

Q: Does Yellow Pages advertising work for personal injury and divorce practices?

A: The Yellow Pages is a surprisingly interesting topic, one that I've had occasion to learn an awful lot about over the past couple years (see www.redjackal.com). Although I believe that it is a waste of money for big-city business law firms to advertise there, and have strongly urged many corporate clients to reduce or eliminate their expenditures there, I believe that an American Bar Association survey showed that Americans find lawyers through the Yellow Pages more often than any other impersonal method of selection.

Remember, most average Americans don't know a lawyer personally. Further, as I show below, people may *browse* online, but they *buy* in the Yellow Pages. This is what got me interested in it in the first place.

In one survey, a remarkable *one-third* of people (33.6%) looking for lawyers would look in the Yellow Pages, although obviously not the sophisticated purchasers corporate law firms tend to represent. Expenditures in the "Attorneys" heading exceed \$800 million per year, according to Competitive Media Reports and the Yellow Pages I.M.A. "Attorneys" is now the seventh-most-referenced Yellow Pages heading, with 271 *million* annual phone calls made directly from Yellow Pages ads. Wow.

In many industries, the Yellow Pages are the top-performing new-business vehicle. For example, in 2001, 68.5% of people using a Moving Company and 56% of the people who need Bail Bonds found and hired them directly through the Yellow Pages.

Here's why the Yellow Pages can be most valuable to those with consumer-oriented practices. Most buyers are still shopping when they open a directory. According to National Yellow Pages Monitor (2001), 59% of consumers haven't made up their minds when they open the books, providing advertisers with a potent opportunity to present a final sales message precisely at the point of decision.

According to Statistical Research Institute (2001), the Yellow Pages are used monthly by 76% of U.S. adults who are actively seeking information and are ready to buy, 56% in a typical week. And a remarkable 89% of those references result in a purchase or an intent to buy.

What do I think this means? That done right, the Yellow Pages is still a tremendous marketing opportunity for lawyers with consumer-oriented practices like PI, divorce, blue-collar criminal, and bankruptcy. Obviously, internet use is growing rapidly, but I believe that for the near future, it is overwhelmingly going to remain a secondary reference tool -- the convenient place to go to *learn more* about a lawyer or firm you already know. It's a handy place to skim their lawyer's bio or read up on a few firms you're going to be considering before a meeting or on-campus interviews.

People shop the Yellow Pages with their wallets open, ready to *buy* something. Sure, we've heard a handful of isolated stories about sophisticated clients hiring corporate lawyers they'd never heard of after finding them exclusively through the web, but this is still quite rare. Consumers do this in the Yellow Pages hundreds of millions of times across North America every year.

The internet is a remarkably effective way to find things, especially things that are far away. The web might be a remarkable source of useful information, but for the foreseeable future the Yellow Pages is going to remain the easiest, most pervasive place for John and Jane Q. Public to find a local plumber, roofer, or divorce lawyer -- not their cell phone or PDA.

And the statistics show that the Yellow Pages aren't going away any time soon, in fact, while the exploding internet use might be having some effect, Yellow Pages usage is still growing, albeit arguably slightly more slowly than before.

Amazing, isn't it?