In the current competitive market, however, firms can't depend solely on them to generate leads, according to Stevan Pardo, Chair of the construction, hotel and litigation groups at boutique Miami law firm Pardo Jackson Gainsburg, PL.



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"Selling who you are to other lawyers in the community isn't as effective as it used to be," Pardo says. "You have to go to the business client directly and supplement what you do through a lawyer referral network."

Pardo Jackson encourages its attorneys to get involved in community groups, business organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, and not-for-profits to expand their contact base.

Jonathan Fitzgarrald, Managing Partner at Equinox Strategy Partners, a legal business and development consultancy, recommends partnering with complimentary service providers — accountants, insurance brokers, business managers — who may view recommending your services as offering clients added value.



"There are other professionals outside of legal who are essentially targeting the same market," Fitzgarrald says. "The more you can form an alliance with them, the more likely they are to think of you when one of their relationships needs a lawyer."

To help attorneys network and meet new referral sources, some savvy firms are starting to provide client development training earlier than in the past, according to Fitzgarrald.

"Most law firms don't have their attorneys focus on any client generation until the attorney becomes a partner — then they've wasted 10 years of mentoring and developing future partners," he says. "Yes, it's expensive for law firms, but it's an investment that can pay off beautifully in the future."

### SIGNING NEW CLIENTS THROUGH IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS

The way a firm communicates with the leads its marketing and referral efforts generate can either earn it new business or end the relationship before it starts.

"Whenever somebody fills out a 'contact us' form or completes another action on your website, it's very important someone within the firm is responsible for making sure each lead gets put into a marketing database, and there's a very specific follow-up sequence that's tracked," Chaires says. "If somebody downloads a probate checklist and is interested in learning more, are there additional resources you should be emailing them? That's someone looking for help."

It's equally as important to respond to other correspondence quickly. A study from sales management software provider Velocify showed returning a call within a minute increases the likelihood of conversion by nearly 400 percent. Starting in the second minute, that number drops to 160 percent — and keeps declining.

Yet 42 percent of law firms take three or more days to reply to voicemails or web-generated inquiries from prospective clients, according to an ABA Law Practice Division study.

"With the level of competition, you need to follow up persistently with multiple phone calls and emails — 6 to 10 times before giving up," Fairley says.

Instead of assigning the task to a busy attorney or paralegal, he recommends appointing an office manager or other non-attorney team member, or adding a new role.

“Once you’re getting more than 30 to 50 leads per month coming into the top of that sales funnel, you need to hire a dedicated client intake specialist,” Fairley says. “You can get 5 to 10 times the return on your investment.”

Once you’ve made contact, a few other moves may help you woo potential clients:

**Meeting face-to-face:** “You will always have a higher conversion ratio if you can get a lead to come in,” Fairley says. “People are more committed if they get in a car or on a bus or train to come into your office. There are less distractions, and you can build a rapport easier than on the phone.”

**Being sympathetic to the situation:** “Clients want to feel like their issue is the most important issue,” says Linda Worton Jackson, Chair of Pardo Jackson’s bankruptcy/restructuring and corporate transaction groups. “Even though you’ll need a lot of information to get to a solution, they need to know you’re already thinking about it.”

**Considering alternative fee arrangements:** That’s helped Pardo Jackson bring in new clients, according to Jackson. “Clients have to budget for legal services, and they expect us to budget, too,” Pardo says. “If we can’t tell them approximately what we think it will cost on a retainer, with some flexibility for adjustments, they’re not going to feel like we’re as nimble in our ability to satisfy their goals and needs.”

If you can’t convince the prospective client you can offer an agreeable arrangement, another firm might.

The legal market is highly competitive, and that isn’t likely to change anytime soon. However, with a carefully crafted value proposition and an ongoing commitment to expeditious communication, opportunities to convert potential parties into signed business can abound.

“Turning relationships into clients is not rocket science,” Fitzgarrald says. “If the timing is right and the message is right, there are tons of people out there.” ■



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Erin Brereton** is a legal industry marketing consultant and freelance journalist who has written about the legal industry, finance, business and other topics for more than 50 legal associations, magazines, websites and other publications.

 [breretonerin@gmail.com](mailto:breretonerin@gmail.com)

 [twitter.com/erbrer09](https://twitter.com/erbrer09)

 [www.chicagojournalist.com](http://www.chicagojournalist.com)



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