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## The On-line, Reputation Based Practice New Ways to Evolve Your Process for Success

by Tom Caffrey

The most successful firms do things differently than the average law practice. They have well developed systems that prepare them to manage growth and to respond to change. More importantly, they have a firm culture of change and process for success that provides continual improvement. They are also the first to adapt to new technology.

To illustrate the difference our featured example involves the management of your online reputation. We show how small changes to a firms' internal process, can result in major improvements to your online presence and associated results.

### **Process for Success**

1. Recognize Change
2. Analyze and Decide on Response
3. Delegate Tasks and Allocate Time for Implementation
4. Measure and Monitor
5. Re-assess and Adjust

## 'New' Areas of Change

### **Online Reputation Management**

- Self Posted Testimonial vs Independent Reviews
- Accurate Directory Listings?
- Sufficient Reviews, Star Rating
- Aggregated to Your Web Site
- Leveraged to Social Media
- Reviews with Keyword and Location Meta Data

### **Video Conferencing**

*Update on Video Conference Technology for Elder Law Attorneys*

NAELA News July/Aug/Sept

**"We are now taking "virtual appointments"**

### **Marketing / CRM Automation**

- Web Forms
- Automated Email Campaigns
- Workflow Automation

### **On-line Practice Management**

All-in-One or Integrated Apps

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## How has your business environment changed?

### Today's Reputation Based Economy and Online Review Culture

- Increasingly, everyone looks online for everything
- Certified online reviews are highly trusted
- Google and others assign significant weight to what their users say in online reviews.
- Clients want to find independent reassurance online before hiring

**Direct from Google:** <https://support.google.com/business/answer/7091?hl=en>

### **Prominence**

Prominence is also based on information that Google has about a business from across the web (like links, articles, and directories). Google review count and score are factored into local search ranking: more reviews and positive ratings will probably improve a business's local ranking.

### **Manage and respond to reviews**

Interact with customers by responding to reviews that they leave about your business. Responding to reviews shows that you value your customers and the feedback that they leave about your business. High-quality, positive reviews from your customers will improve your business's visibility and increase

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## Online Reputation Management

Online Client Reviews are compelling stories that once read will be remembered. This type of advertising and marketing can't be bought, rather, it is earned thru your firms' good work. You should be facilitating the process of obtaining and sharing client reviews and helping to get the word out. Online Client Reviews are the new modern form of Word of Mouth marketing.

Online Reviews generate new ideal clients because they originate from the best source possible, your most satisfied clients.

### Your Process for Success

Some recommended steps are internal in the way your office processes clients, and some steps involve a new web based service to manage online reviews. Many of these recommendations are common sense obvious, yet, most of the better estate and elder law firms are overlooking and underutilizing this key aspect of managing their practice.

## Two ways to respond to the change?

### Passive:

Evidenced by few reviews may be old, or from a dissatisfied client  
Firm may not be aware, or may not have responded with a comment

### Active:

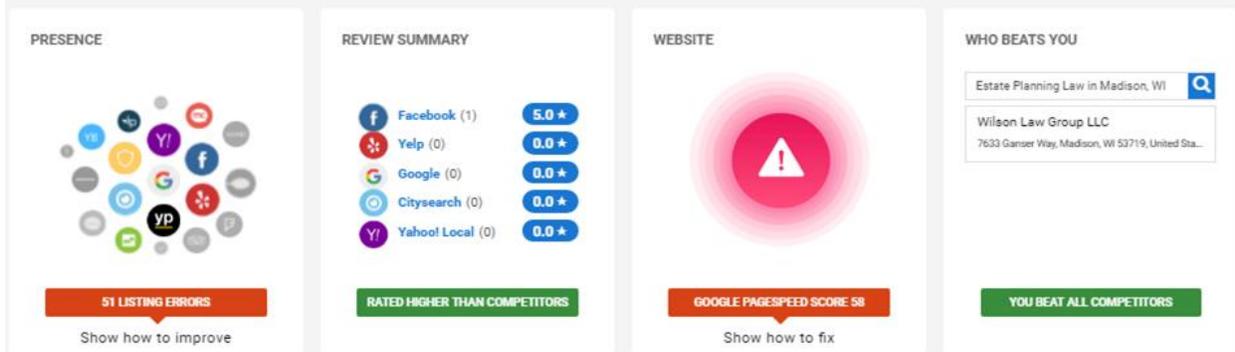
Many and Frequent Reviews, Across Multiple Sites, Mostly Happy Clients  
Firm responds quickly to all reviews with appropriate comments  
Firm appears as top search result with stand-out star rating

## New Technology

- New web based software can generate a free report\* on your online reputation
- Independent Reviews may now be aggregated and displayed in multiple venues online
- Alerts can be generated when a review is created somewhere online about your firm
- Integration allows your reviews to be displayed in social media

### \*Free Report

#### Overview



#### Online Presence

Business Name	Address	Phone	Rating	Reviews	Status
Google	<i>Variations of firm name and address will dilute search ranking</i>	(608) 833-4001	0.0 ★	0	⚠️ Fix low rating
Yelp		(608) 833-4001	0.0 ★	0	⚠️ Fix multiple errors
Citysearch		(608) 833-4001	0.0 ★	0	⚠️ Fix multiple errors
Yahoo! Local		(608) 833-4001	0.0 ★	0	⚠️ Fix multiple errors



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### ***Managing Your Online Reputation***

#### ***How to Dress for Success Online***

The most important factor of success online, is also the most overlooked, for over 90% of estate and elder law attorneys. Regardless of the source, new clients increasingly search about you online before hiring. Fortunately, a few slight adjustments, outlined below, can quickly secure a competitive advantage for your practice specialty in local search.

#### **Reviews, What Reviews?**

The presence or absence of certified, high quality client reviews is a significant differentiating factor for exceptional new business generation. Law firm owners who pay attention to this important factor can enhance their online reputation and results. Clients reviews, are the empathetic voice of your clients and their brief stories and unique styles are very compelling. Furthermore, your online rankings are rewarded by Google<sup>1</sup> and other search sites when they find good and frequent reviews balanced across several venues. Google and other search sites use reviews to help establish who should be displayed as the best current, local resource. (See our endnote for proof.)

New web services can aggregate independent reviews and syndicate publication to your website and social media. Imagine your 5 star AVVO reviews appearing in a Facebook review tab. In addition, this new technology makes it easy to direct your clients to your review pages on popular independent search sites, such as Google, AVVO, Yelp, Martindale, Lawyers.com and Facebook.

#### **Reviews = Ratings = Online Reputation**

Our consumer culture has changed. We increasingly rely on reviews to make choices every day, especially for expensive products and services, purchased infrequently and falling outside our expertise. Can finding a lawyer be much different? Of course not.

Your web site and blog are a *menu* of information, but where are your *ratings*? Independent reviews are how you are rated online. It's the new word of mouth, on steroids. You just can't top great reviews from highly satisfied clients.

#### **Google as a Case in Point**

To view your online reputation status, enter a Google search, such as, 'estates, elder law, probate, special needs' attorney in 'your city, state'. *Ideally, you want to appear on Google page one, in the center area (the 3-pack). You should also strive for a star rating which is only*



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assigned after a minimum of five reviews. Five star reviews help your firm get and stay in this preferred online location. You can remove a barrier if a potential client can quickly see that you are top rated, otherwise they may delay and keep searching.

### **A Step Not Taken**

I often ask lawyers:

*'When you complete a file, you send a closing letter, right?'* the answer is usually *'Yes.'*

Then I ask, *'Do you also include a satisfaction survey?'* they hesitate then answer *'No, but we should.'*

The most successful firms are those who send the survey and, at the appropriate time, ask for an online review. It is also very useful to get client feedback whether it is positive or negative.

### **Two Types of Online Reputation Management**

There are two styles of online reputation management, *passive* and *active*. The passive approach results in a far fewer reviews, some may be old and one or more may be negative. The alternative is an active approach which can yield frequent, high quality reviews. A lonely negative review, especially with a thoughtful response from the attorney, mixed in with predominately positive reviews, can actually build credibility. The reader knows you are not just cherry picking firm posted testimonials.

### **Two Steps for to Improve Your Online Reputation**

The first step is to change your internal procedure, so that a satisfaction survey/review request is included as a standard procedure in your client process. Use one or more document templates, consider dedicating the task to a responsible staff member and maybe even create a filtered list in your practice management program displaying closed files and track the 'client review' status. *The bottom line, to obtain feedback and a client review, it helps to ask for it.* The second step for improving your online condition is to clean up your directory listings and to facilitate frequent new client reviews across a variety of popular review sites.

Search sites look at each other's directory listing to help confirm who you are. Slight variations in your firm name, address and telephone number prevent your listing from being considered as a single entity, therefore your aggregated online presence is diluted. The bottom line here is to check and make your listings both accurate and consistent. There are free tools available to scan your business and other tools and methods that can clean up these listings.



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### How New Technology Can Help

You need to provide the motivation step across the doorway to your practice. If the Internet and social media are your menu, then great client reviews are the user ratings that convince contacts to become new clients. Consider using new tools that perform some neat tricks:

1. Facilitate - make it easy for clients to write certified reviews on independent sites
2. Notify - receive an alert as each new review is posted
3. Aggregate – automatically consolidate online reviews and publish to your web site
4. Associate – client reviews with your practice areas and locations (as meta data)
5. Syndicate – integrate your reviews to other online locations including social media
6. Balance – obtain client reviews across a wide variety of search sites
7. Campaign – use email templates to request a review, and to share the review

It is common sense to look your best on the internet, on your firm web site and in social media. There is low hanging fruit just waiting to be claimed by you or, Oh no!, a competing local lawyer. Chances are your peers have not yet addressed their online reputation. The key is to have not just information but ratings. Ratings are where I see an opportunity, especially for estate planning and elder law attorneys.

I know this is all true, because ...wait for it, I looked it up online.

Tom Caffrey Tel. 856.429.3010 [tcaffrey@premiersoftware.com](mailto:tcaffrey@premiersoftware.com)

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