

Popular Threads on Solosez

Sticker Shock Over Yellow Page Ad Costs

Folks, I am in sticker shock. I had *no idea* YP ads cost two to five thousand dollars a month. Truly. I'm flabbergasted. (Not really, but I do like that word. I am shocked, though.)

Here's my question: how essential are they anymore? Do people really hire lawyers this way nowadays? How much business do you get from a listing or an ad? Is it one of those things I need to "bite the bullet" on or perhaps wait until year #2? Or do you think a solo's dedicated marketing efforts in other areas might make up for the business that would have been brought in? Are YP ad users more or less likely to price shop, in your experience? Does it depend on your practice area? (Mine's consumer law, bankruptcy, and employment litigation)

Inquiring & newly solo minds wanna know.

I am a patent lawyer, and most of my clients find me through the internet, probably because most of my clients are pretty comfortable with technology (e.g. the internet and computers). The majority of your potential clientele may use a phone book to find a lawyer rather than the internet (this may be wrong, I don't know). Based on that, I would lean towards getting a yellow pages ad. As you get more and more known in your field, you will probably get more referrals from other lawyers and previous clients.

If you do decide to get a yellow pages ad, I would stick with the main telephone book, that is, the book that is published by the main telephone company in your area. When I first went solo, I got a yellow pages listing with a 3rd party yellow pages book, and got no calls from it for a whole year.

Michael A. Blake, Milford, Connecticut

OK, first, yellow pages costs typically depend on the size of the community that the yellow pages are directed at: a yellow pages ad in the New York City yellow pages is going to be astronomical; a YP ad in a county of 15,000 people is likely to be cheap.

Second, size matters in cost: an in-column listing is likely to be much cheaper than a display ad.

Third, are they effective? depends. I think for most consumer oriented practices- family law, bankruptcy, real estate, wills, probate- they are useful; for appellate work, probably not. BUT: I saw an ABA study of effectiveness of yellow pages ads, probably published late 80's but I suspect the basic findings are still valid: long story short was that they found lawyers had very high satisfaction with display ads; and the bigger the display ad the more satisfied the lawyers stated they were with the ad; BUT that when potential clients actually went to use the YP to select a



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lawyer, they frequently ignored the display ads and went to the in column ads, and looked for practice areas, location, hours, whether free consults were offered. Point is, the study concluded that the most bang for your advertising buck came from relatively small, cheap, in column ads and not the big display ads. Take the study with a grain of salt; but that's what it said.

You also might consider 'targeted' yellow pages; while our county has several yellow pages (one from the 'phone company' and two or three from other publishers) we've also got a yellow pages directed exclusively at a mega retirement community; my ad in that runs \$27/month versus \$140/mo for the 'official" county yellow pages.

Ronald Jones, Florida

Title of study is:

Yellow Pages Lawyer Advertising: An Analysis of Effective Elements.

American Bar Association: 1992. R Harrison Pledger, Jr.

Check it out; maybe at your local law school library.

Ronald Jones, Florida

I understand the price for a YP ad is based upon size/color and directory area. The size can be regulated. The directory area is based upon the exchange of your telephone; the larger the exchange population the more exposure thus the greater the cost.

I know people who advertise in multiple YP exchanges. The decision is largely based upon their area of practice and the population from which they desire access. Where I could pay \$200/month in outside the city, it may cost \$1,000/month in the city. If I want the city exposure, I can advertise there too, or both exchange areas.

How essential are YP ads? Well I placed a 1/8" ad my first year and ended it recently. I was not getting calls from the ad. I know this because I ask potential clients where they got my name. I found that other forms of advertising were paying off much more, and more per cost, than the YP.

Then again, I believe the decision must be based on location and practice area. Also, many YP ads are badly written and do not entice those looking in the YP. Bankruptcy is an area that I feel is good for YP. Big and bold "BANKRUPCY" with a name and contact info. You need not include all your areas of practice. It all depends on what you are targeting. Perhaps you want an image of all your practice areas...

The YP is only one form of advertising. Your marketing plan should be sufficiently budgeted and incorporate several forms of advertising. As you find some forms are ineffective, those can be cut back in favor of what is working for you. I tried the YP my first year. Perhaps I will go back to a YP ad. But right now it does not appear to be working. What is working for me is writing articles for the local paper. My Web site is not drawing in anyone, perhaps a statement on the quality of my site. But I understand

people are going there after learning of me in order to learn more about me and my practice.

For a marketing plan to work, you need contacts. Those contacts may come from bar involvement or publishing (not just memberships), getting out to meet other lawyers (education and referrals, etc.), involvement in the community (publishing in the paper or being active in an organization), and many other sources. I found that during my first year the YP did not affect those contacts, certainly no quality contacts. I feel your name is best coming up in a conversation then someone goes to the YP for your contact information. Much like people going to a Web site, only less informative.

Another question to think about is, do you really want clients that seek legal assistance in your practice areas that seek an attorney in the YP? Sometimes the answer is no. Perhaps I would be less reluctant to consider YP advertising if I were in legal malpractice, aviation or maritime law. I don't know, and it would depend on the ad population.

A good question to ask others is, where would you look for a _____ attorney? The thing is many people as their attorney or a friend. You need to be known to those people. I am not a believer in being a jack-of-all-trades. I believe in tailoring one's practice for competency and logical sense. There are many areas of practice that can work well together (bankruptcy and consumer come to mind). These days I shutter when I hear a GP is handling an occasional bankruptcy case. Then again, your mileage may vary...

Bill Driscoll, Groton, Massachusetts

Here's another resource that I've heard good things about:

http://www.amazon.com/Lawyers-Effective-Yellow-Advertising-Second/dp/1590316215/sr=8-2/qid=1157643869/ref=sr_1_2/102-7285510-8328936?ie=UTF8&s=books

It's an ABA publication.

Jennifer Moore, Champlin, Minnesota

My personal experience with YP ads has been very positive -- but then, I took a lot of time to think out the ad size, content, and where I wanted it placed, and made sure that the sales rep understood what I was doing.

I have a specialized practice -- elder law. The client whom I believe is most likely to look in the YP for an elder law attorney is someone in a crisis. That person is NOT going to want to wander through the multiple names, ad copy that crams so much in as to be unreadable, etc. Therefore, I have placed a two-inch ad under "Elder Law" in three phone books where potential clients are within a 20-minute drive of my office.

My ad copy is minimal, so I can use a type size that is easy to read. It gives my name and phone number (larger type), the address and web site (in smaller type) and five bullet points of one to three words each stating my core practice areas. I put the ad in the specialized section at the end of

the lawyer listings, where it would stand out more.

My YP budget is about \$4,500 for the year. All I need is one good case for it to pay itself off -- everything else is gravy. I estimate that I have a 25:1 or 30:1 rate of return. Further, having my name in there gives me repeated exposure, and it may stick somewhere in the subconscious until needed a few months or years later -- "oh yeah... I remember I saw the name of an elder law attorney in the phone book -- let me find it again."

YP isn't my only source of advertising, of course, but it's an important part of the arsenal.

E. Alexandra Golden, Needham, Massachusetts

Found out what the publishing schedule is in your area. It is usually a full year between publications though a few areas push two books out. Lead time is usually 3-6 months.

As mentioned, cost depends on community. A generous display ad in Philly costs more than you quoted.

Play it by ear and do some market research. What localities will you be tackling? Where are your clients likely to come from? The older the clientele the less likely they are to go straight to the Internet.

That said, the first thing you need to do is get listed in SuperPages.com AND your local equivalent. SuperPages.com is THE source material for MANY other info pages (YELLOW.com which also supplies, 411.com, info.com, infopages.com, whitepages.com, and so on). Some other baby Bells (a/k/a RBOCs) have their own source listing but I would start with SuperPages. This is the Internet equivalent of the YP. SuperPages is owned and run by (now) Verizon.

Initial listings are free and add-ons seem pretty fair priced. BUT, if you don't purchase any add-ons initially it is sort of a pain to get the free listing. (The listing service "malfunctions at the end.") You will probably need to send an email requesting to be listed. Include all the info you wish to be in the ad (as chosen from the SuperPages site). It may take a few weeks for the ad to get up using this back door, but eventually you will be able to edit it online. And of course they will try to up-sell you but aren't pushy.

Roger Traversa, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Thanks for the tip, Roger.

Judging from all the emails that mentioned pricing - I'm shocked anew at my community's pricing. We're far from being a "big city" and this pricing just seems way out of line with what the rest of you folks are paying.

This stinks.

Sheryl Schelin

Two things: first, confirm that this is for an 'in-column' ad; YP reps LOVE

to push the big display ads to lawyers. Second, see if they'll cut you a break as a new advertiser or if there are any deals they are offering; typically they want to sign up new advertisers because they know it is very likely they'll renew the following year(s) and sometimes they offer things like: buy one in column ad with one inch of column space under one heading, get second listing under second heading free/reduced price.

Ronald Jones, Florida

The only thing about going in-column is that stupid and unconstitutional new rule about "debt relief agency" disclosure in all advertisements. I mean - bankruptcy is the only one of my practice areas I think YP ads *might* possibly be good for, and if I specify bankruptcy at all, in any way - even if I'm just listed under that heading, the way I read the rule I'd have to put that mandatory language in there. I'm not sure an in-column ad would be enough room for that.

However, all that said, you make a very good point and I will verify that with the rep.

Sheryl Schelin

Too bad this wasn't next year -- I have no YP ad and I could tell you how my first year went, Sheryl!

I do have a sponsored lawyers.com listing -- I am the top attorney listed for Bankruptcy and for Employment Law in Pasadena. I also put ads in Craig's list -- that is cool because they can be as long as I want. I also have bought postcards VERY cheaply (a.k.a. free) from Vista Print and I leave those in good areas like Laundromats.

I am sure a yellow pages ad would be great, but there is no way I can afford it (simply no way, so this was not a decision I had to make!)

One note -- I have been REALLY happy with the quality of my clients so far and I wonder if it is because of the ways I advertise.

So if you get the YP ad, Sheryl, let's compare notes next year and see how if you thought it was worth it. Once I have the money, I would consider a listing for Bankruptcy at least. And, a little OT here, but that ridiculous "debt relief agency" language IS annoying, is it not? I think it confuses clients and it takes up space! I do not see any sense in it at all, but maybe because I am too dense to understand even how I am a debt relief agency. I am an attorney, gosh darnit!

Amy Kleinpeter, Pasadena, California

Whether to have a YP ad or not depends to a great extent on where you live. If I lived and practiced in Seattle, I wouldn't bother with a YP ad; there are just too many lawyers there, and my ad would get lost in the crowd. Here in the small city of Yakima, though, many people turn to the YP to find attorneys, and it's worth it to have a small ad.

I haven't yet sprung for a full page color ad, just a 2"x3" ad in the general attorney listing and some in-column ads in the practice areas section. This

is just my opinion, but it seems to me the practice areas section is the most important, because people will most likely be looking for an attorney who practices the type of law they need. I pay under \$300 per month. Since I haven't done much other advertising yet, I've gotten almost all of my clients through the YP.

Heidi G. Bolong, Yakima, Washington

My theory is that Yellow Pages works well in attracting individual consumers who have never needed a lawyer before and/or who might be embarrassed or otherwise disinclined to ask their friends for referrals. Divorce, personal injury, bankruptcy, DUI and other criminal matters would rank high. It works well for people who think they need "just a lawyer," not the best or most expensive. Conversely you won't see any sophisticated consumers of legal services like Fortune 500 companies or insurance companies picking lawyers from the Yellow Pages.

But a solo attorney really needs to look at the true economics of advertising. If a company has a bunch of widgets sitting around in inventory that they have already paid to produce, then the economics are pretty simple. They buy a \$10,000 ad. They sell \$20,000 in product. Then they made \$10,000 from the project. Good deal. A lawyer who runs a \$10,000 ad and brings in \$20,000 in business, however is not nearly in such a good position. They have \$10,000 worth of work to do at the regular rate and \$10,000 worth of work to do for free (or for the phone company, if you will.) If you are opening your practice and don't have enough to do, this may be a very good deal. But if you are already fairly busy and shorting your family obligations, it may not be. If you have unused excess capacity (e.g. a great system for processing bankruptcies and paid staff who could use more work), it could be a great deal. If you'd have to hire more staff or pay overtime, it might not be so good. And the very worst case would be if you got so busy you had to turn away work-- because you still have to do the other work for free!

Finally, there is a small additional cost to Yellow Pages in particular- time. My experience is that Yellow Pages ads tend to generate a fair amount of price shoppers, who call and want a price quote in advance. They won't make an appointment without one. They will call all lawyers with ads in your area. This only works to your advantage if you are the lowest-price lawyer in your area. (And those people don't make the best clients.)

Don't get me wrong. I'm not against advertising. If you do practice in those areas I mentioned, it can be very good. If it is a firm with more than one attorney to share the load or associates who need to be kept busy, it can be great. If you are seeking long term clients like new small business who will need you regularly, that alters the economics, too

Here's the link to my published materials on marketing. (Free)
<http://www.okbar.org/members/map/marketingarticles.htm>

Even though it was written way back in 2000, I'd direct your attention to the two-part Marketing Magic article.

Jim Calloway Director, Oklahoma Bar Association Management Assistance Program

You should be shocked. I don't think many people know how much the YP tries to gouge \$ out of us. I bought in my first year, and for me, absolute waste of money. Not one client through them (and actually I am suing them now in a related issue). The internet is absolutely key. I think the YP knows this and is trying to get as much money while they still can...

Tilden Moschetti, San Francisco, California

We gave up on TPC and YP after they listed our closing company as Lafayette Tile Company instead of Lafayette Title Company. It was their fault as the copy they gave us was correct. We are still getting calls for tile. All TPC did when we complained was to promise us a discount the next year. There was no next year. We have a very small add in YP section just to be there and we spend the money saved on single malt scotch and crawfish.

Art Mouton, Louisiana

My life improved when I STOPPED all Yellow Page advertising. I now have better cases and more time.

Joel Selik

Thank you to all who have replied. The discussion has essentially validated my original decision to forego the ad - at least for the first year. I've decided to spend my time on my other marketing efforts, tracking the results therefrom carefully, then I'll revisit the issue in a year. If I think I can handle more business (ha! - ever the optimist), I'll consider adding a YP ad for a year and tracking its results.

What a helpful group!

Regards,

Sheryl Schelin

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