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How To Manage Leads And Convert Prospects Into Paying Clients

By Stephen Fairley

The purpose of marketing is to generate leads. The purpose of your intake system is to convert those leads into clients. To take your law firm to the next level you need both. The problem is most attorneys spend all their time and money focusing on getting more and more leads, but fail to recognize that what you do with those opportunities is just as important as generating them.

Over the last 16 years, we have developed a proven intake and lead conversion system that has doubled the conversion rates of thousands of attorneys all across the nation. It consists of four major components: (1) training for your front office and intake staff; (2) specific tactics and strategies to maximize your conversion at each stage; (3) an intake customer relationship management (CRM) soft ware that automatically tracks and follows up with every lead; and (4) tracking and measurement of key metrics.

Training for Front Office and Intake Staff
Most law firms have a receptionist, but a receptionist is very different from an intake person. When hiring someone to handle calls from prospects, you are not looking for a receptionist. You are essentially looking for a sales person – someone who feels very comfortable "selling" over the phone. They are selling prospects on why they shouldn't try to handle their legal problem on their own and why they should come in for a consultation. One of the biggest mistakes for consumer law firms is having an untrained, minimum wage receptionist handling calls from prospects. The only thing worse is to have a paralegal or attorney handle incoming calls. Why is that worse? Because in our experience, 99 percent of the time, they are terrible at it. Paralegals and associates see these calls as an interruption to their day.

Here are the major areas your intake staff should be trained on:

• How to quickly qualify or disqualify prospects (this should be no more than four to six questions).
• Precisely what information you want collected: name, phone, email, reason for call.
• Talking points on exactly how you want the phone answered.

• Answers to the most frequently asked questions prospects call about.
• Scripts for when they leave voicemail messages.
• Brief guide on how to use your phone system.
• How to use your lead tracking system or intake CRM.
• Your firm's relevant information, such as website, address, driving directions to your local office.
• Protocol on expectations on how, when and how frequently to follow up with prospects.
• Top three reasons why they should come in for a consultation (for local clients).
• Top three to five reasons why they should hire you. What makes your firm unique?
• How, when and with whom to set appointments for initial consultations.
• What to do when you don't know how to handle a prospect.
• Key phrases of empathy and support.
• How to control the call for when prospects want to talk too much.
• Sample intake form filled out correctly as a guide.
• Training on how to use any soft ware required of them.

Specific Tactics and Strategies to Maximize Conversion at Each Stage
Dr. James Oldroyd, visiting research fellow at MIT and David Elkington, CEO of InsideSales.com, researched three years of data across many companies that respond to online-generated leads. The data included 15,000 unique leads and 100,000 call attempts, which the researchers scoured to determine how companies should respond to their online leads for the best possible results. The results were broken out into four areas and reveal the best days to make contact, best times, response time and persistence. Here's what they found – and what you can use to guide your intake person in responding to online leads:

Wednesday and Thursdays stand out as the best for making contact with online leads. In fact, there was almost a 50 percent bump for calls made on Thursdays in comparison to calls made on Tuesdays. The best time to call leads is between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. The second best time is between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Prospects are more willing to talk to you either before they start their day or at the end of the day.

We have discovered over 45 additional techniques your intake staff can use that can rapidly increase your lead conversion rate. Here are a few of the top techniques:

1. **Every lead must be followed up within five minutes! Research is very clear that speed-to-call is the highest predictor of lead conversion.** When the initial follow-up call/contact goes from five to 10 minutes, lead conversion drops by up to 400 percent! The intake team must be trained and monitored to ensure every potential new client is being called back within five minutes or less.

2. **Every lead must be called back a minimum of six to 10 times!** It's not enough to call back a prospect once and then hope they call you back. When dealing with consumers you need to be persistent, oft en calling them back four, five or more times before you reach them. Once you reach them you either disqualify them and stop calling or qualify them and set the appointment. Just making one or two attempts will net you next to nothing; if you don't connect, you have to be persistent in continuing to call.

3. **The first day, each lead should be called two to three times.** The average consumer calls five to seven law firms when making a buying decision and the law firm who gets them on the phone first will likely be chosen. We never received more than one call back or voicemail the first day.

4. **Scripts need to be written for voicemails so they aren't always the same.** Unless you give them direction, most staff will leave the same, generic message, "Hi this is Stephen from ABC Law Firm calling you back. Our number is (888) 588-5891. Please call us back." This does nothing to differentiate you from the pack of attorneys they have already called. Come up with different voicemails that encourage the prospect to call your office back. For example, "Hi Mr. ____. This is ____ with ABC Law Firm. I'm calling about a potential motor vehicle accident you inquired about. I need to get some more information from you to determine if this is a case we can assist you with. If you could please give me a call back as soon as possible, I can be reached at (888) 588-5891 and my extension is 613."

5. **Never make an attorney or paralegal responsible for making follow up calls.** They will not do it. They just won't. Trust me. We have tried every possible incentive to get associates or paralegals to make follow-up calls and they will not. As much as possible, you want to build a wall between anyone who takes calls from prospects and those who do the work.

An Intake Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Software

Once your firm is getting more than 30 to 50 leads per month (meaning contacts from potential clients, not consultations or sign ups), you really need to have a soft – ware system for keeping track of all these incoming leads and where the leads are in the sales cycle. Has the prospect been contacted? Has an appointment been set? Did they come in for a consultation? Did they sign up?

Once a lead comes in, your intake person should be tasked with keeping track of the lead status so leads do not fall through the cracks. When we are asked to go into a law firm to analyze their intake system, you would be shocked at how many leads they are losing just because they don't have a system in place to keep track of every single lead and where the person is in the sales process. Lost leads are wasted opportunities. Small law firms lose tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars every year because they aren't tracking their leads and quickly following up with them. Mid-sized law firms are losing millions. Lost leads also hurt your reputation with your referral sources if they supplied the referral and your team doesn't follow through on the lead. A good intake CRM should:

- Integrate with your website, live chat, phone system and other major lead sources.
  • Provide an electronic intake form that helps your intake person qualify and disqualify leads.
  • Track every lead and where they are in the sales process.
  • Notify your intake person when a new lead comes in.
  • Allow your intake person to track their contact with the prospect.
  • Enable your intake person to follow up with each lead via email and text message.
  • Track your lead conversion rates by lead source and whoever is doing the initial consultation.
  • Provide metrics and data (hopefully via visual dashboard).A comprehensive law firm

marketing program that embraces multiple marketing tools – SEO, PPC, ads, email marketing, social media, blogs, etc. – means leads come in from many different sources. If you don't have an automated way to deal with them, leads will slip through the cracks and all that hard work and financial investment will be for nothing. Converting those leads into clients and ultimately referral sources is how you grow your law firm into what you envisioned when you began. Without a good lead flow system, the likelihood of you maximizing the possibilities of your marketing program is slim.

Tracking and Measurement of Key Metrics

There are several metrics every law firm should measure regarding their intake:

- How many leads are you getting every day? Remember, we want to measure leads, not just appointments, consults, or sign ups.
- Where are these leads coming from? Use tracking phone numbers whenever possible.
- How many appointments are set by practice area?
- How many of those appointments show up for the consultation?
- What is your closing rate at the initial consultation?
- How many people sign up later after the consult?
- If you have multiple people handling consultations, what are their individual conversion rates?
- What is your cost per lead by lead source?
- What is your cost per client acquisition by lead source?

If you track and measure each of these numbers, you will be far ahead of your competition. Th is data will allow you to make smart marketing decisions and identify holes in your system. The fastest and most cost-effective way to grow your law firm is not to spend more money chasing more leads, it's to fix your follow up and maximize your lead conversion rate.

Two-time international bestselling author, Stephen Fairley is CEO of The Rainmaker Institute LLC, the nation's largest law firm marketing company specializing in marketing and lead conversion for small to medium law firms. Over 18,000 attorneys nationwide have benefited from learning and implementing the proven Rainmaker Marketing System. Over the last 16 years, he has become a nationally recognized legal marketing expert and been named, America's Top Marketing Coach. He has spoken numerous times for over 35 of the nation's largest state and local bar associations and has a large virtual footprint with his highly successful Rainmaker legal marketing blog and has over 200,000 followers on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. For more information, please visit www.TheRainmaker-Institute.com or call (888) 588-5891.