

How to Launch a Virtual Law Firm



virtual law office feature image

You're ready to start your own firm.

Here's the problem. You don't have the resources you need to build a large brick and mortar law firm from scratch. The good news? You *don't* need a large nest egg to strike out on your own.

A virtual law firm could be just the thing you need.

With a virtual law firm, you'd be able to quickly figure out what works. With [the right systems and procedures](#), you'd be able to identify the building blocks you need to establish a successful practice.

Are law firms still needed today?

Pessimistic pundits would argue that the law firm, as we know it, is fading away. Big law is in a [death spiral](#) they say. They argue that the market has changed, that lawyers are quickly [becoming obsolete](#).

Is this true?

Others argue that the [job market is shrinking](#). Law firms around the world are [closing at an alarming rate](#). It seems as if things are getting worse for the legal industry.

These naysayers are *wrong*.

Attorneys are needed today, more than ever. How do I know? The market tells us. Using market data, we can *instantly* verify these doom and gloom complaints. How do we do that? Simple, we head to [Google Trends](#).

I used five common keywords.

(1.) Real estate attorney **(2.)** bankruptcy attorney **(3.)** business attorney **(4.)** divorce attorney and **(5.)** estate attorney.

Fairly straightforward, right?

If you're unfamiliar with Google Trends, it's a free tool that gives us instant access to searcher data. Using a list keywords, we get data driven answers about a keywords popularity (demand), what people want (wants/needs) and more.

So what does the data say? See for yourself.

What do these numbers mean? Here's Google's explanation.

"Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term."

Seeing a pattern here?

There are general fluctuations in demand, same as any industry. But overall, the demand for attorneys has remained consistent.

This isn't a fluke.

Change the time range from 2004 to today and *you'll see the same thing*. Client demand for attorneys remains high. Notice these aren't product or service specific requests (e.g. how to create a will) for example.

So what's going on here?

The demand for attorneys hasn't changed all that much. On the other hand, *how* clients solve their legal problems, that's changed considerably.

The virtual law firm solves a very serious problem

Here's the part pundits get right.

Your clients have lots of options. They're able to work with [hated](#) (and [inadequate](#)) solutions like LegalZoom. They have an abundance of options.

What does this mean?

The old client model – bill hourly, ring the bell, profit – is falling out of favor with clients. They're flooded with an incredible amount of options and alternatives. They don't have to do things our way anymore.

Why the virtual law firm is an ideal answer

It's an incredible opportunity to build an effective law firm rapidly. Simply because it gives you things other business models can't.

With a virtual law firm you can...

1. **Create an alternative brand.** Let's say you have deep pockets. You're able to create the traditional brick and mortar firm. Will it be successful? A virtual firm allows you to create an alternate brand.

Significantly less risk if it fails.

Use this alternate brand to – test your services, messaging, pricing – anything you want – ***without*** hurting your brick and mortar firm.

2. **Find what works, quickly.** Using DBAs and websites, you can create multiple versions of your virtual law firm. You can test ideas against each other. Which clients spend more money? Which service areas produce the greatest amount of profit?

Testing with multiples gives you the answer.

With this strategy you can create businesses or micro sites that are focused on a particular specialty or service area. You can mix and match, adjusting your price

and services to meet client demand.

Wait a minute.

Won't this raise a few eyebrows? It seems like this sort of strategy enters a grey area. It doesn't have to be a questionable area if you're upfront about **(a.)** *who* you are **(b.)** *what* you're doing and possibly **(c.)** *why* you're doing it.

3. **Increase hiring effectiveness.** Dr. Bradford Smart, author of Topgrading, found that a mis-hire costs businesses [27 times an employee's salary](#). A comprehensive hiring process is a great idea. Hiring attorneys on a freelance basis to test their abilities, even better.

You're able to attract the talent you want when you need it.

Hiring, maintenance and management costs are reduced. Severance, opportunity and disruption can be eliminated. Additionally, a virtual law firm gives organizations the opportunity to test alternatives to the "***eat what you kill***" model.

[The "eat what you kill" culture is damaging](#) when there's a consistent amount of external and internal competition. More often than not, these firms are constantly at war with themselves. It promotes a kind of cutthroat cultural Darwinism where everyone looks out for number one.

4. **Dramatically reduce operating expenses.** This is an obvious point, right? Your office space and associate salaries take up as much [as 2/3rds of your revenue](#). With a virtual law firm, you're able to dictate when and why you take on major expenses.

Performance data tells you whether it's worth it (or not).

You're able to grow slowly (or rapidly) scaling up as demand and performance dictates. This dramatically reduces the upfront capital needed to launch your firm.

There is a caveat though.

Certain clients are all about image or aesthetics. When they shop for an attorney, they have a specific idea in mind. These clients aren't always favorable to working with virtual attorneys, especially if you're an unknown.

The good news?

Younger companies, experienced organizations and utilitarian entrepreneurs care less about image and more about **results**. Produce the results they want and you have their attention.

Okay then.

The demand for attorneys – it's still high. Clients are bombarded with options. This has changed how they select their firm of choice. Here's the obvious question.

How do you launch a virtual law firm?

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A virtual law firm is first and foremost...

A business.

Here's the part where attorneys tend to stumble. Running a law firm is unique. Are you a name partner that brings in a significant amount of business to your firm?

It's still different.

A virtual law firm is a legitimate business and needs to be treated that way. Looking to establish your law firm quickly? You'll need to [follow the same tried-and-true steps](#) successful entrepreneurs use to grow their business.

What steps?

Step #1: Give your business an incomplete foundation

You're going to make mistakes.

It's inevitable.

It's incredibly unlikely that you'll set every single part of your virtual law firm up properly. And you know what? That's okay, as long as you have the essentials.

What essentials?

- Identify your practice areas
- Assess your team's technological prowess
- Create [the right systems and procedures](#)

- How to work with staff/clients in a virtual environment
- How you'll expand your business (e.g. hire more associates, paralegals, administrative staff, etc.)

Next, you'll want to identify your must-have technology requirements. Technology is far more important for a virtual law practice; it's how you'll compensate for the reduced amount of in-person contact. This means you'll need solutions for...

1. **Practice management.** How you'll manage contacts, time tracking, billing and reporting. If you're running a virtual law firm, it's more important that your practice management solution is **centralized**. Data shouldn't be stored on a shared laptop or mobile device that everyone uses.
2. **Document management.** Documents are the lifeblood of your practice. You'll need to have a solution that allows you to send/receive documents, store documents safely and securely and is readily accessible regardless of your device (e.g. mobile, desktop, iPad, etc.).
3. **Online delivery.** You'll need to be able to communicate with clients privately. Many new attorneys rely on email as their online delivery mechanism of choice. It's free and it's easy to use. The problem with email is the fact that it's not centralized and it's not secure. At any given time, your team needs varying degrees of access and email prevents that.
4. **Communication management.** You'll need a communication system that allows you to chat with your team in real-time. Meeting and communication tools like [Slack](#) or [Legaler](#) give you the real-time or face-to-face communication you need to stay current with your team.

These details are important for every law firm, but they're more important for virtual firms. You simply won't have the day-to-day, in-person connection with your team. If you're looking to launch your firm successfully, you'll need to have a solution to each of these problems.

Step #2: Avoid clients who only have money

Your ideal client should meet two simple criteria.

1. **A willingness to pay for your services.** This communicates several important details at a subtle level. **(a.)** These clients understand and value your services **(b.)** they have a limited understanding of their problem and **(c.)** most importantly, they know they need your help.
- 2.

The ability to pay for your services. Quid pro quo is an important part of every relationship. Clients who are willing to pay what you ask for show that they have the means and the commitment to pay for your expertise and knowledge.

There's a lot to unpack here.

If a big-ticket client shows up with lots of money (*and not much else*), they may have the ability to pay for your services. That doesn't always mean they're willing to do so.

Do your due diligence.

Are they the kind of client you want to work with? You'll need to profile your clients to identify the ethos, demographics and psychographics of the people you want.

Why though?

Is this really all that important? Absolutely. Focusing your time and attention means you're far more likely to win stable and consistent clients. You may even enjoy the work you do with engaged clients.

That's because they're more receptive.

There's less haggling, complaining or negativity. You're far more likely to have the financial stability you need to build a successful virtual law firm.

Bad clients are the opposite.

They take up large amounts of your time. The work is often unpleasant, which makes it more difficult. You're almost guaranteed to deal with people who don't value your hard work.

Stability, security?

All but impossible in that environment.

Step #3: Stun clients to get their attention

There are a lot of restrictions on you.

You're limited in what you can say, as well as when and how you say it. The law requires that you avoid *even the appearance* of duplicity.

This is an advantage.

Here's why.

Many attorneys see this as a disadvantage, that they're simply unable to promote their law firm the way they'd like to. Some choose to skirt the law anyway, doing what they want regardless of the consequences.

You have clear boundaries you can work with.

You have explicit instructions outlining what you can and can't say. What's acceptable or unacceptable. Use specific strategies and tactics to attract a consistent amount of customer attention.

- **Use emotion to spread ideas.** Research shows psychological triggers (trust, mystique, alarm, etc.) and [emotions, are contagious](#). Used properly, emotion is a straightforward way to attract customer attention. *Combine this with...*
- **Guest posts on large publications.** It's a good idea to go where your customers are. If you're working with entrepreneurs, write for major publications like Business Insider, Entrepreneur.com, Fast Company and others. Publish on industry platforms like Law.com, the American Bar Association or Above the Law. Create links and hooks that lead readers back to your site. *Then combine this with...*
- **Partnerships with medium-to-large platforms.** Once you've developed a working relationship with medium-to-large platforms, provide them with more of the exceptional content they value. The sky's the limit. Give them more content in a variety of formats (e.g. quizzes, videos, posts, etc.). Make an exclusive offer, negotiate a profitable exchange, anything they're agreeable to. Lead their readers back to your site.

These details aren't comprehensive.

But they're a great way to build up a lot of buzz and attention for your virtual law firm. There are thousands of platforms, groups and brands who need your wisdom.

Share your knowledge.

Then, provide readers with more valuable content. Use it to earn a like, follow, share or subscriber. Then, once you have a relationship with readers...

Step #4: Pre-sell clients on your product or service

Selling is a dirty word.

At least it seems that way. Selling seems to have an unsavory reputation, doesn't it? There's a good reason why. As it turns out, there are two kinds of "selling."

1. **Coercive selling.** This is where selling gets its bad reputation from. *These sellers try to force or coerce* prospective clients into a deal or situation that's harmful. They're not really looking out for their client, they're looking out for themselves. These salespeople can be needy, pushy, manipulative and dishonest.
2. **Consultative selling.** *These sellers don't care if you work with them or not.* At any given time they're negotiating with 15 to 20 clients. They know how to make it rain.

They act as an advisor and they often begin the relationship by treating you as if you're already a client. Don't misunderstand, this doesn't mean they assume or provide all of the benefits of an established attorney/client relationship. It means they're looking out for you, in a limited capacity, from day one.

Consultative selling is needs based and client led. It's based on a simple but neglected sales paradigm.

If *this*, then **that**.

If I send you an email, I wait for you to respond. I don't bombard you with seven to eight emails begging for your business. If I make an offer I give you the chance to respond to it.

This alone sets you apart.

This also puts you in the perfect position to pre-sell your virtual law firm. How?

By teaching.

Teaching clients, at their level, gives you the trust, authority and influence you need to pre-sell your clients. Teach them something new, help them solve a minor problem, show them they're at risk.

Then, present your firm as the solution.

It's really that simple. This is something you can accomplish with a few well-written guest posts (or speeches and workshops), a simple one-page website that collects emails, and an email provider like [MailChimp](#). Then continue to provide value to your audience.

This is huge.

You can build an audience and sizeable client list **before** you strike out on your own. This means you can launch your virtual law firm with a consistent stream of cash on day one.

That's the power of pre-selling.

Step #5: Show clients their problems will only get worse

This sounds really negative, doesn't it?

But it's actually the opposite. *It's something you absolutely need to do* to protect your clients. Let's use an unrelated example to convey the point.

Imagine you're a cyclist.

You ride everywhere. Not because you have to but because you can. Then, at some point, you realize you can't get to where you need to go as quickly as you'd like. You come to the decision that you need a car.

That car is a solution to your problem.

But it also makes your problems worse. Previously, you only had to worry about taking care of your bicycle. Now you have to worry about the warranty, insurance, vehicle registration and licensing requirements that come with owning a car. Your solution created a whole new set of problems.

Every product or service has this problem.

Let's say clients hire you to incorporate their business. They now need help with employee contracts, intellectual property, taxes, terms of use agreements and more.

See what I mean?

You can be gentle in your approach but you'll need to make your clients aware of the dangers they face. It's prudent and appropriate for you to remind them of the consequences that come with negligence.

This is what your clients want.

Then, when they're ready to move forward, solve their problems. Then repeat steps three through five. This is the secret to consistent cash flow and a stable virtual law firm.

The legal industry is evolving rapidly

Clients have options.

They're no longer restricted by the rules of past. The rules have changed. The firms that adapt to these new rules will win. The firms that resist won't.

The virtual law firm is your secret weapon.

It's a tool brick and mortar firms can use to build a successful practice. A tool new firms can use to quickly establish a successful digital practice.

You *don't* need a large nest egg.

You just need the right ideas. With a virtual law firm, you're able to quickly figure out what works. With the right systems and procedures, you'll be able to identify the building blocks you need to establish a successful practice.

The naysayers are *wrong*.

The market *tells us* they're wrong. Client demand for attorneys remains high. With a virtual law firm, you have an incredible opportunity to build a top-tier law firm rapidly. With the right training and bit of preparation, you'll find the tools and resources are right in front of you.

Everything you need to start your own successful law firm.

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