



Should your firm utilize online chat or live support?

If you are online frequently, searching for service providers or looking for answers to questions you have about products, chances are you have encountered – and perhaps used – live support. It can be handy to have someone available to answer a quick question with minimal effort on your part.

The goal of live support is to initiate contact before a visitor clicks away from your site. The chat enables a user to submit a question easily and anonymously without asking them to commit to filling out a form or making a phone call. Ideally, the representative chatting with a prospect will be able to glean some contact information by answering a few questions and making them feel comfortable with your firm's ability to help.

To incorporate a live chat feature, most services will ask you to insert a small snippet of code on your website. The chat can be executed in a couple of ways. You could choose the subtler route and simply add a button somewhere on your site indicating whether or not live chat is available. If the user would like to ask a question, they can click to chat.

Live chat can also be integrated in a way that displays a popup when a visitor lands on your site. The chat box will invite users to talk, sometimes even by introducing the supposed chatter. "Hello, I'm Tom. Can I help you by answering any questions today?" Or, more generally, "We offer 24/7 support. Would you like to chat with a representative?"

Some attorneys have begun incorporating live support into their websites as a marketing tool. However, before your firm takes this step, you should consider some of the pros and cons.

Live chat pros: Live chat services give people who are visiting your website the ability to ask questions instantly. Instead of filling out a form or making note of a phone number to (maybe) call later, the user can have casual contact with a representative. An individual who is unsure about contacting you may be nudged just far enough by a live chat prompt that they ultimately take the time to ask a question or two.

Monitored live chat services allow someone to be available to users at any time of the day. This lets people get instant feedback when it is most convenient for them with little to no effort on your part.

Live chat cons: One of the pros of live chat services is also its biggest con: outsourcing. Many attorneys may not be comfortable with the idea of a representative unaffiliated with the firm communicating with clients on their behalf. Chances are, you have had a bad or unhelpful chat experience in the past. This could happen to your prospects without your knowledge.





Most services will let you send messages directly to your office. This eliminates the outsourcing issue but raises one of time investment. Someone at your office must be available at all times during business hours at a minimum. Live chat services also generally charge a monthly fee for the most useful features, so your firm should to a cost/time benefit analysis before making a decision.

Remember, live chat may work better for some practice areas than others. Firms that specialize in complex transactional work are better served by getting prospective clients on the phone or in the office. However, for some practice areas, where people in need of legal services may be inexperienced or even self-conscious about their problem, live chat services could be useful.

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