

# The Power of First Impressions

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Where do your clients first engage with your firm? Perhaps they visit your website? Or give the office a call? Maybe they contact you via email.

First impressions are one of your most powerful resources—or one of your biggest pitfalls. Those initial experiences a client has with your firm are literally laying the groundwork for a foundation of trust. And that foundation of trust? It's vital to ensuring a long-lasting, successful client relationship.

The truth is, in this high-touch, digital age, there have never been more ways in which prospective clients can connect with your firm. The benefits of being accessible to new clients are obvious...but actually capitalizing on these client touch-points can prove much more challenging.

What happens in those first moments, for better or worse—from a phone call that goes to voicemail to a not-so-tidy lobby—gives your newest clients insight into their future experience with your practice.

During those first moments, there are three questions your customers are asking themselves:

1. Does this attorney care about their clients?
2. Will I enjoy working with these people?
3. Are they going to respond to my needs?

It's critical that you answer these questions in those initial interactions because if you don't, the client is going to answer for themselves. You want a resounding, "Yes, absolutely!" for every one of these questions! That means thinking long and hard about where those first impressions occur, and examining these touch points closely. Is there room for improvement? Are you leaving any opportunities to surprise and delight on the table?

Most importantly, do clients experience confusion or discomfort at any point in the process? If so, immediately focus on those areas until that is no

longer the case. After all, 78% of consumers have literally [bailed on a transaction](#) solely because of their initial experience! What if three-quarters of your potential clients are moving on because of one poor (and easily fixable) interaction?

And remember, we want our first impressions to form a foundation of trust and answer those three important questions. Confusion and discomfort are antithetical to trust (and certainly won't make clients feel cared for), so don't let those feelings creep in to those first interactions. Think of yourself as the guardian of trust in those first moments. Defend it with all of your might!

OK, so we know those first impressions are really important. That's all well and good, but let's get down to brass tacks here: What can you do now to ensure that your clients are experiencing a delightful first impression of your practice?

### **Answer the Phone**

Seems like a no-brainer, right? Sure, but to the solo attorney balancing casework with court dates, travel, and client meetings...answering a ringing phone might not be so simple.

But, when your phone goes to voicemail during business hours, it causes confusion and frustration for clients trying to reach you. While managing every incoming call may sound like a tall order, there are resources available to help you. From an in-house hire to virtual receptionist services, there are ways (some more costly than others) to stay productive while creating positive experiences for your clients.

One word of advice: avoid obnoxious phone trees at all costs. Keep in mind that 67% of clients have actually [hung up the phone](#) out of frustration with an automated system, likely moving on to the first attorney who answered their call.

### **Be Prompt**

When responding to emails or messages, always do so as quickly as possible. If you're not typically able to respond to emails or messages throughout the day, be sure to include an auto-reply or other communication so that clients know exactly what to expect (and, again, help

avoid any confusion). A friendly “I’ll be in court until 3 p.m., but I look forward to responding to your email as soon as I am able,” goes a long way to soothe and reassure clients that you haven’t forgotten them.

### **Get Chatty**

While small talk is great and can help you foster a relationship with your clients, that isn’t what we are driving at here. Engaging with law firms doesn’t always happen in a linear, step-by-step fashion anymore—people are on your website, phoning in, sending emails, and possibly interacting with your social media page. What’s more? Clients are reaching out through these channels. Live online chat can generate up to 40% more leads for law firms and businesses, and converts website and social media traffic into clients. The first part of mastering this touch point is simply being accessible. Start there and watch your practice grow.

### **Be Human!**

Wait, what? Yeah, I said it: Don’t rely on robots to take care of your clients. Chat bots, interactive voice response (IVR), and other forms of customer-facing AI can be even more frustrating for a client than radio silence.

[Humans crave connection](#) and interaction—even if they swear they’d rather send a text—so be sure to satisfy that craving wherever you can. Bots are limited in their capacity to assist, and even as far as they’ve come, it’s always painfully obvious when you’re interacting with one. Don’t cut corners where it matters most: Ensure that your clients are getting an opportunity to interact with a warm, friendly human, and you will be well [ahead of the game](#).

Masterfully crafting these initial interactions will set you up for long-term success with your clients. If you want clients to trust you—and ultimately to feel loyalty for your practice—don’t let those first impressions slip by!