

10 Ways to Win the Law Firm Ratings Game

By John Remsen, Jr.

Unless your firm has unlimited time and resources, you must be keenly strategic about which listings, rankings and directories you target. It would be easy to spend thousands of hours – and thousands of dollars – submitting applications. After all, there are more than 1,200 law firm ranking opportunities, according to [Jaffe PR](#), and that doesn't even count pay-to-play.

To make sure your firm is making the smartest investment of its time and resources, keep these considerations top of mind.

1. ***Focus on the rankings and directories your clients reference.***

You may discover that your clientele doesn't even use directories as part of the firm selection process. In fact, the more sophisticated the client - think in-house counsel - the less likely they'll reference them. They have peers they can turn to for referrals. However, a middle-class consumer who has required minimal legal support may be very impressed with a Super Lawyer's designation, for instance.

2. ***Map ranking submissions to your marketing and business development goals.***

Do you want to penetrate certain industries more deeply? Do you want to expand a specific practice? Do you want to grow business in a certain geographic area? Are you hoping to recruit talent? Pinpoint rankings and directories that will help achieve those objectives. For example, if your goal is to build your insurance defense practice, you'll want to submit your top lawyers to [Best's Recommended Insurance Attorneys](#). To make a regional impact, be sure your firm is included in the annual rankings of the nearest [Business Journal](#).

If you want to simply stroke a partner's ego, think long and hard about whether the investment will be worth the return, which leads us to our next strategy.

3. ***Get input from your marketing director.***

Clearly, law firm marketers have strong opinions about lawyer directories because:

- They have a 360-degree view of the firm's marketing and business-development objectives and are intensely focused on meeting them.

- They're the ones who are typically tasked with preparing submissions. They know the time and energy they consume. A typical submission requires, at minimum, 20 hours to complete. It's not unusual for them to eat up hundreds of hours.

That's why marketing directors can outline the opportunity costs of a submission more effectively than probably anyone else in your organization. Consider the thoughts of Arielle Lapiano, Director of Communications and Public Relations, [Paul Hastings](#).

"One of the constant themes I hear from other law firm marketing and business development professionals is that so much time goes into answering submission requests. They feel they're spending too much time on submissions that don't make sense and that's taking them away from more important activities," she points out.

4. ***Limit submissions.***

Because of the time it takes to submit a strong application, target five or fewer directories. Again, consider your marketing and business development goals and what your clients reference. Even talk to leaders at similar firms to find out which directories they consider most valuable.

5. ***Remember that strategy isn't a once-and-done deal.***

Revisit your target list each year to ensure it continues to align with your firm's goals.

"Just like every firm should have a list of top five target clients, they should have a list of top target accolades," Arielle says.

She notes that individual lawyer, practice and regional strength influence outcomes and will change year over year.

6. ***Pay attention to ranking methodology.***

The quality of the directory or list is often revealed by how they determine lawyer rankings. That's why the two publications that should appear on almost every firm's shortlist are [Chambers](#) and [Best Lawyers](#).

At *Chambers*, 150 researchers devote months to gathering peer and client feedback to rank lawyers by location and practice area. *Best Lawyers* ranks lawyers based purely on peer review. Once a lawyer is nominated, *Best Lawyers* researchers capture the consensus of leading lawyers, within the same geographical and practice area, about the professional abilities of their colleague.

7. ***Reach out to the editors of the rankings publications before beginning your submissions.***

Study their methodology and introduce yourselves to the researchers and editors so that you know exactly what to do to efficiently create the optimal submission. Keep in mind that a quality directory will encourage you to reach out to them.

“Whenever you call *Best Lawyers*, you will speak directly to a research editor,” says Elizabeth Pettit, Managing Editor and Director of Research, *Best Lawyers*. “They will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you have.”

Likewise, Toby Eccleshall, Editor, *Chambers USA*, says they’re “always open to providing feedback and giving firms an idea what happens in the selection process and where they are in it.”

8. ***Alert references that they will be contacted by a rankings organization.***

References play a major role in determining rank. So, of course, it’s damaging if your references are late in responding or, worse yet, don’t respond at all. Make sure they know they will be contacted, who will be contacting them and approximately when.

9. ***Didn’t make the rankings? Keep trying.***

Remember, competition is fierce, but persistence pays. If you aren’t included in a directory, call the publication or rankings organization and ask what you can do to improve your next submission.

“There could be a very simple reason,” explains Elizabeth. “We can work together to make sure that, for the next edition, we can resolve what happened.”

10. ***Establish a matching-funds policy.***

With the proliferation of rankings and directories, lawyers are being bombarded with opportunities to put their name in lights. Feeding egos can squander resources rapidly. If you’re being overwhelmed with submission requests that don’t align with your marketing or business development objectives, ask lawyers to put some skin in the game by having them match the firm’s contribution of time and resources.

By following this advice you'll do so much more than stroke egos or win positive recognition. You'll score the most valuable reward of all: attention and engagement from the clients you want most.

Want to learn more? Check out our MPF Webinar with Elizabeth, Arielle, Toby and Jaffe's Vivian Hood:

[What Every Managing Partner Needs to Know about Lawyer Rankings, Listings and Directories.](#)

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