



## 5 Tips for rising above the competition in a saturated market

The Am Law Daily announced last week that early numbers show only modest growth for a prestigious group of New York's largest law firms last year. Within the study is the admission from several partners that persistent pressure to lower rates is cutting into profitability, even with a rise in some types of litigation work. The push for firms to lower their rates or pursue alternative billing agreements is growing as law schools continue to graduate more students than the market can absorb. Not only is the market saturated, but too many young attorneys are graduating ill-prepared to meet the demands of both employers and clients. Some are responding by attempting to cut rates even further.

The problem is becoming so pervasive that some law schools are considering opening their own firms to better prepare students for the real world of the legal profession. Arizona State, for one, is setting up a non-profit firm for its students this summer. According to Arizona State University law school dean, Douglas J. Sylvester, the program will be like a "teaching hospital for law school graduates."

What does this have to do with marketing?

Now more than ever, you have to stand above your competition. There are, quite simply, a lot of attorneys out there who do what you do. You have to make it clear to clients that you offer something more. In terms of marketing, that means getting back to the basics, focusing your message and building online authority. You can get started by reviewing how your firm is performing in some of these areas:

1. Differentiation. Sally J. Schmidt at [attorneyatwork.com](http://attorneyatwork.com) writes that differentiation is something lawyers generally understand but often do not embrace. Differentiation, or centering your marketing around a subset of specialized areas, is critical to helping connect your firm with the right clients. There is a tendency to think that marketing a certain specialty will turn people away. The opposite is actually true – offering too many choices is more likely to discourage people from picking any. If you were to peruse the menu of a restaurant that offered gourmet American, Italian, German, Thai and Ethiopian food, you are likely to move on to a place that specializes in one type of fare. It is too easy to assume businesses that offer everything are not the best at anything.

2. Attorney Bios. Attorney bios are an underutilized resource. They often contain little more than a resume or list of practice areas, schools and maybe publications. Studies have shown that attorney bio pages are some of the most visited pages on a firm's website. They present you with an opportunity to speak directly to prospects and explain to them in your own voice why they should choose you. Be consistent – explain why you got involved in a specific area of law. Visitors are not interested in reading dry lists. Instead, give them a reason to like and trust you.





3. Client Reviews and Testimonials. Good word of mouth matters online. If people see that others have hired your firm and been pleased with the results, their trust in your abilities increases. Solicit Google reviews and incorporate them into your website. Monitor sites like Yelp to make sure your reviews are positive, and ask clients to add their voices, too. If allowed by your state bar, place testimonials in prominent places on your website. Potential clients know your opinion of your own firm is biased, and they are more likely to believe the reviews of others.

4. Professional Profiles. LinkedIn has released a string of updates aimed at making the network more useful for online marketing. Make sure your profile is complete and that it mentions just a small number of focused areas. If you can, have others endorse specific skills. Be sure to keep tabs on your LinkedIn skills and keep them to a reasonable number, since others are allowed to suggest them on your behalf.

5. Photography and Graphics. Lawyers have to be careful to follow their state's online advertising guidelines, so some website practices may be restricted. This could include the types of photography you are able to acceptably use. But that does not mean that you have to use the same photography as everyone else. People know what to expect of a law firm, they do not need to see "the handshake." If your state limits the use of stock photography, hire a professional to take some pictures around your office. Make sure to get some candid, non-traditional shots that show off the personality of your firm. Standing out visually will make your firm easier for prospects to remember.

The market is saturated and people have a lot of choices. Make their choice easier by focusing your marketing and standing out from the competition.

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