

# What Today's Legal Consumer Wants from Attorneys

Today's savvy legal consumer doesn't need attorneys the way they used to because they don't buy legal services the way they used to. The consumer is more knowledgeable and has more options available than at any other time in history.

When I begin a consulting project for a law firm or work one-on-one with attorneys, many are shocked to find out that they are using an initial consultation approach that is out of date, out of sync and clashes with how human beings are wired to be influenced. Attorneys need to have a solid understanding of how the legal consumer hires attorneys these days. It is nothing like it was five short years ago.

By the time the legal consumer meets face-to-face with an attorney, a whopping 65 to 70 percent of their decision-making process is complete. They are doing their homework on their terms, their turf, and their time. The consumer will hop from website to website to research you, Google you, read about your credentials and expertise, and check out your ratings and reviews.

The remaining 25 to 30 percent of their journey comes down to YOU. Will you engage, connect, and communicate with prospective clients in such a way that they do not need to visit the competition or continue shopping for

an attorney? Will your one-on-one communication skills and approach be current or look like you got stuck in the 1980s?

Prior to writing both of my books for attorneys, I conducted extensive research into the mind of today's legal consumer. I ran focus groups with individuals who went through the process of buying legal services and retaining an attorney. They revealed their wants and needs. They openly shared with me what makes them tick and what ticks them off.

Below are the three insights into the mind of the new legal consumer and what they wish you would stop doing.

**Skip the superficial small talk.** When meeting a potential client, attorneys are taught to begin a consultation with small talk, to chat about the weather, traffic, parking, or commenting on what someone is wearing or a current event. "Did you have any trouble finding the building? Did you have any issues with parking? How was the traffic getting here? Is it hot enough out there?" STOP! Every other attorney is using this thirty-year-old, antiquated approach. Contrived chit-chat does nothing to build rapport, create a strong connection, or make a dynamic first impression. Connect authentically, not artificially.

**Don't treat me like I am clueless about my legal options.** In the past, the traditional consultation approach relied on meeting with a potential client willing to sit quietly and be educated, a time where people had little knowledge and fewer legal choices. Attorneys were taught not to sell but rather to educate. Then educate some more, and the consumer will write you a retainer check. Not anymore! Education is still important, but

you need to educate people from where they are, not where they used to be. Find out where a prospective client is regarding their knowledge and insight and navigate the consultation from there.

**Help me see why you are different than your competitors.** The challenge that attorneys have when attempting to communicate how they are different is that to potential clients; they sound similar to their competition. When the legal consumer asks you how you are different or why they should retain your services, they don't want you to launch into a canned answer. "I have been an attorney for more than 22 years and have a stellar reputation in family law. I am very proud of my practice and the outstanding service that I provide to all of my clients." Blah, blah, blah. Consumers are thinking, "Tell me something that I can't get from your website. Give me something that I can't read in your bio." You must articulate and connect the dots about why you are different and how that difference relates to them and their situation.

These issues are not minor; they are major keys to inspiring and influencing others. The more your approach is aligned with what the new legal consumer wants, the more you can stand out, pull yourself ahead of the pack, gain more referrals and win more business.

By Liz Wendling