

DIRECTORY ENQUIRIES

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Before the internet age, to find the who's who in the legal sector (or the low-down on your opponent) there was the legal directory. When starting out in my career as a non-lawyer in the sector it was always interesting to see who the main players were in various areas of the country, and it's still a very valuable tool. Back when having a website was alien, this was how it was done.

In recent times and since the advent of ABSs, the credence of such statistics in directories has come into question, as many firms now employ varying staff grades to produce the work a qualified fee earner may have done in the past, thus skewing how you define the true headcount of fee earners. Some joked that, at some firms, the office cat was counted among the fee earners (although we all know about herding those). Thankfully, the guides moved beyond these ranking methods. The general focus is now far more on the client perception of law firms and competitor analysis by participant firms.

But while client feedback may be good and people do like to be referred to as 'mercurial', 'very commercially focused' and generally 'excellent', who actually uses these guides – and whom do they benefit? Admittedly, the research that goes into producing a directory is mind boggling: spanning not only the high-ranking lawyers of the world, but their clients as well. A colossal task, indeed.

Readership figures released for some guides state that 66% of clients use directories to help choose which law firm they use. The digital age has led to millions of users turning to the web as opposed to the vast amount of physical directories still in circulation.

Certainly the magic circle firms still invest heavily, as you would expect in order to maintain their profile, but considering the massive disparity between the top 100 and the remaining 11,000-plus firms, does one size fit all? To get a more visible profile in a directory you have to pay, understandably, as how else could the guides be produced in such great volumes? A lot of firms, regardless of size, are still reluctant to spend big on profiling during the tough financial times when every pound becomes a prisoner.

With the emergence of more legal networks holding a greater online presence there are endless resources and options for clients selecting their legal service provider. In the present day, many of the established companies producing legal directories are reaching into many more initiatives, such as roundtable discussions, legal awards and offering much more than just a guide, causing firms to think strategically about how they raise their own profiles, and also how this complements their own social media planning. Generation Y clients are far more likely to turn to web-based options to choose their lawyer, with directories being a supplementary option. Is your firm ready? **LPM**



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