Why Your Law Firm is Failing at Lead Conversion & How to Improve It

By Stephen Fairley, CEO of The Rainmaker Institute, LLC®

A topic that should be at the top of every law firm's radar is how to improve your intake and lead conversion. This skill is woefully overlooked by most attorneys, who continue to focus 99% of their efforts and money on lead generation, fallaciously thinking this will solve their declining revenue problems.

Logically speaking, why would someone continue to spend an increasing amount of money on lead generation if they aren't doing everything they can to actually convert those leads into paying or retained clients? Lead generation too often comes down to a firm's financial ability to "throw money at the problem," but a lead conversion system can level the playing field and **give small firms a true unique competitive advantage.**

The problem is most lawyers believe they and their teams are great when it comes to lead conversion….and most of them are wrong! I understand no attorney wants to admit he or she doesn't know how to close a deal, but that is not what lead conversion is all about. **Lead conversion begins the moment someone initiates contact with you, not after you get them into your office.**

Research Results from the National Trial Lawyers

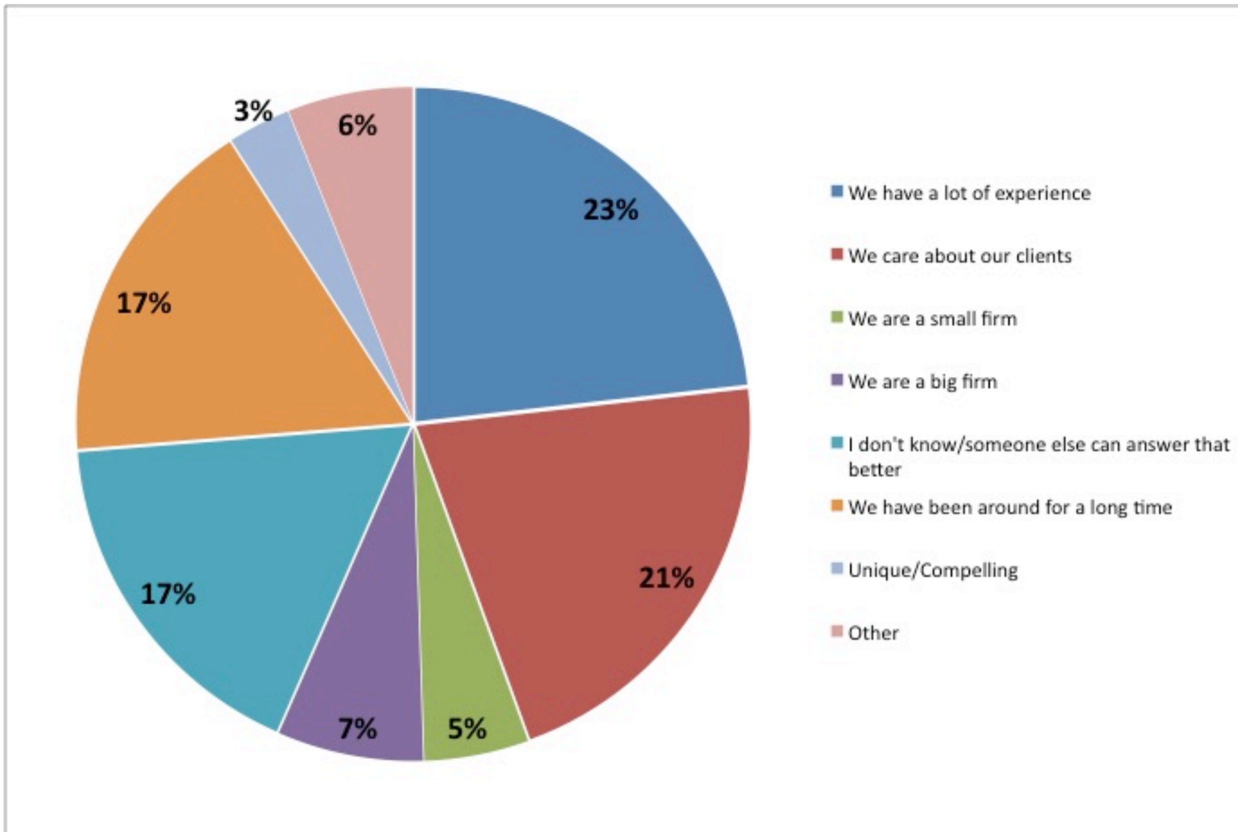
In the weeks leading up to my keynote presentation at the previous National Trial Lawyers Summit, I had my staff call 126 of the law firms who had registered for the Miami Summit event and secret shop their intake process. The majority of NTL members practice either personal injury (PI), workers compensation, med mal, mass torts, or criminal defense. When calling the PI firms, we posed as a potential client who was in a car accident, was in an immense amount of pain in her neck and back, and was referred to their law firm by her doctor.

Here are the results of our findings:

- 70% did not ask our team member for any contact information before getting off the phone! It's very difficult to follow up with a lead when you don't have their contact information.
- When contact information was given to the law firm and a call back was promised, 52% of the firms never called back! How can you be good at follow up if you never actually follow up?
- Only 40 of the 126 law firms even bothered to identify the name of their firm when we called. The rest answered, "Law Office" or "Law Firm." Why spend so much time "branding" your law firm when you don't even use the name when answering the phone?
- 90 firms left our staff on hold for at least two minutes. How long do you think an interested prospect would wait before hanging up and calling the next law firm?
- When our staff asked for the law firm's website address, 33% misspelled it.

During the course of the call we asked an easy softball question, "I'm feeling overwhelmed with all the choices and I'm having a difficult time deciding which law firm to hire. Can you tell me why I should hire your law firm?"

This chart shows the responses we got when our staff asked why they should hire the firm:

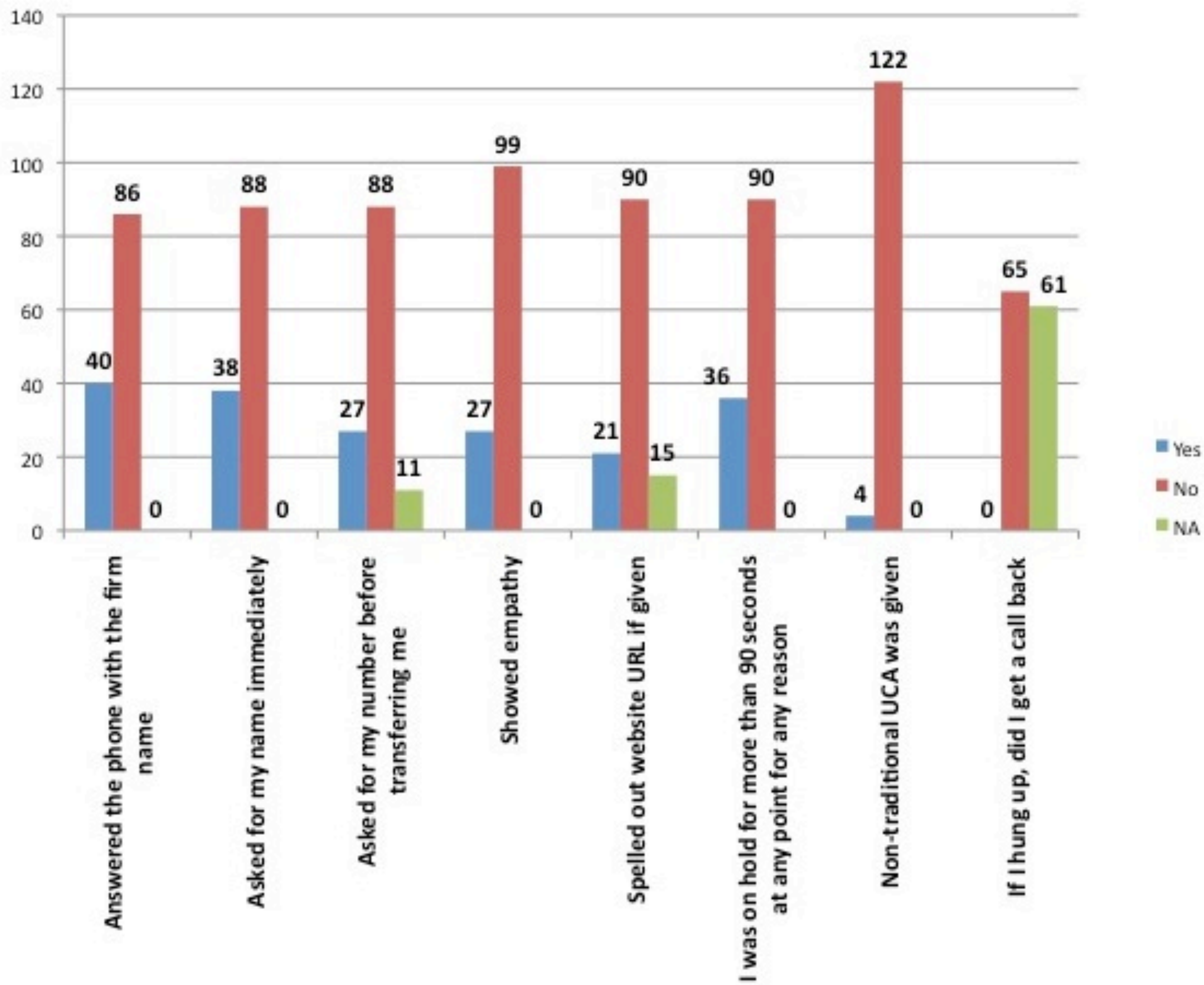


Note that a majority of firms (61%) gave reasons that **any prospect would assume is a given** from a law firm (the first two) or is a total turnoff (the last one):

- 23% responded: “We have a lot of experience”
- 21% responded: “We care about our clients”
- 17% responded: “I don’t know/someone else could answer better”

Other interesting responses ranged from, “I’m not at liberty to say” (is it a state secret?) to a partner in NYC who remarked, “I’m not going to tell you why we are different!” Our *favorite* response was, “I like to think the firm fights for justice and the lower people.” Yes, the intake person actually said “lower people.”

Here is the actual breakdown of those call results:



We have performed similar call campaigns prior to our monthly Rainmaker Retreat legal marketing workshops (http://www.RainmakerRetreat.com), by calling the offices of attendees and we have found that the results are not very different, regardless of practice area. Most law firms do not have a proper intake and lead conversion system in place that begins when someone calls or initiates contact with the firm and they have not trained their staff!

By the way, if you want to find out how your law firm compares to these stats, I recommend you have us secret shop them. Just give us a call and we will do it at no charge.

I was consulting with a client recently who is spending $15,000 to $20,000 per month on lead generation, but said he had no money to spend on improving his lead conversion—even though he is only converting 11% into paying clients! It's insane to spend money on marketing to get your phone to ring and then not spend the time, energy and money to ensure you're doing all you can to encourage them to hire you!

So few firms are making a positive impression on the initial call that there is HUGE opportunity to set your law firm apart by improving and focusing on your intake process! Here are just a few of the best practices we teach our clients on how to improve the intake process, the true beginning of a solid lead conversion system:

1. Have a dedicated person answer the phone: We were astounded by how many firms answered the phone in a way that left the distinct impression we were annoying them when we called, as if we were taking them away from another priority.

2. Show compassion and empathy. Of 126 law firms, only 27 (21%) expressed any compassion or sympathy when our staff told them about their situation: “I was in a car accident and I'm having a lot of pain in my neck and lower back!” A simple, “I'm so sorry to hear about that. Are you ok?” can go a long way towards connecting with a potential client.

3. Get the caller’s name and phone number at the beginning of the call in case you get cut off. If you do get cut off unexpectedly call them back immediately. Somewhere during the call you should also get their email address or at least permission to text them information after the call.

4. If you send someone to your website, SPELL it out clearly. Many law firm websites domain names are hard to spell or understand over a bad cell phone connection. One intake person gave us the wrong website altogether which sent us to a different law firm!

5. Do what you say you are going to do when you say you will do it. Many firms said they would send us information via email or mail – we only received one response.

6. Do not answer the phone with a generic "law firm." Clearly say the name of your law firm.

7. If you are going to place someone on hold, always ask for his or her permission first.

8. Write out three to five reasons that make your law firm different. Make certain anyone talking with prospects can recite these from memory and knows how to weave them into a call. Everyone, whether they verbalize it or not, wants to know the answer to, “Why should I hire you?"

9. Remember that people buy emotionally and justify logically, so the person on the phone must **build an emotional relationship with the caller.**

10. Have a dedicated person to return all voicemails the same day.

11. Never make an attorney responsible for following up with leads. Even though they may have the best of intentions, other things will take priority. Task a staff person with following up with leads and setting appointments with the attorney.

12. Never quote fees over the phone. The sole purpose of the call is to get qualified leads into your office. You will always have a higher closing ratio if you meet prospects face to face rather than trying to "sell" them over the phone.

If you've realized you need a system that actually helps you track and convert more of those leads into retained or paying clients, you might benefit from the **Rainmaker Lead Conversion System**. It's a software-generated approach that includes training and consulting with a firm's staff on best practices, but at the heart of it is a software-driven system that tracks where all your leads are coming from.

It tracks what your conversion rate is by office location if you have multiple offices, by attorney, how many of those appointments actually show up, how many convert to retained clients, and more. After the initial consultation, it sends out auto responder e-mails that follow up and track every single lead. It has a series of action-trigger sequences. It's a very, very comprehensive system, and if you want to run an effective lead conversion program, you can't just use Excel.

For more information about our lead conversion services and our other proven marketing strategies, we invite you to call us at 888-588-5891 or visit www.RainmakerIntake.com.

About Stephen Fairley

Stephen is the CEO of The Rainmaker Institute, the nation's largest law firm marketing company specializing in lead conversion for small to medium size law firms. Over 10,000 attorneys nationwide have benefited from learning and implementing the proven marketing and lead conversion strategies taught by The Rainmaker Institute, LLC.

He works exclusively with attorneys to find new clients fast using online and offline legal marketing strategies and to convert more prospects into paying clients using automated marketing and by fixing their follow up systems.

Stephen is a nationally recognized law firm marketing expert and the international best-selling author of 12 books, a library of cutting edge webinar programs, and 10 audio and video training programs including:

He is a Registered Corporate Coach (RCC) through the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, has a Master's degree in Counseling and a second Master's in Clinical Psychology. Stephen's doctoral training is from Wheaton College (IL) in Clinical Psychology and he practiced as a therapist for several years in Virginia and Chicago. After leaving the field of clinical psychology Stephen founded and ran two technology companies, one in the restaurant industry and another in the health sciences field prior to launching Today's Leadership Coaching, LLC, a Chicago-based professional business coaching and consulting firm.

Through Today's Leadership Coaching, LLC, Stephen led a team of experienced business consultants and psychologists as they worked with over a dozen Fortune 500 companies, but primarily small to mid-sized, privately held businesses in the Chicagoland area. The focus of their consulting was on leadership development, high impact team building, and management training. Periodically, the team would be asked by smaller clients to consult on business development and marketing related issues. Stephen found he enjoyed the marketing aspect of consulting more than the leadership development. As a result, he spent time developing his philosophy of relationship-based marketing and how to apply this in a professional service-based company. He encapsulated this in his first book, Practice Made Perfect for Small Business Owners 2001), which he wrote in 7 days without notes while on a cruise ship in the middle of the Caribbean.

It was shortly afterwards that he was asked by a major New York publishing company, John Wiley & Sons, to write one of the very first professional books on the newly forming field of professional business coaching. He researched and wrote his second book in six months and when Getting Started in Personal and Executive Coaching was published in 2003 it quickly achieved international best-selling status in 4 different countries: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

The very next year, **Stephen was named "America's Top Marketing Coach"** by CoachVille, the world's largest professional coaching association and given their top "professional coaching" industry award. He spent the next few years flying around the country speaking to industry groups, companies, and trade associations on business coaching and marketing. He soon realized his true passion was in working with small, privately held, professional service-based companies.

While living in Chicago he had the honor to speak to sell-out crowds of attorneys first at the State Bar of Wisconsin, followed by the Illinois State Bar, then the prestigious New York State Bar at their annual convention.

Since that time, Stephen has spoken numerous times for over 35 of the largest state and local bar associations in the country including: the State Bars of California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, Maryland, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Arizona, Nebraska, New Mexico, the Los Angeles County Bar, Essex County Bar, Monmouth County Bar, Hackensack County Bar, the Washington DC Bar, Texas Young Lawyers Association, Orange County (FL) Bar, the Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom, the Consumer Attorneys of San Diego, the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys, and the San Diego County Bar, to name a few.

The Rainmaker Institute, LLC grew directly out of his experiences first speaking to, then coaching, consulting with, and training attorneys. Since that first event at the State Bar of Wisconsin, Stephen has worked with over 10,000 attorneys from virtually every state in the country and almost every practice area.

Stephen's work has been noted and quoted in the *American Bar Association's Journal, Entrepreneur, Inc., Fortune Small Business, Harvard Management Update, Business Advisor,* the *Chicago Tribune, Crain's Chicago Business,* and on the front covers of *AdvantEdge* and *Choice* magazines. He is a member of the prestigious National Speaker's Association and his Rainmaker seminars are sponsored several times every year by some of the largest state and local bar associations in the country.