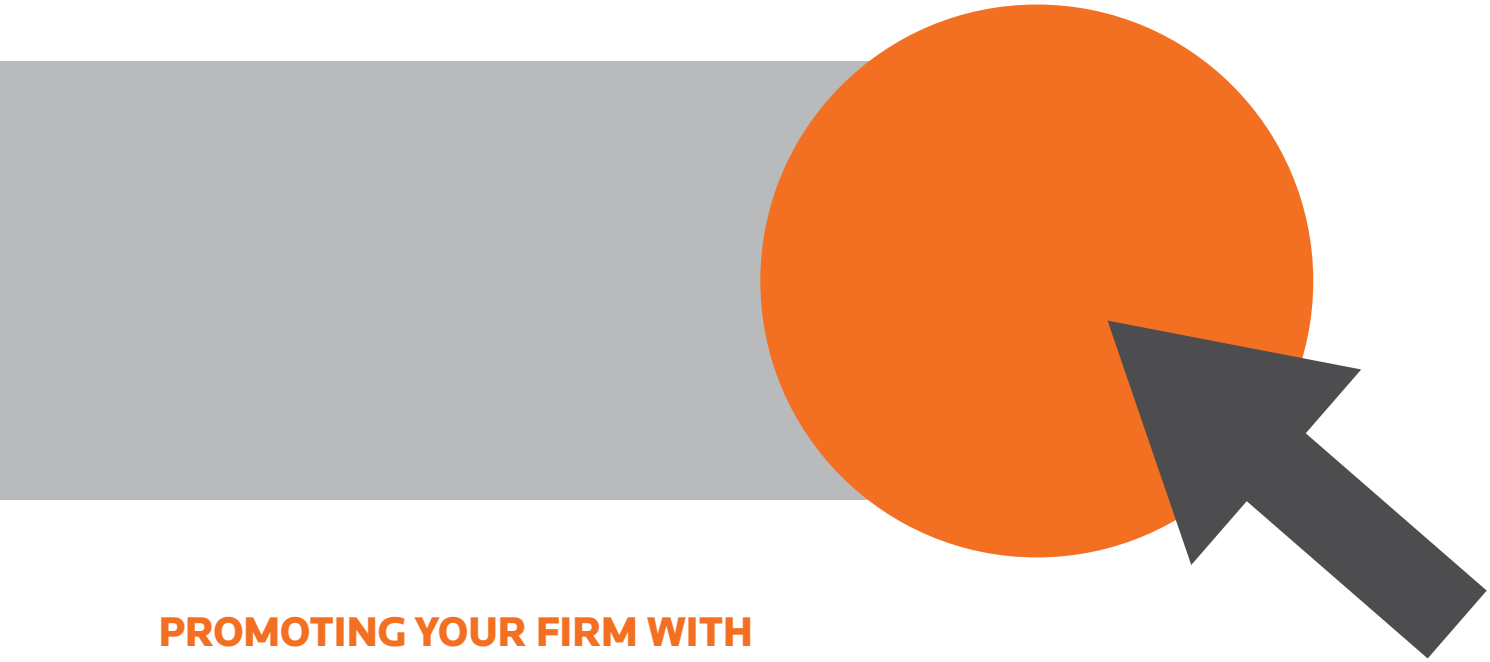
FindLaw®



PROMOTING YOUR FIRM WITH

Pay-per-click

A marketing playbook for attorneys

THOMSON REUTERS®

Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising is easily one of the most valuable marketing tools at an attorney's disposal.

These small ads appear most often at the top and sides of a search engine results page. By now, we're all used to seeing them in nearly every search we run. With such a prominent visual position, PPC ads deliver a virtual "top hit" search result for consumers and advertisers alike.

Given the competitive nature of legal marketing, it's obvious why law firms get excited about PPC. Yet the platform is much more complex than most people realize. That diminutive text ad has a lot of strategy and planning behind it.

When done right, PPC can significantly impact the entire journey your customers take to get to your firm. From generating targeted awareness, to creating easy engagement, to sealing the deal with a real connection, paid search aligns with every stage of the buyer's experience.

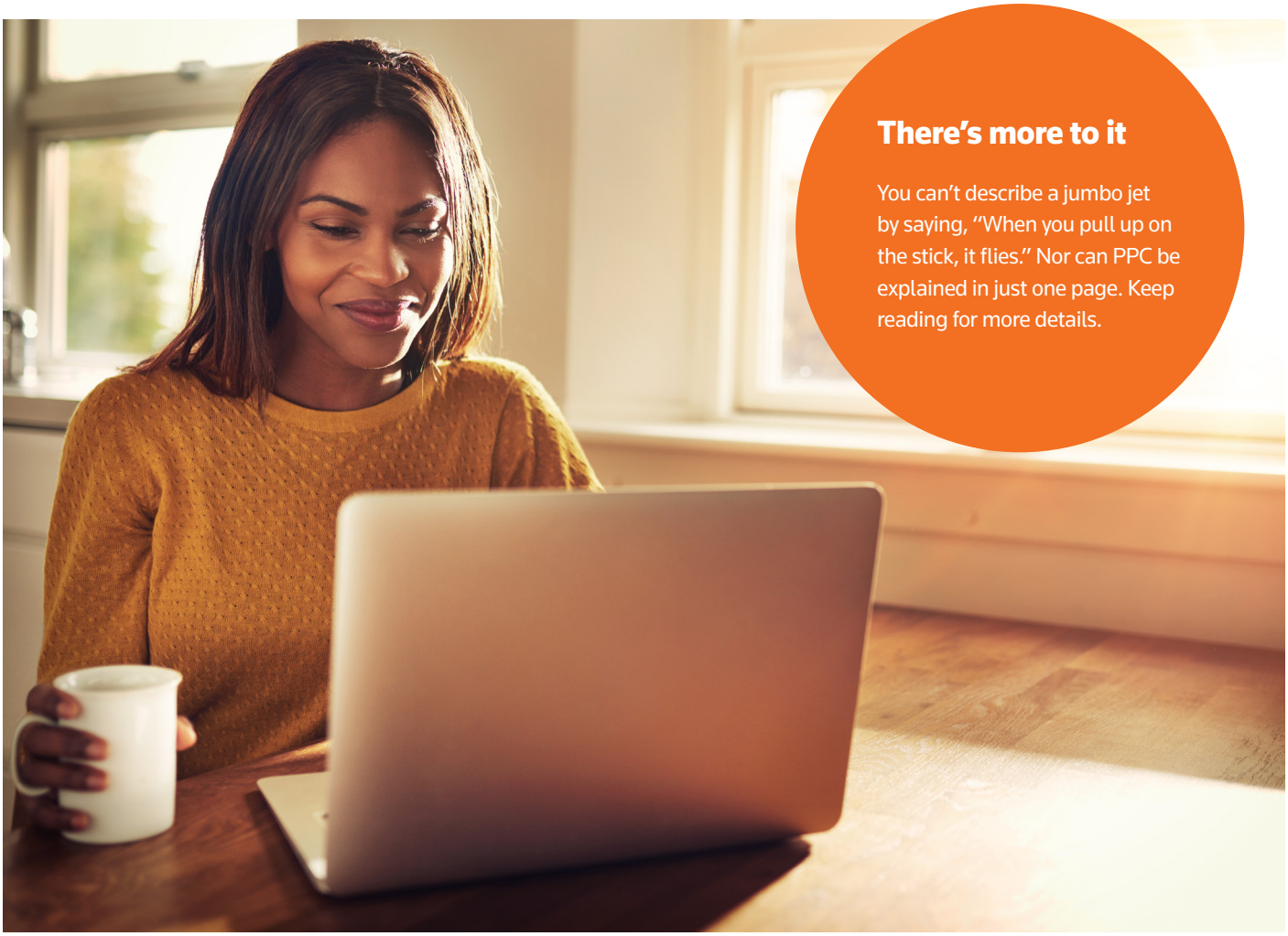
That's why we're here: This guide provides an overview of the concept and strategy behind PPC. It will discuss what goes into a PPC campaign and how law firms can begin to think about where and how PPC will fit into their overall marketing strategy. And while PPC is a generic term, this book will generally refer to the Google™ Ads platform.

A PPC primer

Yes, they're little ads at the top of a search engine results page (SERP), but how do they get there? More important, how can your firm get an ad to show up in front of your target audience?

First and foremost, PPC ads generate on SERPs when the search terms contain specific keywords. In its simplest form, PPC looks like this: Let's say your law firm creates an ad targeting the words "divorce" and "lawyer." When a person runs a web search using those two terms, an instantaneous auction happens behind the scenes. Bidding on those terms are you, and anyone else who wants a piece of the action. (Whether you win or lose that bid depends on some criteria we'll explain in detail later.)

If you win the bid, your ad gets served up to that web user. If the user clicks the ad, he or she is directed to your landing page and you are charged for that click. Conversely, if the ad isn't clicked, you aren't charged.



There's more to it

You can't describe a jumbo jet by saying, "When you pull up on the stick, it flies." Nor can PPC be explained in just one page. Keep reading for more details.



Why PPC matters

Attorneys love search

Call it vanity. Call it opportunism. Call it business savvy.

Whatever their motive, attorneys just can't get enough of search engine optimization (SEO) and chasing after page rank. We've covered the risks of such a single-minded devotion to page rank before, but nevertheless, many lawyers just can't resist the draw of showing up at the top of Google.

And consumer behavior reinforces this desire. After all, 62% of online legal consumers use search engines in their quest for representation or information.

Moreover, these consumers visit an average of only four websites prior to contacting an attorney. So, while PPC isn't easy, it does offer firms a better chance to position their businesses front and center before these consumers when compared with traditional SEO.

PPC is flexible

Another major draw of PPC is that you can use it to redirect your firm's marketing thrust without creating a wholesale change in brand or practice area. For example, a firm pursuing a class-action suit against a pharmaceutical company may conduct a targeted, limited-time PPC campaign to reach affected patients. The dedicated PPC ads and a well-designed landing page can work wonders for a single case while not disrupting the content of the firm's overall website.



Keywords and budgets

PPC is far from simple, but several core concepts will determine your ad's delivery frequency, position, and cost per click. If you wade into the deep waters of PPC, you'll want to at least get familiar with the following terms. The consequences of ignorance can cost your firm time and money.

Budget One of the wonderful things about PPC advertising is that you control the budget. Your firm can establish, up front, just how much you want to spend – assuming you can afford the keywords you're targeting. When you deplete that amount, your ads stop running. (Of course, you can always add more funds to your campaign.)

Keywords The specific search terms you choose to target are where things can get expensive and risky. Firms compete for broad, commonly used words like "at fault," effectively driving up their cost. In contrast, legal consumers probably don't search the term "contributory negligence" as often, so it likely can be won for far less money.

But there's both an art and a science to keyword selection. In the age of big data, there's no shortage of information available for firms wanting to know the most popular search terms. So while terms like "contributory negligence" might be very inexpensive, their search volume return could be so low that the savings simply aren't worthwhile..

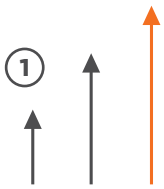
Think people, not keywords

To effectively reach the intended consumer, attorneys and PPC experts alike should focus on the person behind the search. Some keywords might seem enticing – but point to a legal consumer not yet ready to hire you. Going back to our earlier example, note the subtle but real difference between someone searching for "divorce attorney" versus "female divorce attorney." The simplicity of the former may indicate a consumer doing basic research, while the specificity of the latter might reveal a consumer a bit closer to the hiring stage.

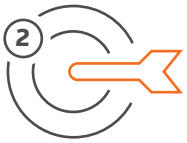
Behind the curtain

Much has been said and written about PPC quality scores, and for good reason. They determine when and where your ad will display, and the fee each click will cost you. Quality scores measure the relevance of an ad, its keywords, and its landing page to any person who may see it in their search results.

Quality scores are often treated like a mystery, but three main factors contribute to them:



The first and most prominent contributor is your ad's click-through rate (CTR). Simply put, a high CTR tells Google that web users consider your ad relevant and useful. This is also important because historically low CTR can work against you later on. Previous time spent "learning" PPC through trial and error could possibly impact your quality score in the future.



The second factor is relevancy. This is just good housekeeping. A web search for "hot cup of java" probably shouldn't return ads for the computer programming language JavaScript.



The third component is your landing page: the destination your ad links to. Here Google evaluates page load time, keyword relevance, ad copy, and nuisance factors such as pop-up ads and the like.

These three elements contribute to your quality score, which can impact your ad's frequency, page position, and even cost-per-click. Now you know why quality scores are such a hot topic among PPC advertisers.



When your ad works

Bring in the closer – a great landing page

Think about it. If someone clicks your ad, it takes them somewhere. That destination should always be a dedicated landing page focused on getting visitors to contact your firm. This page should complement your ad and reassure the visitor that they've come to the right firm.

A landing page is one of the most powerful conversion tools at your disposal. Spend time optimizing your landing page so that any visitors will take the desired action. If you want them to call your firm, show your phone number prominently and optimize your landing page for smartphone capability. Contact forms should be easy to complete and gather just enough information for you to succeed in contacting the prospect.

Keep your content, design, and language all focused on the potential client and what they're looking for. Be concise and offer value for their action. You don't need a full paragraph to justify your firm. A simple "Click here for your free consultation" will suffice. Remember, you've paid for these visitors. It would be a shame for them to slip through your fingers now.

Unbounce's Conversion Benchmark Report found that legal service advertisers converted an average of 11.8% of legal consumers using PPC, with a median of just 4.4%.

Low conversion rates mean a higher cost-per-click and destroys your ROI.

What about display?

Don't put all your eggs in one basket

Chips and dip. Eggs and bacon. Peanut butter and jelly. Certain things just go together, and this same concept applies to pay-per-click and display advertising. Unlike search ads that appear on SERPs, display advertising allows you to reach customers on millions of websites, videos, and apps through a customized banner ad.

Think about display as a virtual billboard

While PPC puts your law firm in front of potential clients who are actively searching for specific information, display advertisements help generate awareness for the casual consumer. Finding the perfect mix between paid search and display can help create and capture demand of customers throughout their entire buying journey. While PPC is an extremely effective way of engaging customers who know what they're looking for, don't overlook the person who may not need your service at just this moment. Because display ads increase brand awareness and build credibility, when someone finds themselves needing a lawyer, they'll be more likely to click on your paid search ad over the competition's.

When creating a display ad, keep consistency in mind. Use the same color scheme and font found on your website's landing page to create a seamless experience for your customer. Don't overwhelm your ad with text, either. Five to ten words is all you need to create a simple, powerful call to action. And don't be afraid to ask for help when it comes to graphic design.

Quality matters in display advertising and a professional designer will know how to give your ad the look you need for the results you want.





Buying Local

Targeting your ads to specific geographical areas

Local Services Ads (or LSAs) are one of the latest advertising tools from Google to become available to law firms. They allow you to narrowly focus your ads on a particular geographic area that you operate within. This means that only users who live or search within the area you designate will see your firm advertised. There are some familiar parallels between Google Ads pay-per-click campaigns and LSAs:

- Both are based on targeting relevant consumers
- Both focus on showing ads that highlight a firm's credentials
- Both enjoy high visibility placement on Google SERPs.

One of the most important factors clients consider when choosing an attorney is their location. **LSAs help you reach the people who have this in mind.**

The biggest difference though, is that LSAs use a pay-per-lead model rather than pay-per-click. This means that you only pay for leads generated by your LSA, instead of every single click. While this option may potentially yield a lower cost-per-lead than PPC under some circumstances, LSA lead quality may vary just as much as, if not more than, PPC leads because advertising firms have significantly less control and opportunity to customize what they present to consumers in these ads compared to PPC.

Local Services Ads also require some things that firms might find intrusive, like attorney vetting and call recording. We always encourage firms to check their state bar guidelines, too, as there may be specific rules in your area about how you operate these types of ads. They're also managed in a different platform than PPC, making it more cumbersome to manage both.

Most importantly, the performance of LSAs is much less predictable, and there are fewer levers for advertisers to pull to help them gain an edge over competitors. So instead of choosing just one or the other, consider a mix of both PPC and LSAs to maximize visibility and optimize your cost per lead.



Automation station

Don't just fire and forget

Another growing trend in digital advertising is the use of automation tools. These types of tools are designed to save time by using machine learning and AI technology to reduce or eliminate time spent on tedious, manual tasks so can you focus on higher value activities. Both Google and Microsoft® are pushing advertising automation as a way to more efficiently manage campaigns while you focus on providing strategic direction. Extensive machine-learning testing has been done by both companies, but those tests were primarily focused on e-commerce business. Because many legal services are not strictly transactional and not typically resolved immediately, law firm advertisers must give special consideration to how they may (or may not) plan to utilize automated digital advertising features. Don't assume that these features will instantly provide the same benefits to your law firm. This is especially true of law firms with small budgets and high CPCs.

Think of it like this...

Machine-learning can be highly effective at finding new consumers to target when the platform has millions of impressions across the country or globe and thousands of clicks and conversions to analyze, but it can struggle when applied to a campaign that might only get a few clicks and impressions in a month.

The promise of a self-managing system that you never have to worry about might sound pretty great, but your input, attention, and strategic adjustments remain critical to performance. When left unattended, automation features can sometimes produce surprising and unforeseen results, like implementing one of Smart Bidding strategies from Google only to find that ad clicks that previously cost you just $150 are suddenly costing nearly $1000. Expect automation to eventually play a larger role in legal campaigns, but while the tech is still fairly new, law firm advertisers should be especially vigilant about monitoring their campaign performance.

Planning your approach

Even a low cost is still a cost

Take time to consider just how you want to use this powerful opportunity before you dive in. Mistakes and on-the-job learning have real consequences in this field.

The targeted, not branded route

This PPC tactic highlights a practice area or niche market rather than your firm's name. Think about your expertise here. If you have experience with overseas adoptions, you may choose to run a PPC campaign to highlight that service. Conversely, if you'd like to expand a practice area, PPC allows you to build that aspect of your business with a custom, targeted message that maybe just doesn't fit on your current website.

Using PPC to build or defend your brand

Simply put, many law firms don't enjoy much name recognition. Even for those that do, a consumer misspelling or forgetting the company name can weaken even the most effective branding efforts. In cases like this, PPC can help to enhance or protect your existing brand.

PPC ads also allow for customized messaging, which you can develop to reinforce your law firm's reputation or expertise. And as the owner of your brand, you're in a uniquely positive position. Most PPC bidding processes favor the owners of company names, offering you an inexpensive and effective brand play.

Your approach may change over time

Paid advertising can be very effective at any stage of your firm's business. For new firms – or new websites – paid advertising can be used to drive early traffic to your law firm while your organic (unpaid) content strategy gradually builds brand trust and credibility. Over time, a website recognized as an authority will capture more organic search traffic. This means you can intelligently adjust your paid advertising budget over time so that you aren't paying an unnecessary cost per lead. As you fine-tune your budget over time, you can balance your paid advertising spend with your organic traffic flow to keep your return on investment positive and the leads coming in.





The options are endless

Don't think Google or Bing, think Google and Bing

Microsoft Bing® accounts for 33% of web searches and boasts an exclusive user base of 50 million people. Because Microsoft has worked to integrate Bing search into so many of its devices, Bing is most popular among those who aren't tech tinkerers. Think about it this way: Who's more likely to tweak their default settings or install different browsers, millennials or baby boomers? That's not to say that Bing users are under-educated or ignorant. They're simply casual about which engine powers their searches.

Don't dismiss Bing ads

Targeting Bing keywords with Microsoft Advertising is often cheaper than on Google Ads. Depending on your market, you may see an average price for legal keywords significantly lower than what you're used to.

The targeting is outstanding. Bing actually offers some of the most sophisticated targeting options in paid advertising, allowing you to home in on the most relevant audience for your firm.

The rules on Microsoft Advertising are the same. The PPC structure and rules are very similar to those used by Google. So, if you know how to set up a PPC campaign on one, moving to the other doesn't require a trip back to school.

So where does social media fit into the equation?

Outside of traditional pay-per-click is paid social advertising, which solely resides on social media platforms. If you've ever seen an ad while scrolling through your Facebook® timeline or had a promoted tweet pop up on Twitter®, you've experienced paid social advertising.

Unlike search advertising, social advertising offers unique ways for consumers to engage with paid content but doesn't rely on them accessing your landing page. At the heart of social media is conversation, so just because someone doesn't click on your post doesn't mean it wasn't effective. Users on these platforms interact with content by liking, sharing, following, or retweeting, meaning additional exposure for you and your brand outside of an actual lead conversion.



Friendly advice

PPC is no game. The expense of effective keywords and the consequences of wrong moves can be very real for lawyers with their own skin in the game. As you head out onto the field, equip yourself with the following tips.

1 Stick with it – PPC takes time

Out of the gate, neither you nor Google really know how your ad will perform. Advertisers with established, high-performing ads will receive a lower cost per click than yours for the same or better ad position. It's not personal. Once your law firm's account accumulates some historical performance data, you'll be able to make adjustments to improve your performance. Maybe you'll decide to bid on different keywords, or maybe you'll edit your ads. If your performance improves, your cost-per-click could decrease. Give up too soon, and you'll never know what could have been.

2 Target intelligently

Some keywords will always be popular, such as "attorney" and "lawyer" or "top personal injury attorneys." It might feel good to see yourself in the top paid spot for these coveted keywords, but they're expensive, and their generality doesn't really indicate a searcher's intent to hire. You'll see a much higher ROI by targeting keywords more closely related to the types of cases you actually want.

3 Hire someone

PPC can immediately impact your budget. Remember, charges apply every time someone clicks on your ads. The costs of even minor mistakes in your keyword targeting, location targeting, bid amounts, ad copy, landing pages, campaign settings, and so on will quickly add up.

There's a whole economy of PPC experts out there. Find one you can trust.

Don't believe the hype

Lists of the "most expensive keywords in PPC" abound. But cost doesn't equal quality. Poorly managed campaigns can actually drive up keyword prices, creating a false sense of value.

PPC isn't DIY

It's shockingly common for attorneys to rely on intuition and luck when crafting their first PPC campaigns. The result? Lost time, lost money, and little or no new clients in return.

To be effective, PPC campaigns are more about hard work and expertise than fate or talent. If you're ready to complement your organic search marketing with PPC, make sure you have the following qualities in spades.



Make time to regularly analyze and adjust your PPC ads, keywords, and bids. Like so many other aspects of online marketing, PPC is not something you can set up once and never touch again.



Commit to PPC. Results don't come overnight, and ongoing benefits require ongoing expertise. If you don't have a strong desire to master the art of PPC, get help from someone who does.



If you're not already a data hound, prepare to sharpen your skills. Interpreting performance metrics and determining the next steps are part and parcel of a PPC campaign.



This is the toughest area to handle on your own. Things can go wrong with PPC, and it's important to have a support system in place. Do you know where to get help if you go over budget or if the ad platform rejects your ads or suspends your account?

None of this implies that PPC is an insurmountable challenge, but it's a complex and powerful system that performs best with an expert behind the wheel. Even if your firm has had a bit of luck in the past, don't blind yourself to the possibility of what a managed PPC campaign can do.

Click away

PPC is immensely popular for one simple reason: It works

The tactic is versatile, effective, and (when managed properly) affordable. As you consider the next move for your law firm, make sure PPC is on the table. You'll need to plan ahead to achieve the right combination of keyword targeting, landing-page optimization, and ad timing, but the rewards for your business are concrete and quantifiable.

Remember to stick with it. Success does not happen overnight, and PPC advertising is a long game. By working with the right vendor and staying true to your law firm's business goals, you'll set a course for repeatable success year after year.

How to hire a pro

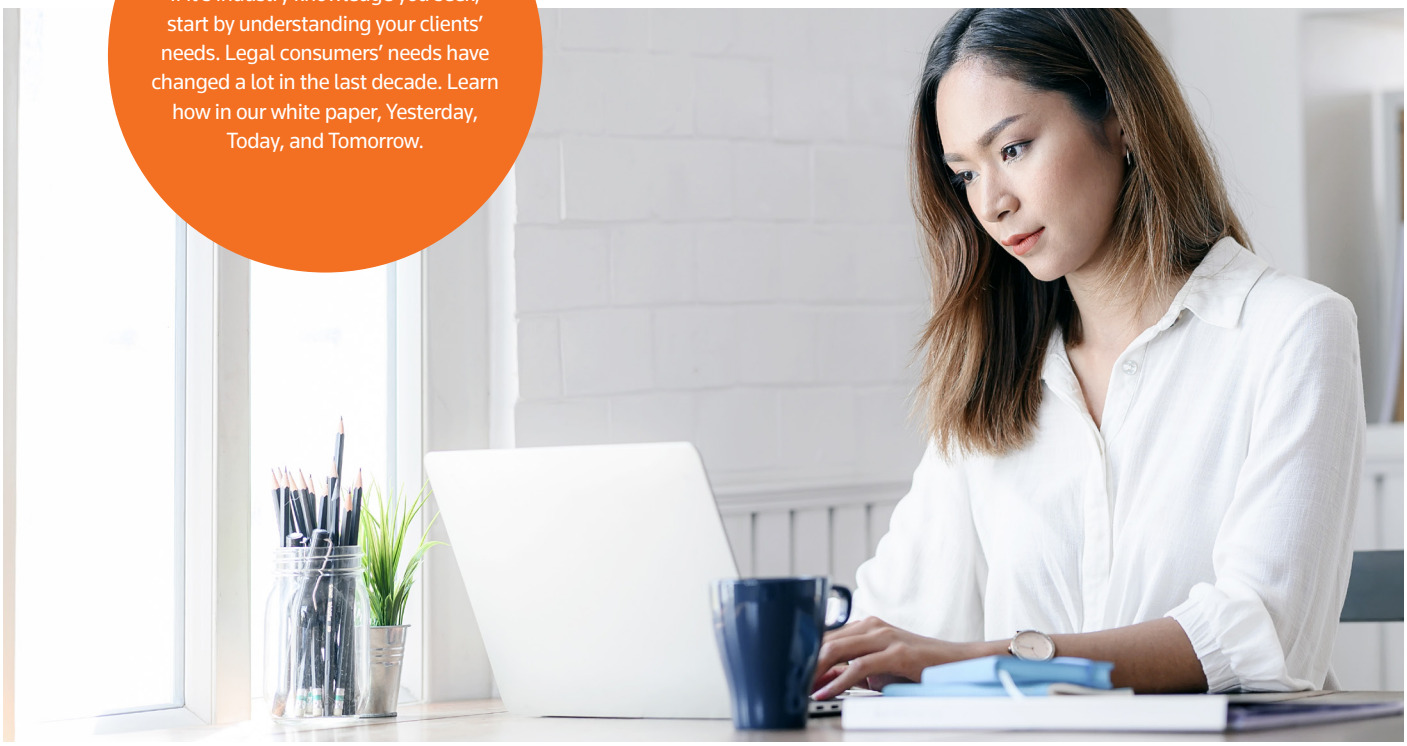
You can verify a PPC provider's qualifications to handle your campaign in several ways. First, look for official proof of their abilities. For example, every FindLaw® PPC Strategist holds certifications for managing PPC campaigns from both Google Ads and Microsoft Advertising. That means we are experts not only in the technology behind PPC, but also know how to analyze and optimize a campaign.

Look for industry knowledge as well. The best PPC results come from understanding the unique connections between a specific group of advertisers and consumers. Without industry knowledge, other providers waste client time and money on broad campaigns that target everything under the sun, which can become highly effective over time, but only if they're closely monitored and regularly adjusted. You need an expert who understands legal consumer behavior and knows what to look for from the moment the campaign goes live.

Finally, work with someone you trust. An effective PPC campaign will likely be an ongoing expense, so you need to feel confident that your program is being managed effectively.

Educate yourself

If it's industry knowledge you seek, start by understanding your clients' needs. Legal consumers' needs have changed a lot in the last decade. Learn how in our white paper, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.



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