



How U.S. Consumers Meet Their Legal Needs Online

A FindLaw White Paper



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

56% of consumers had a legal need in the past two years. This statistic – and all of the other statistical findings that appear in this report – are the findings of a consumer research study, undertaken to sub-segment the U.S. consumer market that had a recent legal need. A total of 1,926 consumers responded to an online questionnaire between July 27 and August 8, 2006. Here is a summary of those findings:

- 1. Legal needs increasing.** More consumers than ever before are faced with legal issues that demand their immediate attention. In fact, almost everyone (95%) said his or her legal need was important.
- 2. Demographics vary.** Consumers with a legal need are evenly represented by age, gender, employment and marital status. But even with their high household incomes (\$68K average), only 18% have used an attorney before.
- 3. Consumers address legal needs immediately.** When consumers have a legal need, 77% said it was either extremely urgent or very urgent. When contacting an attorney, 38% did so the same day and another 24% within the same week.
- 4. Consumers seek legal help from variety of sources.** Of the 56% who reported a legal need in the past two years, some consumers handle their legal needs themselves or contact an attorney. Others rely on friends or colleagues for help, or seek legal information or products on the Internet (including doing legal research online).
- 5. Consumers find attorneys online.** Many consumers use the Internet to find an attorney or validate a referral, even if they originally decided to handle the situation on their own. Still others research legal information or products.

SECTION I – INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY, DEMOGRAPHICS

Introduction

In order for FindLaw to serve our law firm customers, it is important for us to understand how our customers' clients behave. Over the years, several research studies have been conducted detailing the legal needs of consumers across the country. FindLaw used an independent research group to conduct additional in-depth quantitative research to investigate the legal issues and the process/actions consumers initiated and acted upon. Results of that survey are presented throughout this paper.

Methodology

Independent researchers used an online methodology balanced to the U.S. Internet population to survey how consumers responded to their legal needs. Screening qualifications included:

- Online U.S. residents; Adults age 18 and older.
- Had a potential legal need within the past two years (designated by one of 18 needs).
- At least one legal need was deemed as somewhat or very important.

A total of 1,926 respondents completed the online questionnaire between July 27 and August 8, 2006. Thomson West and FindLaw were not identified as sponsors of the research.

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63% of consumers with a legal need are between 35 and 54 years old.

Demographics

Demographics were varied for gender, age, and marital status, representing the online population as a whole. The demographic breakdown of the 1,926 respondents is as follows:

Gender52% female; 48% male.

Average Age.....42.2.

Marital Status56% married; 21% single.

Average Household Size ...2.9.

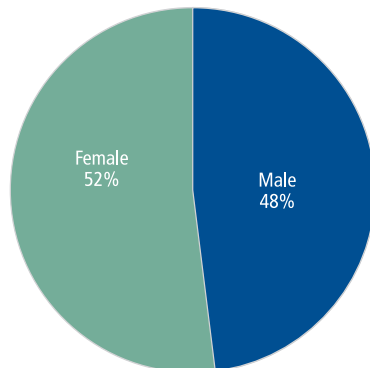
Employment Status.....57% full-time; 11% part-time; 13% not currently employed.

Home Ownership67% own; 30% rent.

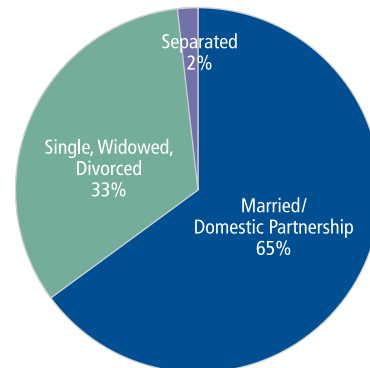
Education.....19% graduated high school; 17% had some college; 36% graduated from two- or four-year college; 13% post graduate degree.

*Chart represents percentages for some *and* completed education.

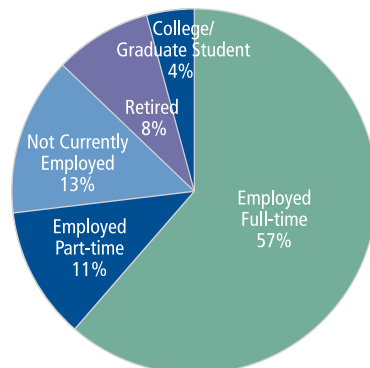
Gender



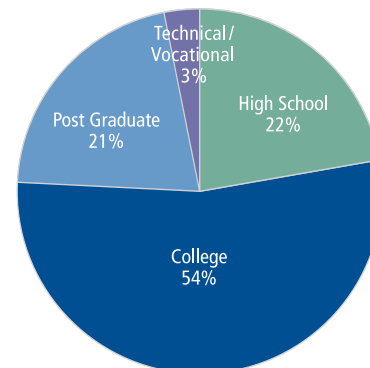
Marital Status



Employment Status



Education*



More than half of consumers surveyed (56%) had a legal need in the past two years.

A vast majority of consumers are willing to go to court to fight for their rights.

SECTION II – LEGAL NEEDS

Consumers facing increased legal needs

In an increasingly complex society, it is only natural that consumer legal needs are also increasing. The number of attorneys and law firms with the experience and expertise to help consumers address these needs is also increasing.

Consumers across the country are reporting they've had a legal issue in the past two years that required their immediate attention. Many even had to deal with several different legal issues at the same time.

How are consumers coping? One thing is apparent: consumers are not passively sitting by waiting for the legal issues to resolve themselves. Instead, consumers are aggressively seeking credible legal help using a variety of resources at their disposal.

Consumers willing to fight for their legal rights

Armed with legal information and expert support (often secured from legal resources on the Internet), an overwhelming majority of consumers are fighting for their legal rights.

In fact, 64% of consumers surveyed were willing to go to court to fight for their rights; 36% noted they were willing to pursue legal issues regardless of time or cost.

Legal needs vary by age, gender, place in family

Most legal needs extend to the entire family and beyond.

For instance, while men are more likely than women to have a legal need, spouses are often involved in addressing the need. So are children, parents and other family members.

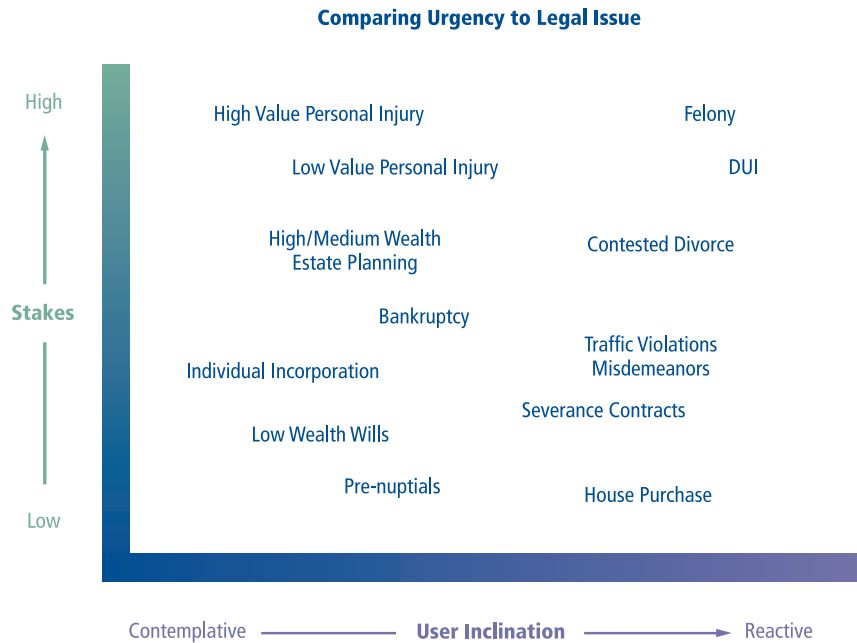
Most consumers who went online to research a legal need or legal resource were married, employed, well-off and well-educated; a majority (63%) were between 35 and 54 and had a mean income of \$67,000.

77% said their legal need was extremely or very urgent.

Consumers feel sense of urgency in addressing legal needs

When consumers have a legal issue, timing is everything. Of those who contacted a legal professional, 38% addressed their legal need the same day it arose; another 24% addressed the legal need the same week.

Why the sense of urgency? Responding to a legal need is often in direct proportion to the seriousness of the need itself. Put simply, the sense of urgency in addressing a legal need is more pronounced when the stakes are high—when liberty, wealth and/or children and family are at risk. (Consumers consider the stakes highest when they’re addressing personal finance, employment and family issues.)



SECTION III – CONSUMERS TURN TO THE INTERNET FOR LEGAL HELP

The Internet as a legal resource

It comes as no surprise that the same consumers who visit online job sites, check the weather, listen to video casts and plan personal travel online are also using the Internet to meet their professional and financial needs.

Whether it's accessing their bank statement, trading stocks, searching for legal information or finding an attorney, more and more consumers are finding the Internet a credible resource for legal and other professional help.

Consumer Attitudes on Online Legal Resources



Using the Internet to research legal information or products

Internet-savvy consumers spent an average of 16 hours per week online doing research on consumer products, travel services and professional services (including legal services). Whether an upcoming meeting is with an accountant, doctor, realtor or attorney, consumers today find it helpful to do their homework before meeting with any professional.

One of the reasons, of course, is the cost savings. Another is time. Most professionals charge by the hour so spending the time up front can save consumers time and money.

95% of consumers surveyed researched general information on their legal need.

29% of consumers with a legal need contacted an attorney rather than take other action or do nothing.

51% contacted a legal professional after researching legal information or products.

Using the Internet to find, choose, and hire an attorney

While there will always be a segment of the population who will turn first to their family, neighbors or office colleagues to get legal information or the name of an attorney or law firm, more and more people are looking to the Internet as a credible legal information resource.

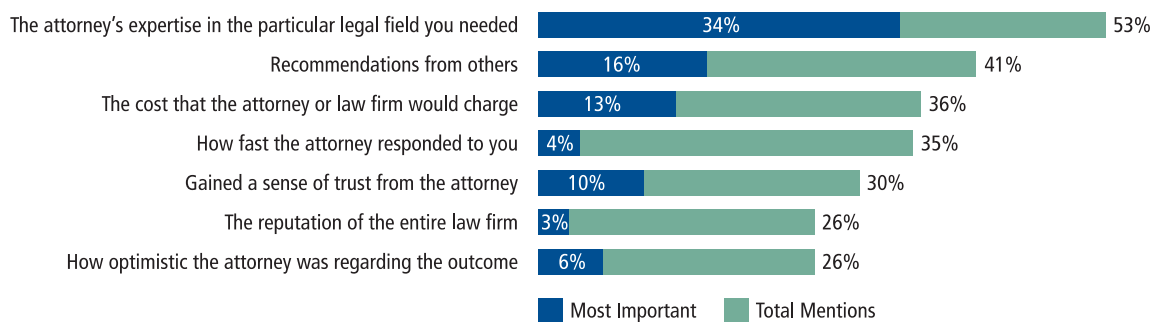
Finding an attorney on the Internet. Finding an attorney on the Internet isn't difficult. Finding the *right* attorney can be. Almost half of the consumers who used the Internet to access information about their legal issue decided to contact an attorney or law firm. Others used the Internet to validate an attorney or law firm referral from a friend or co-worker. Still others accessed a variety of Web sites to get more information about various attorneys and law firms.

Choosing an attorney. Matching the legal professional to the legal need is important to consumers—even consumers that have a current relationship with an attorney or law firm.

An attorney's expertise in the particular legal field was the single most important factor in choosing an attorney—more than recommendations from others or the cost of the attorney.

Criteria that were not factors in the choice of one attorney over another included the location of the firm (20%), length of time in practice (19%), and the size of the law firm (4%).

Choosing an Attorney

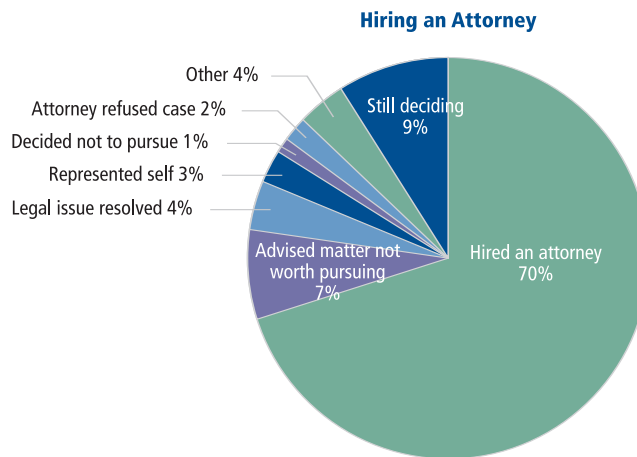


15% of consumers who originally determined to handle a legal situation themselves decided to contact a legal professional.

Hiring an attorney. While many consumers initially address their legal issues on their own, their follow-up actions belie a total reliance on their own initiative.

In addition to specific actions taken (writing/emailing complaint letters, representing themselves, filing a form or legal claim, and contacting the Better Business Bureau or other agency) a significant number (20%) researched legal information or products, often online. Another 15% contacted a legal professional.

In all, over half (56%) of the consumers who contacted an attorney or law firm contacted only one attorney to try to resolve their legal need. What's more, 70% of those who contacted an attorney decided to hire an attorney. Many of those who chose not to hire an attorney (32%) decided not to because they were advised the matter was not worth pursuing.



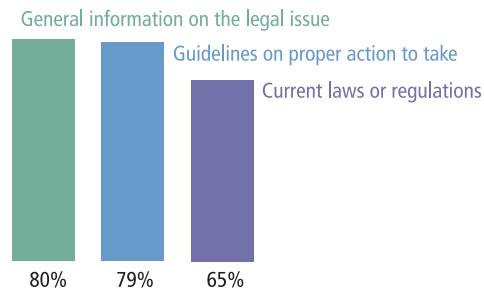
79% of respondents who access information online look for guidelines on proper action to take.

SECTION IV – HOW CONSUMERS FIND THE LEGAL INFORMATION THEY NEED ON THE INTERNET

Consumers want depth, breadth, and convenience

Although some consumers are frustrated with the multitude of online choices for legal information, most consumers are satisfied with the Internet in terms of the ease of finding information, the depth of that information, and the amount of usable content.

Types of Legal Information Sought Online



How do consumers find the legal information they need online? Most consumers are Internet savvy: 85% of them begin with a search engine (Google is the most popular), and 31% use legal information/directory Web sites (like FindLaw.com).

Another 30% of consumers look for Web sites that focus on legal specialties, such as attorney/law firm sites. More than two thirds of all solo and small law firms have some kind of Web presence. Savvy Web site marketers understand that consumers accessing legal information online are looking for Web sites that are easy to find and navigate, include relevant and timely information, and are visually appealing.

Visibility, design, and content make a difference

A firm that specializes in legal Web site design notes that consumers are looking for:

- Clarity, not complexity. Consumers are drawn to user-friendly sites that welcome visitors with a layout that's clear and intuitive.
- Easy-to-follow content. Successful law firm sites include not only practice areas and attorney profiles, they also provide information about a variety of legal issues.
- Contact information. One Web site designer notes that many Web sites focus too much on splashy designs and too little on the basics—such as how to contact the firm.

Over half (57%) of respondents satisfied with the Internet [as a source of legal information].

As a legal resource, the Internet is here to stay

How would consumers respond to a future legal need? A vast majority (80%) of consumers who searched for legal information on the Internet responded that they would be likely to use the Internet as a legal resource in the future.

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CONCLUSION

The future of the Internet as a legal resource

Consumers are becoming increasingly comfortable with using the Internet to meet their legal needs. The good news is that consumers can easily and quickly access Web sites that provide accurate, relevant, timely and credible information about legal issues and legal professionals.

Finding the right attorney—the one with the most relevant expertise and experience—serves both the consumer and the attorney. Coming prepared to a meeting with a legal professional saves time for both the consumer and the attorney, leading to faster resolution of legal issues.

However, most consumers agree that it's often difficult to access information online simply because there is so much information available. They report getting frustrated navigating the ever-increasing volume of legal information online. Evaluating the credibility of legal information and legal professionals is equally difficult.

What does all this mean for consumers and for attorneys? Consumers, appropriately taking a tip from a legal phrase (“caveat emptor” buyer beware), would be well served to access legal information only from recognized and credible legal resources.

The Internet is also changing the way attorneys do business. A transparent Web presence, one that provides comprehensive information that allows consumers to match attorney expertise and experience with their legal need, benefits the attorney, the legal profession and the consumer.

Learn more

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