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Choosing Legal Representation in the UK:

**How the Internet is Transforming User
Behaviour and Legal Services Marketing**

Legallybetter White Paper

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1. Introduction

The Internet has dramatically changed the way we find information about and compare products and services. Many of us are already using the Internet to source and purchase a range of products and services from DVDs and books through to travel and insurance. Now, the importance of the Internet as an information source is spreading into new markets and one of these is legal services.

Choosing a solicitor is an important decision but it is not always that simple to compare solicitors and find the right one for you. Traditional methods include local phone books and specialist legal directories but many of these tell you nothing about the quality of service available or the suitability of a specific legal adviser for your specific problem.

As our use of the Internet to find information and advice grows so new sites are emerging offering more effective ways for individuals and SMEs to compare solicitors and choose their legal representation.

Section 2 outlines the results of some recent research which emphasises the increasingly important role that the Internet is playing as an information source on legal services.

Section 3 describes the range of information sources now available on the Internet offering help to those looking to compare solicitors and find legal advice and it focuses particularly on new sites such as comparison sites and legal matching sites:

- Traditional legal directories
- Comparison sites and legal matching sites
- Networks of law firms and solicitors

As this White Paper was being published, the consumer web site moneysupermarket.com announced the launch of a lead generation service for personal injury (PI) lawyers, following its launch of similar services for areas such as wills and conveyancing at the end of 2008. The service claims to have 30 PI lawyers already signed up and the arrival of such a mainstream consumer site into the legal web space is further evidence of the way the marketing and sales of legal services is rapidly being transformed.

2. Recent Research

- Results from an independent survey in 2008 show that, after word of mouth, the Internet is now the most important source for those looking for a law firm or solicitor.
- In 2005, only 11% searched the Internet for sources of legal advice but by 2008 this had risen to 19%. In contrast, 20% of adults used Yellow Pages or another local directory to find a law firm or solicitor in 2005 but, by 2008, this had fallen to just 9%. (Source IRN Research Survey, June/July 2008 [1]).
- Similar results to the above came from an Ipsos survey in the USA back in 2007 which found that more people - 32% - were turning to the Internet as a resource to find out about lawyers than traditional Yellow Pages [2].
- The Ipsos survey also noted that the second most important factor when choosing a lawyer, after the attorney's experience handling cases similar to theirs, were the "positive ratings from their clients".
- IRN's 2008 survey also found that, of those respondents using a law firm in the last 18 months, over three-quarters rated the overall quality of service offered as either "excellent" or

“good”. So, despite the generally poor perception of lawyers and solicitors fuelled by some adverse media coverage, the overwhelming majority of clients are positive about the legal services they receive.

- The Internet is rapidly becoming a key tool resource for looking for information on legal services and choosing a legal representative yet a significant minority of law firms and solicitors are still failing to take advantage of the Internet as a marketing channel. An analysis of Legallybetter.com’s database of UK law firms and solicitors estimates that around a third of these still do not have a web site.

*1,039 adults were interviewed in an independent research survey in June/July 2008 and asked:

"If you had to choose a law firm or legal representative for a relatively straightforward matter such as a house purchase or sale, or making a will, which of the following would you use to find a law firm or solicitor?"

Methods of Choosing a Law Firm/Solicitor (% of respondents), June/July 2008

Method	Total	Male	Female
Recommendations from friend, relative, work colleague	49.0	48.0	50.0
I have law firm I have used for many years	30.0	30.0	30.0
Search the Internet	19.0	21.0	17.0
Advice from another professional, e.g. bank, estate agent, accountant	19.0	22.0	17.0
Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Which?, other consumer organisation	19.0	18.0	20.0
Yellow Pages or other local directory	9.0	9.0	9.0
None of the above	5.0	3.0	6.0

Source: IRN Research

3. Finding and Comparing Solicitors on the Internet

3.1 Legal Web Sites - Traditional Directories

The Law Society in England and Wales (and similar bodies in Scotland and Northern Ireland) has a web directory of solicitors and other legal directory brands, such as Chambers and Waterlow, have been around for many years in print versions. Most of these specialist brands now also have a web presence.

Most of these directories can be searched by practice area and geographical area (e.g. town or postcode) but the information given can vary from one directory to another. In some cases it is basic contact information and in others more detailed information on areas of expertise.

Some of the most comprehensive lists of solicitors and law firms come from:

The Law Society (England and Wales)

<http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law>

LawyerLocator (LexisNexis)

www.lawyerlocator.co.uk

Waterlow

<http://www.waterlowlegal.com/>

Directories focusing on the larger law firms include:

Chambers

<http://www.chambersandpartners.com/>

Legal500

<http://www.legal500.com/books/I500>

TheLawyer

<http://www.thelawyer.com/law-firm-directory.html>

3.2 Legal Web Sites - The New Breed

The Internet opens up new opportunities for potential clients of law firms and solicitors to make more informed decisions. In particular, three types of websites are emerging which enable potential clients to compare solicitors:

- Comparison sites which compare solicitors on areas such as quality of service, communications with clients, speed of service etc. Legallybetter.com in the UK is such a service.

We are all becoming familiar with comparison sites in other sectors, such as insurance, but many of these are looking for the best priced deals for a specific type of product. Given the complicated nature of many legal issues, a simple price comparison rarely works so legallybetter.com is not a price comparison site but focuses on other areas such as service quality.

- Legal matching sites which will give contact details for appropriate law firms and solicitors if the potential client is prepared to provide some details to the site about their specific legal issue. Some examples are Qualitysolicitors.com, Bidlegal, Takelegaladvice, and Connectlaw.
- Solicitor network sites where groups of local solicitors and law firms join together to create an umbrella national brand offering legal services on the Internet. These networks have been developed in the wake of increased competition in the sector as a result of the Legal Services Act. Examples are the Legal Alliance and LawNet.

Here is a brief selection of some of the sites to check out:

Comparison Sites

www.legallybetter.com

Legallybetter's unique feature is that it brings consumer reviews and ratings of solicitors from around the UK together in one place to enable other law firm users to compare solicitors and compare lawyers. All reviews and ratings are verified and come from genuine clients and focus on service quality and value not price.

Visitors to the site looking to find a solicitor in a specific locality or covering a specific practice area can check the ones reviewed by other clients through a free simple search with no registration needed from the home page. Once Legallybetter has a client review for a specific law firm the law firm can join the site via an annual membership fee.

Matching Sites

www.qualitysolicitors.com

At qualitysolicitors.com, the user fills in a form covering the type of legal issue that they are interested in and the site then matches the user to a solicitor for the type of law needed after calling/emailing back to the user to discuss their needs in more detail. Law firms and solicitors pay an annual membership fee to be on the site.

www.takelegaladvice.com

Takelegaladvice describes itself as a "matching service" where individuals/businesses register and fill out a form with their specific legal issue, location, and personal details and the site then matches these to relevant law firms. The site also gives an estimate of the cost involved. No referral fees are involved but the site obtains revenue from advertising from law firms and others.

www.bidlegal.co.uk

Having submitted details (including name and address) in a 3-stage register process, the user's 'case' is submitted or lawyers to bid for. The user is emailed the bids by law firms interested in taking the case and a price is quoted. The law firm's identity is kept secret from the user – and vice versa - until a decision is made to use a particular lawyer. Law firms pay a registration fee to join the site and then an annual membership fee.

www.contactlaw.co.uk

Contactlaw is a Thomson Reuters web site where visitors can telephone or fill in a form online giving details of their legal requirements. Once the form is submitted, or the phone call made, someone from Contactlaw then phones the potential client back to obtain more information. The final stage is that the potential client is introduced to a preferred solicitor.

Solicitor Network Sites

www.lawnet.co.uk

A network of 66 independent law firms and solicitors in the UK and Ireland. LawNet has actually been around for a long time as it was established in 1989 and it now offers a wide range of marketing options and purchasing discounts for its member firms. Many of the firms in the network are established law firms with a long history of membership of LawNet.

www.thelegalalliance.co.uk

Formed in 2009 as a network of independent law firms spread across England and Wales, The Legal Alliance (TLA) is looking to recruit medium sized and will have two types of members:

General members - general practice firms offering a broad range of services to consumers and SMEs and each will have an exclusive area based on postcodes (typically a city or town) and will receive all leads generated in that area for the types of work they undertake.

Specialist members - niche or volume practices. Niche firms will typically operate on a regional basis in types of legal work that most general practice firms do not undertake. Volume practices will operate in their volume specialisms.

4. References

[1]

The UK Legal Services Market. IRN Research, October 2008.

General review of UK legal services market size, market trends and developments. Includes original 2008 consumer research on routes to find information on legal services.

http://www.irn-research.com/index.php?/main/news/legal_report_2007

[2] Consumers Lack Confidence when Choosing the Right Lawyer. 5th June 2007

Research undertaken to coincide with the launch of www.avvo.com, a US website rating and profiling lawyers.

http://www.avvo.com/about_avvo/press_detail?article_key=confidence

[3]

Legal Referral Sites Galore - But Which Will Work? Can You Create A 'Legal Brand' From Scratch?

Joe Reeve. *Words for Business*, 17th March 2009

A detailed independent analysis of some of the sites mentioned in this White Paper.

<http://email.fusionexpress.co.uk/T/ViewEmail/r/236A84E7BF08A624/E85C8D71A714F3432540EF23F30FEDED>

[4]

Like for Like. Jo Summers. *Solicitor's Journal*, 10th February 2009.

Given the growth of legal comparison sites and matching sites, article considers whether law firms should factor these new sites into their marketing plans. Jo is a consultant at Penningtons, sole practitioner at PWT Advice and director & co-founder of www.bidlegal.co.uk.

<http://www.solicitorsjournal.com>

This White Paper was prepared by David Mort, Client Marketing Director at legallybetter.com and also Director, IRN Research. Any comments and feedback to david.mort@legallybetter.com

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legallybetter.com [The solicitor comparison site](#)

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