

Comparison websites: How to use them effectively

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Comparison websites are an important feature of the legal services market. They include websites and apps that aim to match consumers with legal issues to lawyers and law firms. Some comparison websites also provide tools for consumers to compare legal service packages offered by different law firms.

Comparison websites have helped transform how people compare and choose products and services in many sectors, including in the financial services market where research has found 70% of people now use them to choose financial products.

In the legal service market there are indications that demand for comparison websites is rising. 41% of consumers say they [shop around for a legal service provider](https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/24.07.15-How-comsumers-are-choosing-legal-services-report-FINAL.pdf) [https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/24.07.15-How-comsumers-are-choosing-legal-services-report-FINAL.pdf], and 41% of consumers are aware of legal services price comparison sites to help them compare providers. 42% of consumers who shop around for legal services, compare three providers.

Demand for digital information and services continues to grow. Ofcom reports that [UK adults spent a quarter of their waking day online](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/196407/online-nation-2020-report.pdf) [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/196407/online-nation-2020-report.pdf]. Likewise, the volume of online legal services being used also continues to grow year-on-year, [up 34% in 2020](https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-08-05-Press-release-choosing-and-using-legal-services.pdf). [https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-08-05-Press-release-choosing-and-using-legal-services.pdf]

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Types of comparison website

Online marketing can be expensive and time-consuming - engaging with a comparison website is a simple step you could take to build a stronger online presence while also providing information about your firm's services to prospective clients.

Different websites have different models. Some cover different markets and areas of the economy, while others focus specifically on the legal service sector.

Functionality offered by such sites can vary greatly. It ranges from sites that simply provide basic business listings and the opportunity for customers to post and compare reviews, through to sites that offer visitors tools to select and directly compare detailed information about

the featured businesses – and to also then contact those businesses directly, or opt to be contacted by them.

Whether your firm's name is featured on some sites may be not be something you have any choice over, as the names of regulated law firms in England and Wales are already available in the public domain. Other sites might only include details of firms who formally sign up to them, sometimes offering firms a range of free-to-use tools, or the option of paid-for extra facilities, such as allowing you to provide quotes to prospective clients when they are searching for legal support online.

With all these models available, the chances are that regardless of the time or resource you have to spare, there is a comparison website that may work for you. They can provide opportunities to you to build your business and to compete for new clients in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Where can I find out which comparison websites are operating in the legal services market?

The legal service regulators run a voluntary code for comparison website operators in the legal services market. [Read information about operators that agree to meet the code's expectations](https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/fees/customer-reviews/) [<https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/fees/customer-reviews/>], and that are operating in the legal service market. This includes contact information to find out more about the services they offer.

Referrals

Rules relating to referral fees do not prohibit you from engaging with comparison websites.

Even in areas where there is specific legislation on referrals, such as personal injury, engaging with comparison sites is still allowed, but subject to certain considerations.

Personal injury

From 1 April 2013, the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2021 (LASPO) prohibited the payment or receipt of referral fees in claims for damages following personal injury or death. The prohibition applies to a number of situations, including referrals between a regulated person and another person who is not a regulated person for the purposes of LASPO.

This only applies to any personal injury services specific to LASPO. This does not mean that you cannot engage with a comparison website in relation to these services.



However, if you want to provide personal injury services to clients that you are introduced to through a comparison website, you must firstly ensure that any fee arrangements or business models you adopt with that comparison website provider do not contravene section 56 of LASPO.

Many business models used by comparison tool providers do not contravene LASPO.

For example:

- you sign-up with a comparison website that requires you to pay a subscription fee to be listed on their site as a provider of personal injury services. You pay this fee regardless of whether you receive leads or clients through the website. We do not view this as a payment in breach of LASPO, as the payment is for the provision of other services – in this case, being listed on the comparison website.
- you sign-up to be listed on a comparison website that provides quotes to consumers from firms for personal injury services. You agree to pay a fee to the comparison website operator for each consumer sent a quote from your firm, regardless of whether or not this results in a consumer contacting you or becoming your client. We do not consider this amounts to a referral in breach of LASPO as you are not being provided with names and contact details that would enable you to make a direct offer (or provide relevant services) to the prospective client.

For more information, see our guidance '[The Prohibition of referral fees in LASPO 56 60](https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/prohibition-of-referral-fees-in-laspo-56-60/) [<https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/prohibition-of-referral-fees-in-laspo-56-60/>].'

If you are considering signing-up to provide information about your services and your firm to a comparison website you also need to make sure that you continue to meet the requirements of regulation 5.1 of the Solicitors Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs. This explains your obligations regarding referrals of clients to you by third parties. Make sure that you understand whether you need to provide information to that individual about those arrangements if they go on to become your client.

For more information, see our guidance '[Unregulated organisations giving information to clients](https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/unregulated-organisations-giving-information-clients/) [<https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/unregulated-organisations-giving-information-clients/>].'

Advertising rules

Signing-up and providing information about your services and charges to a comparison website is allowed under SRA Standards and Regulations. It is not a breach of paragraph 8.9 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors,



RELS and RFLs - which prohibits unsolicited approaches towards members of the public who are not your current or former clients.

Paragraph 8.8 of the [SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs](https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-solicitors/) (<https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-solicitors/>) sets out your regulatory obligations regarding publicity for your firm. You should make sure that any information you provide to a comparison website about your firm and / or your services is accurate and not misleading.

For more information see our guidance '[Unsolicited approaches \(advertising\) to members of the public](https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/unsolicited-approaches-advertising/)' (<https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/unsolicited-approaches-advertising/>).

Your questions answered

We understand that you might have questions about engaging with comparison websites if you or your firm have not done so before.

Below we discuss some of the more common questions law firms have raised with us about engaging with comparison websites:

Can I describe the quality of my services accurately on a comparison website?

Information on comparison websites helps the public to make well-informed decisions when they shop-around online for a provider of legal services. It needs to provide enough detail for consumers to get a reasonable and comparable sense of your business and how it works, but be short enough to digest quickly on screen.

If they like what they see, it is reasonable to expect that the public will follow a link to your own website or contact you directly for a more detailed discussion, or to request a quote. At this point they will be more engaged in investing time and energy in considering the finer detail of how you work.

Different comparison websites will have different approaches to the type of information they publish, and how and when they signpost visitors to get in touch with you. If you're considering providing information to a comparison website you should ask the website operator how they approach this.

Isn't legal service pricing too complex/client-specific to allow for online comparison?

Comparison websites are well established and influential in other complicated professional service industries, such as financial services. They are already operating in the legal services sector, including in more commoditised areas of law such as residential conveyancing.

Here some sites allow law firms to provide quotes and service information in the same way that firms would to prospective clients who contact them directly. Sites featuring other legal services, such as family law advice, may require firms to provide indicative costing or general information about their charges and hourly rates. But whatever method they use, all firms on the site will follow the same rules.

The best way to work out if your pricing model will work effectively when displayed on a specific comparison website, is to contact that website operator directly and find out more about their approach.

Don't comparison websites focus excessively on price?

The potential cost of a legal service is an important factor for many people when they are shortlisting which law firm to use, perhaps the first thing they think about. But this is just as much the case when potential clients are choosing legal services in other ways.

Customers will always look for providers within a budget range they can afford so it is helpful for them to have an understanding of what a service will cost when comparing firms - see also our [Transparency in price and service](https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/transparency-in-price-and-service/) [https://beta.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/transparency-in-price-and-service/] guidance. But to choose between these suppliers they are likely to also consider wider factors such as a firm's credentials or any evidence as to the quality of service they provide.

That is why features such as customer reviews, star ratings, and law firm descriptions play an important role on comparison websites.

For example, if your firm specialises in a particular field of law comparison websites can help you share, and demonstrate through customer feedback, how your quality and expertise stands out.

Do comparison websites provide enough leads to make engaging worthwhile?

The number of people who shop around for legal services has increased in recent years. Comparison tools are an important part of this, and can help consumers to choose their legal service provider.

Some sites already feature information and online reviews about your business. They do this regardless of whether you engage with them or not. It means that prospective clients can form views about your business with or without your input.

Why would you not want to engage to make sure this audience is getting as accurate and positive impression of your business as possible?

Firms who choose not to engage with comparison websites may risk being left behind. Using comparison websites can work alongside other

approaches you use to find new clients. It also does not impact on who you choose to take on as a client.

You can contact comparison website operators to ask them for more information about the operation of their website, what information you can add to your profile and if and how leads are generated for firms that have signed-up to them.