

How Today's Consumers Really Search for an Attorney

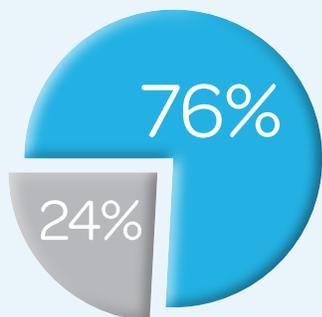
110 million

consumers in the U.S. have sought legal counsel at least once in their lives.

58 million

consumers in the U.S. sought an attorney in the past year.

How they searched:



■ Used online resources
■ Did not use online resources

Based on a survey of 4,000 adult Internet users (Internet users comprise 78% of the U.S. adult population** and the U.S. adult population comprises 235 million according to the U.S. Census 2010) conducted by The Research Intelligence Group (TRiG), March 2012. ** According to The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project's Spring Tracking Survey conducted April 26-May 22, 2011.

Introduction

The Internet and mobile devices are transforming the way people research and purchase all types of products and services. Consumers seeking information and referrals are increasingly looking on the Internet for answers and feedback. The popularity of online research and referrals extends into the legal sphere as well. According to the Attorney Selection Research Study by The Research Intelligence Group (TRiG), **more than three-quarters of adults who have looked to hire an attorney in the past year—76 percent—used online resources at some point in the process.**

Referrals from friends and family remain a key method for finding an attorney. Seventy-three percent of adults who sought to hire an attorney in the past year cited using friends and family at some point during the process. However, the study finds that consumers are slightly more likely to conduct an Internet search as they are to turn to people they know, which marks a dramatic shift in behavior.

"A majority of consumers will need legal services at some point in their lives, and when people need an attorney, they are increasingly turning to the Internet to find the right one for their matter," says Phil Livingston, CEO of Web-Based Marketing Solutions at LexisNexis® Legal & Professional. "Attorneys and law firms should consider how they can position themselves and their firms in order to be easily found by that 76 percent who search online."

According to Livingston, attorneys should employ multiple approaches to online marketing, from having a robust website that utilizes search engine optimization (SEO) to participating in reputable online directories and leveraging social media platforms.

"Many attorneys are hesitant to invest time and resources into expanding their online presence because of limited budgets or questions about the return on investment. But as the survey shows, lawyers who lack a robust online presence could miss out on significant new business opportunities," Livingston says.

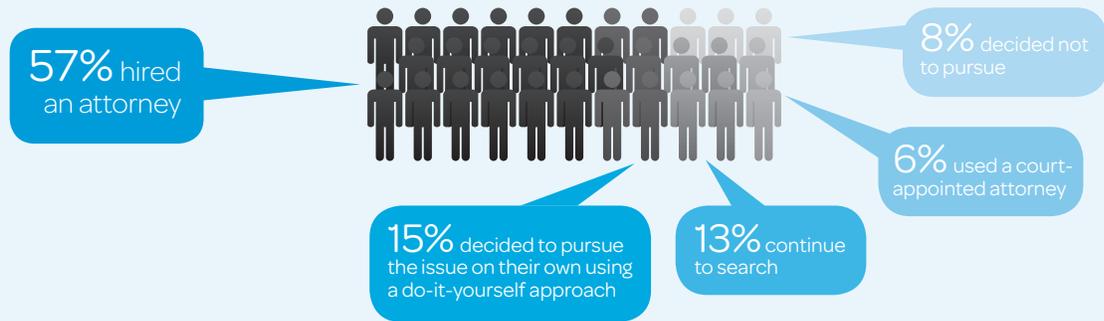
Most Americans Will Need a Lawyer Someday

60 percent of consumers (adult Internet users) in the U.S. have sought an attorney at least once in their lives (110 million people).

- 32 percent (58 million) did so in the past year

Most people—60 percent of adult Internet users in the United States—have sought an attorney at least once in their lives, the survey found. That means 110 million people in the United States have sought legal counsel for some issue. The survey also found that **one-third of respondents, which equates to 58 million consumers, have sought an attorney within the past year.** To capture the most recent consumer behavior, the study focused on this population. Interestingly, most of those consumers who looked for an attorney within the past year eventually hired one.

Results of Attorney Search



Results of the attorney search by the 32% (58 million) who sought an attorney in the past year

Consumers Turn to the Internet Throughout the Search Process

The survey sought to understand how the 76 percent of consumers who went online to search for an attorney in the past year utilized multiple information resources throughout the typical four-stage search process: gather information about my legal issue/case; find a lawyer; validate a lawyer; and select a lawyer. Respondents had the option to select more than one resource for each stage of the process.

Online resources were used most often when gathering information, then progressively less often during each subsequent stage. When gathering information, **65 percent of those who sought an attorney in the past year visited the Internet**; when finding a lawyer, 61 percent did; when validating a lawyer, 53 percent did; and when selecting a lawyer, 44 percent did.

Online Resource Usage by Stage



Online resources usage by those who sought an attorney in the past year, broken down by each stage of the search process.

Together, the LexisNexis®
Martindale-Hubbell® legal
sites Lawyers.comSM and
martindale.com® were the
top-used online directories at
each phase of the attorney
selection process, according
to those who sought an
attorney in the past year.

Respondents relied more heavily on different specific online resources at different stages of the process. Online directories and law firm websites are frequently used earlier in the search process. In fact, online directories were among the top four online resources used early in the process, along with search engines, legal websites and legal forums. Among those who sought an attorney in the past year, 31 percent used online directories and an equal number used law firm websites to gather information.

Law firm websites were used by 35 percent of those who sought an attorney in the past year to find a lawyer while online directories were used by 30 percent.

Twenty-four percent of those who sought an attorney in the past year visited law firm websites to get basic contact information, making it the second-most popular online resource behind search engines, and on par with online legal directories for this purpose.

A Closer Look at Online Resources and Friends/Family Usage

	Gather	Find	Validate	Select
Online resources (net)	65%	61%	53%	44%
Online search engines	39%★	35%	23%	20%
Online directories	31%	30%	21%	16%
Social media sites	26%	22%	16%	11%
Law firm websites	31%	35%	26%	21%
Legal blogs	29%	21%	17%	12%
Online legal advice forums	34%	22%	18%	13%
Friends/Family advice/ recommendation (outside of social media sites)	39%★	45%★	36%★	36%★

★ Indicates leader in category

Comparison of online resources and family/friends usage by those who sought an attorney in the past year, broken down by each stage of the search process.

Clearly search engines play an important role in how consumers search online and in driving consumers to online directories and law firm websites, as well as other resources. Social media, blogging and online legal forums are also playing an increasingly significant role. The study looked at the usage of these channels in greater detail to better understand their relative influence.

Search Engines

Consumers were most likely to use a search engine when gathering information—39 percent. Nearly as many turned to online searches when finding a lawyer—35 percent. Just less than one-quarter used an online search engine when validating a lawyer, and 20 percent when selecting a lawyer.

Roughly one-third of these respondents conducted a Google™ search, either to find information about a legal issue or to look for an attorney. At each stage, Google was by far the most frequently used search engine, followed by Yahoo!® and Bing™. AOL® and MSN® were used by an almost equal number of respondents when gathering information and selecting a lawyer.

Search Engine Usage by Stage				
	Gather	Find	Validate	Select
Online resources (net)	65%	61%	53%	44%
 Online search engines	39%	35%	23%	20%
 Google	36% ★	29% ★	18% ★	14% ★
 YAHOO!	19%	15%	7%	6%
 bing	12%	11%	7%	5%
 AOL	11%	7%	6%	4%
 msn	11%	8%	5%	4%

★ Indicates leader in category

Search engine usage by those who sought an attorney in the past year, broken down by each stage of the search process.

Respondents reported that online search engines were the most popular choices for the following top reasons, beginning with the most cited:

- Finding information about legal options
- Obtaining basic contact information about a lawyer or firm
- Understanding legal terminology
- Finding legal forms consumers could use themselves
- Checking and comparing ratings and reviews for lawyers and firms
- Understanding whether to pursue the legal issue

Online search engines and law firm websites were used equally when respondents looked to find expert advice and validate a personal referral.

The heavy use of search engines, particularly in the early stages of the process to search for a lawyer or law firm, highlights the importance of an effective content strategy and ongoing search engine optimization (SEO) work, to help maximize the visibility of the firm/lawyer as a ‘relevant’ result in natural (non-paid) search results against specific search terms being used by consumers.

Social Media and Blogging

While some attorneys may be reluctant to try social media or may be unsure how to leverage it, the survey found that social media was a frequently used online resource throughout the attorney search process. Facebook®, LinkedIn®, Twitter® and YouTube™ were used by slightly more than one-quarter of respondents researching their legal issues. More than one in five, 22 percent, used these sites to look for a lawyer. Sixteen percent used them to validate a lawyer, and 11 percent used them to select a lawyer.

Social Media and Blog Usage by Stage		Gather	Find	Validate	Select
Online resources (net)		65%	61%	53%	44%
▶	Social media sites	26%	22%	16%	11%
	facebook	14%★	11%★	6%★	5%★
	LinkedIn	8%	6%	5%	3%
	YouTube	8%	6%	5%	3%
	twitter	7%	6%	4%	3%
▶	Legal blogs	29%	21%	17%	12%

★ Indicates leader in category

Social media and legal blog usage by those who sought an attorney in the past year, broken down by each stage of the search process.

At every phase of the search process, Facebook was the most popular site among respondents. Respondents turned to LinkedIn and YouTube in equal numbers at each phase, followed closely by Twitter.

Not surprisingly, consumers were most likely to turn to social media to connect with others sharing similar issues. Seventeen percent turned to social media sites for this reason, making it the most popular online resource in this regard. Eleven percent used it to validate a personal referral.

Respondents were most likely to turn to legal blogs at the beginning of the search process—29 percent did so, while 21 percent read legal blogs to find a lawyer, 17 percent used them to validate a lawyer and 12 percent used them when selecting a lawyer.

Fourteen percent of respondents cited legal blogs as an online resource when finding information about legal options, while 13 percent used them to understand legal terminology and whether to pursue their legal issues.

Legal advice forum:

An interactive Web page that consumers can visit to share legal insights on a range of legal topics and ask legal questions which are answered online by lawyers or other consumers.

Legal Advice Forums

More than a third of respondents—34 percent—visited online legal advice forums at the beginning of their search process, making it the second-most popular online option at this phase, behind search engines at 39 percent. Twenty-two percent used legal advice forums to find a lawyer. Eighteen percent used them to validate a lawyer, while 13 percent participated in online legal advice forums when selecting a lawyer.

Respondents were most likely to turn to legal advice forums when deciding whether to pursue their legal issues—17 percent used them for this purpose. An equal number of respondents, 15 percent, cited these types of online resources when finding more about their legal options and finding expert advice.

Online Legal Advice Forums Usage by Stage

	Gather	Find	Validate	Select
Online resources (net)	65%	61%	53%	44%
▶ Online legal advice forums	34%	22%	18%	13%

Online legal advice forum usage by those who sought an attorney in the past year, broken down by each stage of the search process.

Friends and Family

The survey found that a substantial number of respondents still look offline when searching for an attorney. Seeking the advice and recommendations of family and friends was a popular option—73 percent of adults who sought to hire an attorney in the past year cited using friends and family at some point during the process. When it comes to finding a lawyer, the most common individual information source among respondents was friends and family—45 percent. **During the information-gathering phase, consumers were as likely to turn to people they know as they were to conduct an Internet search.** Thirty-six percent of respondents asked friends and family for advice when validating a lawyer or selecting a lawyer.

Consumers also frequently turned to attorneys they had used in the past. When gathering information or selecting a lawyer, thirty percent consulted or hired a lawyer who represented them before.

While turning to the people around us during the search process is still an important component, the research bears out that the Internet is playing an increasing role.

Friends and Family as a Resource by Stage

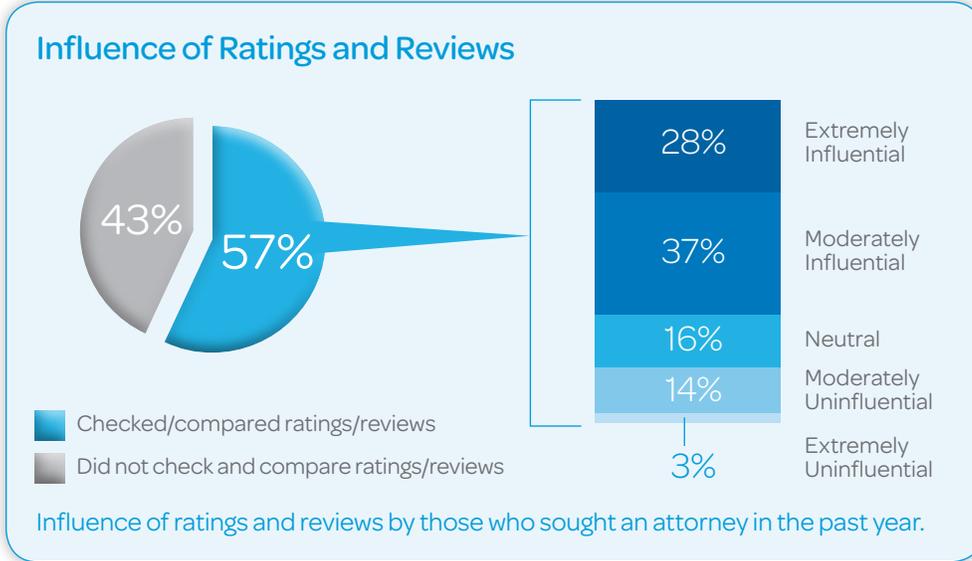
Gather	Find	Validate	Select
39%★	45%★	36%★	36%★

★ Indicates leader in category

Usage of friends and family advice as a resource by those who sought an attorney in the past year, broken down by each stage of the search process.

Influence of Ratings

Internet users also turned to ratings and reviews when conducting research. The majority of those searching for an attorney in the past year, 57 percent, used an online resource to check and compare the ratings/reviews of a lawyer or firm, based on the survey.

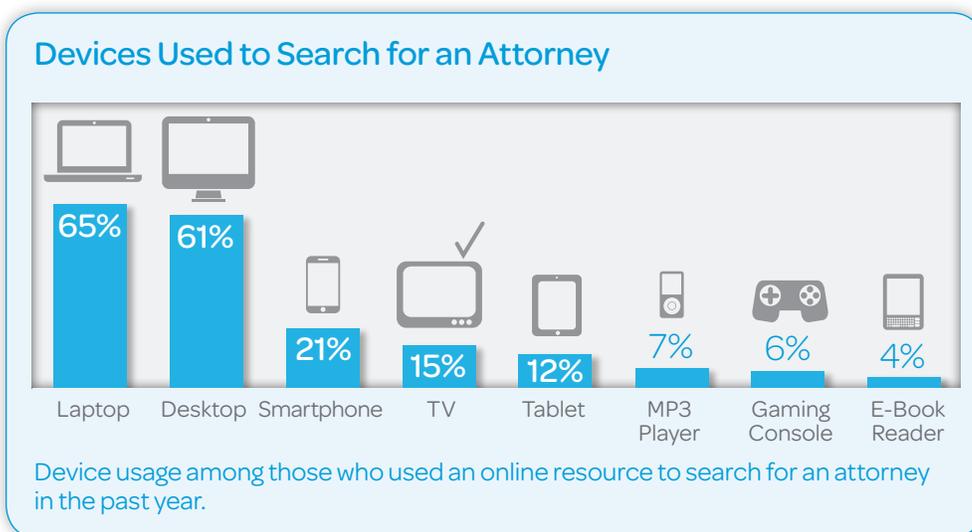


Among those who did so, nearly two-thirds found ratings/reviews to be extremely or moderately influential in their decisions. These results are similar to earlier research by Nielsen, which found that 70 percent of consumers trusted consumer opinions posted online.*

Devices Used to Search for an Attorney

Among those who used an online resource to search for an attorney in the past year, laptops and desktop computers were the most commonly used ways to access online resources. More than half of consumers logged on to the Internet through their computers.

However, smartphones were relatively popular for a sizeable proportion of the participants, with just more than one-fifth accessing online resources through these devices to search for an attorney. When considering their online presence, attorneys should develop mobile-friendly versions of their websites, blogs and profiles that are easily navigable through smartphones. The worldwide smartphone market grew 54.7 percent year over year in the fourth quarter of 2011, according to International Data Corp.



Additionally, while 12 percent of respondents searched online using tablets, that market is projected to grow even faster than that of smartphones, according to "Connected Devices Become Key to Content Consumption," published by eMarketer in February 2012. By the end of 2012, nearly 55 million users are projected to have a tablet, and that number will increase to almost 90 million in the next two years. That means that by 2014, more than a third of those who use the Internet will have a tablet.

* Source: Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey April 2009 / Base: All Respondents

Takeaways for Attorneys

As the survey highlights, consumers are becoming increasingly fluent with Internet searches, and they are sophisticated about the sites they visit and trust:

- Consumers are going online to search for legal services.
- When gathering information about attorneys, the use of search engines, online directories, law firm websites, blogs and legal advice forums is growing.
- Social media is fast becoming a part of how consumers search for legal services.
- Consumers look for and trust attorney ratings and reviews.

LexisNexis® Martindale-Hubbell® helps solo practitioners and specialized law firms enhance their online presence and drive more prospects to their firm. Services offered include website design and development, search engine optimization, social media, video production, robust profiles on leading legal sites Lawyers.comSM and *martindale.com*®, and Martindale-Hubbell® Lawyer Ratings.

For attorneys and law firms looking to leverage their online presence, it's important to develop and maintain a robust Internet presence including, but not limited to, a website, an online directory listing, social media profiles and participation in legal advice forums. This will enable potential clients to easily find information they need, minimizing the amount of research they must do. If potential clients can't find what they need quickly, they may turn to another attorney who has created a more user-friendly, information-rich online presence with a variety of channels as described above.

Methodology for the Attorney Selection Research Study

The survey, commissioned by LexisNexis® Martindale-Hubbell®, was conducted by The Research Intelligence Group (TRiG) from February 9 to February 15, 2012. The third-party, double-blind survey included a representative sample of adults who use the Internet. The online survey was completed by 4,000 adults 18 years old and older, with quotas to reflect the demographic proportion of Internet users within the United States. Internet users comprise 78 percent of the U.S. adult population, according to The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project's Spring Tracking Survey conducted April 26 to May 22, 2011; and the U.S. adult population comprises 235 million according to the U.S. Census 2010.

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