
Review of Legallybetter.com site - Extract from May 2010 issue of Internet Newsletter for Lawyers & Law 2.0

Legallybetter.com – based on client ratings and reviews By Justin Patten

Legallybetter opened for business in January 2009 to provide a quick and reliable way to compare solicitors and then find a solicitor, for private individuals and for businesses.

Its unique feature is that it brings independent consumer reviews and ratings of solicitors from around the UK together in one place. These have come from unsolicited feedback to Legallybetter, regular independent consumer and business market research surveys, and client testimonials from law firms and solicitors. All reviews and ratings are verified to establish that they come from genuine clients.

This is not a price comparison site as such but focuses on service quality and value. Users provide comments on the service they received and also rate the law firm according to Quality of Advice, Speed of Service, Value for Money, Helpfulness and Friendliness and Quality of Communications with Client.

The site is being promoted nationally via various channels including printed media and websites while a locally based promotional campaign is concentrating on key towns/cities and counties.

Legallybetter has 50 to 60 law firms signed up so far, some with a number of offices. The desire is to move up to 150, with a wide geographic coverage. I felt that the company had substance. I had dealings with two of the executives and found them very helpful.

Jon Hepburn, MD, is founder of **The Fedora Consultancy**, a specialist provider of marketing and business development advice for smaller law firms. He is a member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and a Chartered Marketer with over 20 years' experience in a variety of marketing disciplines.

David Mort, Client Marketing Director, is an experienced market research professional. He is co-founder and owner of **IRN Research**, a full-service research agency and a full member of the Market Research Society. David's research work has given him a detailed insight into the trends shaping the changing legal services sector.

Jon told me "The rationale for the creation of Legallybetter came from a combination of legislation, technology and the social shift to using online communication. Effectively the numbers of people using the internet is continuing to grow and with search engines becoming ever more powerful, this represented an opportunity for the firm to focus on the power of recommendation.

Generally speaking, lawyers do not like to be compared, feeling that a straight comparison on the basis of, say, price, doesn't accurately reflect the complexities and quality of the service they provide. With this in mind, we are focusing on the power of recommendation and harnessing the power of the internet. We encourage lawyers to get their clients to recommend them. We promote the individual law firm's brand and their reputation, not that of an intermediary.

We also encourage viewers to provide a rating, direct to us. The actual review is split into two sections namely a star system and word review. The vast majority of the reviews are good. Occasionally you get a bad one. If it is bad it has to go to the law firm for review by that firm. As a consequence it is possible for the firm to check and comment upon any review.

By offering a free listing, we have also distanced ourselves from referral sites. Trust is at the heart of what we do. We enable solicitors to promote their brand and their reputations."

Joining the site

As it says on the site, "Legallybetter is open to law firms of all sizes. All you need to join the site is to supply us with a review of your service from a client."

The basic listing is free and includes a description of the firm's services (up to 15 areas of law can be included), full contact details, a link to your home page, client reviews, Legal Stars rating, and two additional links to other parts of your website. Firms can also add profiles and photos of individual solicitors for a fee. This helps users to find solicitors specialising in a specific practice area and gives the firm an enhanced presence on the site. For £50 (plus VAT) a year, a profile and photo of one fee-earner can be added, or £125 (plus VAT) for up to five fee-earners, and £195 (plus VAT) for up to ten.

A criticism of the search facility is that you can type in your own address and obtain no results; but I understand that this is being improved to show the firms nearest to the given location.

User experiences

I talked to two firms with a paid listing: Mark Kiteley of Kiteleys Solicitors (Bournemouth and Southampton) and Paul Bennett of Bennett's Legal (Shrewsbury), both of whom are lawyers who run their own firms. They were both willing to be quoted and were open with me. What struck me was the positive feedback they gave about the service, with both of them in their own way revealing their internet and marketing savvyness. As a consequence, it was my impression that forward-looking law firms should certainly be considering the LegallyBetter service.

Kiteleys Solicitors primarily deals with personal injury. Mark Kiteley told me "The overall impression that I have is that the service is set out for your benefit. In addition, the Managing Director of LegallyBetter seems to genuinely enjoy the work that he is doing. It was very easy to set up. I receive a lot of emails from companies who seem more concerned about trying to get your business, but this site is different."

Mark has not yet been able to establish how much direct business he has gained from the service but with his website changing soon, he will be able to do so.

One of my concerns over the service was the relatively low number of solicitors who have subscribed thus far. This did not seem to bother Mark, who said that by being connected with a firm at the outset it gave him more opportunity to negotiate for better rates for the future. In any event, his view was that if something was good it should be supported if it is likely to work. He has a strong belief in the power of comparison sites.

With respect to possible negative feedback from clients, he said "We have not had any adverse comment so far, but it is always possible that this will happen at some point and we will just have to deal with it, if it occurs."

Bennett's Legal has taken a different approach with marketing and he has invited 5 clients to comment on the website. Paul Bennett is proactive on the marketing side, for example doing talks and Skype conferences.

As regards potential negative feedback he said "Anything new is frightening. I was reassured that the procedure is verified. We had asked our clients for feedback beforehand and were not just going to throw our reputation out there on the internet."

Paul goes on to say that the service has enabled him to get new business. The impression that I had from him is that the service is not a silver bullet to bring new business in, but rather an additional tool enabling him to market the firm in a certain way such as being progressive and embracing technological change.

Conclusion

In summary, I feel that Legallybetter is offering a service which does enable solicitors to promote themselves at a low price.

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