



**David Seager**  
is Consulting Adviser to  
SIFA Professional

## Professional Peer Recommendation over Comparison Site Review in 2022

**I often feel that I am banging the regulatory drum but having listened to the SRA's session at LegalEx, I was not surprised to hear of further developments planned on the 'Transparency' theme. Although I'm not advocating that law firms further embrace transparency because I am some stickler for the rules, I am saying it makes good business sense.**

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) have revisited the legal market this year from the consumer perspective. As a result, they are now keen not just on the published information to assist a customer who is choosing between providers, but also to help them ascertain the quality of that service.

It is this CMA pressure on legal regulators that lead the SRA to collaborate with CILEx, the Council for Licence Conveyancers and the Bar Standards Board, to announce a year-long pilot with a group of new and established comparison sites. To use a legal expression 'the jury is firmly still out' on the pilot but the regulators will be reviewing its success or otherwise in spring 2022.

My own view is that legal advice comparison is not and will never be, in many cases appropriate for such sites. Such advice, as with financial planning, can be detailed and highly individual and unlike car or holiday insurance, or even the holiday itself, is not easily compared. However, what is perhaps more valid is the personal recommendation of happy clients, and certainly the endorsement of fellow professionals.

Firms of solicitors cannot and should not ignore reasoning behind transparency and obviously must adhere to the rules, but it should be about devising a real plan for 2022 to attract new clients. That must involve a strategy for gaining positive referrals derived from real people as well as, or ideally, instead of comparison sites.

The clarity of your website is critical and, on that site, how your services, people and specialisms are described. In 2022, this is the bare minimum. As we emerge from the pandemic, clients will want options on how to deal with you, and this must be outlined and offered at outset on your site. Potential clients will want to be able to gain as much information from your site without commitment as possible and this might involve short information videos and even in 2022, chatbots, yes, I do mean chatbots on solicitors' sites. Offering an initial online video consultation without a fee for 15 minutes or similar will become increasingly popular - so don't be left behind.

*"My own view is that legal advice comparison is not and will never be, in many cases appropriate for such sites"*



**Alex Holt**  
is Business Development  
Director at Cashroom

## Necessity is the Mother of Invention

**The challenges presented by Covid came out of the blue. Absolutely everyone who was asked two years ago where they thought their business would be in the next three years got it wrong. Everyone.**

Teams and Zoom calls became the norm. Remote working was essential. Sudden staff shortages when Covid struck the firm. Huge fluctuations in work volumes, particularly in the property sector. Firms were forced to rethink their approach to staff and client engagement.

These factors were hugely influential for the growth of our business.

The finance function of a law firm sits right at the centre of many crucial issues for the business owners. Compliance. Risk. Efficiency. All collide within the accounts department. Suddenly firms were having to operate with a remote cashiering function. They had to ensure things were done compliantly, without security risks, and with optimal efficiency so that their end client did not experience a lesser service. Firms began to realise that those issues, as well as issues of sickness cover or problems with lack of resource when demand spiked, were not easily resolved.

The PII market were concerned about the technology and processes for such a vulnerable part of a law firm. Having an inhouse cashier working from home with bank accesses, and payment authorisation processes that only really worked when on site, was a major concern.

All these factors were good news for Cashroom. Our remote operation model was well established with all the right technology, security, supervision and processes in place. The 'necessity' for firms to operate their finance function remotely was the catalyst for even more firms than before to start rethinking their way of operating that element of their business. Suddenly many of the concerns that firms had had simply disappeared. We saw steady growth throughout the last 18 months and far fewer firms were asking whether it could work for them at all. They now wanted to ask "How will it work for us?" A far better conversation from our point of view, and we can now point to around 250 firms who use our services.

The pandemic has been, and continues to be, a horrific, stressful and challenging thing. The need for firms to be inventive is greater than ever before, but we are proof that such re-invention can be a very good thing.

*"The 'necessity' for firms to operate their finance function remotely was the catalyst..."*