

Quality indicators – peer recommendations over review websites

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Seager: Ask fellow professionals for video testimonials

I often feel that I am banging the Solicitors Regulation Authority's drum for them when it comes to transparency but it's because I genuinely believe in clarity when it comes to promoting quality professional services.

It is good sense and good for business, so I am stunned, five years on from the introduction, to be regularly reading that law firms are still being fined for rule breaches.

The SRA has continually reviewed progress and adherence to the transparency rules in the core areas and in 2021 we saw the start of phase two, which was motivated by what the Competition and Market Authority (CMA), whose consumer research inspired the transparency push, called 'quality indicators'.

Revisiting the legal market from the consumer perspective, the CMA was keen to see not just the published information on topics such as price and service standards, to assist a customer choose between providers, but also information to help them ascertain the quality of that service.

The result was the launch by the SRA in collaboration with CILEx Regulation and the Council of Licensed Conveyancers of a year-long pilot with a group of new and established comparison sites. The success or otherwise of the pilot was reviewed in 2022/23 and [published last summer](#).

The regulators wanted to assess the online reviews and customer feedback, sources of independent, trusted data, the views of the legal services providers that engaged with the pilot, and to review their own relationship with the direct comparison sites.

The result, to coin a well-used legal phrase, is that the jury is still out.

What I found extremely interesting is the obvious credence the SRA gives to the Legal Services Consumer Panel Tracker survey (a view I firmly share).

Last year's report began: "The public are increasingly shopping around for legal support, in particular by researching potential providers online. The Legal Services

Consumer Panel's 2022 consumer tracker suggested that almost half (43%) were doing this, up from 31% just 12 months earlier". (NB: It dropped slightly to 39% in the 2023 survey.)

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 2024 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. How your services, people and specialisms are described is vital – and, in 2024, the bare minimum. In this post-Covid world, clients will want options on how to deal with you, and this must be outlined and offered at outset on your site.

A testimonial section might be an easy addition to this end. 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 chatbots (yes, really).

Offering an initial free 15-minute video consultation or similar will become increasingly popular – so don't be left behind.

However, I would like to see this all together by blending the use of video technology and short films with my own suggestion that positive recommendations from clients or professional colleagues will carry more weight than a positive comparison site review.

Coming back to the [tracker survey](#), the third most common way for a consumer to find a lawyer was by referral from another professional firm, at 12%. (three times the figure for comparison sites).

So, why not consider asking the financial planners and accountants you work with, as well as highly satisfied clients, to relay their positive experience of working with or being looked after by your firm on video?

You can simply do this on your phone, of course, but consider paying a company to come into your office for a day to make numerous short videos to use on your website and on social media to draw people to you.

Clients need their tax, financial planning and legal professionals to be working hand in hand, so who better to offer a glowing endorsement of your business than [a trusted professional partner?](#)

A positive referral from a fellow professional who had recommended clients to your firm previously seems a far superior 'quality indicator' than an anonymous review online.

But you cannot rest on your laurels because as recently as January the consumer panel [wrote to the CMA](#) expressing concern at the lack of progress in this arena.

This will undoubtedly result in more action and pressure from the SRA, so develop a strategy and stay ahead of the game.