

The Intake Gap

How Personal Injury Firms
Win - Then Lose - Clients in the First Hour

Mystery Shop Research of 35 Personal Injury Law Firms
Across Louisville, Lexington, and Northern Kentucky

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Personal injury law firms in Louisville, Lexington, and Northern Kentucky are investing heavily in marketing. Billboards line the interstates. Television spots run in morning and evening blocks. Google search and LSA ads compete for the same keywords at escalating cost. The spend is real, and in many cases it is working. Calls come in. Forms get submitted. Prospective clients reach out.

What happens next is where most firms are quietly losing.

High10 conducted a structured mystery shop of 35 personal injury firms across the three major Kentucky markets, submitting a web contact form at each firm under a consistent test scenario and tracking every call, text, and email received over the following 72 hours. We also audited each firm's website for chat technology, documenting the vendor, format, case-intake method, and whether the agent on the other end was a live person or an automated system.

The results were surprising.

THE CENTRAL FINDING

14% of firms never responded to the form submission at all across the full 72-hour window. Among those that did respond, fewer than one in three reached out within five minutes.

The revenue implication is direct: if your marketing is generating leads that your intake process cannot capture, you are funding your competitors' growth.

The research reveals a clear and widening divide between the firms that treat intake as a strategic priority and those that treat it as an administrative afterthought. The top performers in this study did not simply respond faster. They responded through multiple channels simultaneously, they persisted across all three days, and in at least one case, **they eliminated the follow-up entirely by capturing a signed client agreement the moment the form was submitted.**

That firm is Morgan and Morgan, the national plaintiff firm with a Louisville market presence. Their intake process is not comparable to what most Kentucky firms are doing. It is a different category of operation.

The purpose of this white paper is not to discourage local and regional firms. The gap identified here is not permanent, and it is not insurmountable. It is a systems and process problem, and systems and processes can be fixed.

But the gap is real, it is measurable, and it is costing firms cases right now.

Visibility creates the opportunity. It does not close the case.

Personal injury marketing spend has never been higher. Legal advertising across the United States has climbed into the billions annually, and Kentucky markets are not immune to that pressure. On any given morning commute through Louisville or Lexington, a driver will pass at least a half-dozen billboard faces from competing plaintiff firms. That is before the Google search results, the YouTube pre-rolls, and the television blocks.

This is the visibility economy, and most PI firms understand it well. They know their share of voice matters. They know that brand recognition feeds call volume. They know that Google Local Service Ads have changed the calculus of search. They have invested accordingly.

The problem is that visibility only creates the opportunity. It does not close the case.

There is a specific and narrow window of time after a prospective client submits a contact form during which that client is still available, still engaged, and still deciding. That window is minutes not hours.

The injured party who just submitted your web form is likely sitting with their phone in their hand. They may have already submitted forms at two other firms. They are in pain, they are stressed, and they are waiting to hear from someone who can help them.

If that call does not come in the next five to ten minutes, the probability of making contact drops sharply. If it does not come at all, you have simply funded your competitor's next retained client.

High10 designed this research to answer a specific question: what actually happens to the leads that Kentucky personal injury firms are already generating through their marketing? The answer, documented across 35 firms and 72 hours of tracking, follows in the sections below.



SPEED IS THE KEY VARIABLE

The Lead Response Time Imperative

The research on lead response time is unambiguous and has been replicated across industries for well over a decade. A prospective client who submits a web form is at peak intent in the moments immediately following that submission. They are actively seeking help. They have self-identified as a qualified prospect. They have taken the step of reaching out.

Studies consistently demonstrate that the odds of successfully contacting a web lead decline by more than 90 percent when response time exceeds five minutes compared to responding within the first minute. For personal injury, this dynamic is intensified. The injured party is often mobile, distressed, and working through multiple options simultaneously. They are not waiting for a callback that afternoon. They are deciding now.

**LEAD
RESPONSE TIME:**

5 min

COMPETITIVE STANDARD

Five minutes is not a high bar. It is simply the bar that determines whether you are in the conversation.

The Persistence Premium

Speed alone is not enough. Research on B2C service industries consistently shows that the majority of conversions require multiple contact attempts, yet most firms stop trying after one or two. The prospect who did not answer the first call at noon may answer at 4:00 p.m. The one who did not respond to a text on Day 1 may respond on Day 2.

This study measured exactly this dynamic. The firms at the top of the contact volume rankings made 12 to 20 total contact attempts across the 72-hour window. The firms at the bottom made one or two, and five made none at all.

Persistence is not harassment. It is a service. The injured party who is trying to navigate hospital paperwork, insurance adjusters, and a painful recovery is not always in a position to respond on the first try. The firm that keeps showing up earns the relationship.

The Multi-Channel Expectation

Modern consumers, including those in their 50s and 60s, expect to be met on multiple channels. A phone call alone is no longer sufficient. Text messaging has become a primary communication mode for time-sensitive personal communication, and email remains important for follow-up documentation and conveying detailed information.

This research tracked all three channels. The top-performing firms used all three. Many of the lower-performing firms used only one. The firms that used only a single channel were systematically less likely to make contact and, where contact was made, less likely to sustain engagement across multiple days.

The Revenue Math

The financial framing is straightforward. If a firm spends \$5,000 per month on digital advertising and that spend generates 40 web form submissions, the cost per lead is \$125. If only 60 percent of those leads are ever contacted due to slow or absent follow-up, 16 potential clients per month are walking away unreached. At an average case value in the range typical for Kentucky personal injury matters, the revenue impact of that gap over a year is not a rounding error. It is a material number.

The firms most at risk are those with active advertising programs and passive intake processes. They are generating the leads. They are simply not following through to close them.



Firm Selection

High10 identified 35 personal injury law firms across three Kentucky markets: Louisville (LOU), Lexington (LEX), and Northern Kentucky (NKY). Firms were selected based on Google rating and review volume, targeting the most visible and review-credentialed practices in each geography to mirror natural customer search. No firms included in this study were current High10 clients at the time of research.

The Mystery Shop Scenario

A fictional persona was constructed for the purpose of this study: a man in his early 60s who had been seriously injured by a semi-truck. This scenario was chosen because truck accident cases are among the highest-value case types in personal injury, they involve clear liability facts, and they represent exactly the kind of high-urgency situation in which rapid and attentive intake is most critical.

The same scenario, contact information, and submission language were used consistently across all 35 firms. All forms were submitted on the same morning, with timestamps ranging from approximately 11:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. This time slot was intentionally chosen due to its proximity to the lunch hour.

What Was Measured

Following each form submission, the research team tracked every inbound communication attempt from each firm across a 72-hour window.

This included:

- ✓ **Inbound Phone Calls**
- ✓ **Text Messages**
- ✓ **Email Communications**

Logged by time of day and day of study.

Elapsed time between form submission and first contact attempt was calculated for each firm. Total contact attempts across all channels and all three days were counted for each firm.

Chat Technology Audit

Each firm's website was evaluated for the presence of chat technology. For firms with chat deployed, the audit recorded the vendor platform, whether the initial chat presentation used a video of an attorney or appeared as static text, whether the chat initiated with a generic inquiry prompt or asked the user to select a case type, and whether the agent was live or automated. In cases where the agent appeared to be live, a general knowledge test was administered to confirm human presence. All agents who were tested as potentially live passed this confirmation.

PRIMARY FINDINGS

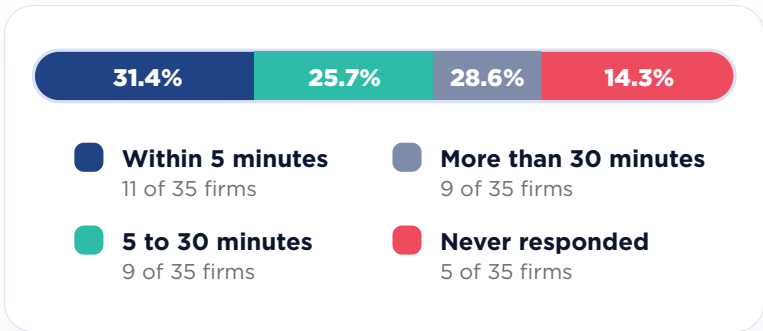
Web Form Response: The 72-Hour Window

The headline finding from the form response audit is that a meaningful share of Kentucky personal injury firms are simply not contacting prospective clients who have self-identified their need and reached out directly. The graphics below summarize the aggregate response behavior across all 35 firms.

Response Speed

Among firms that responded on Day 1, the median elapsed time between form submission and first contact was approximately 7.5 minutes. The mean was 32.7 minutes, pulled upward significantly by a handful of firms that took multiple hours to respond. The fastest responders made contact in under two minutes of form submission. In some cases, an automated email confirmation arrived before the clock had turned a full minute.

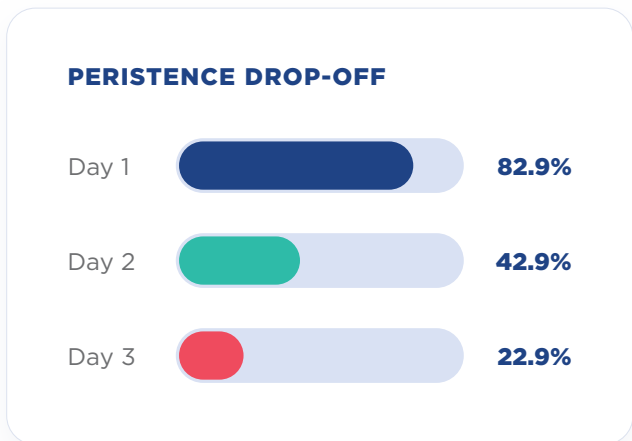
At the other end of the range, three firms took more than two hours to make first contact. The slowest to respond among firms that did reply logged a first contact of more than three hours after the form was submitted. That kind of response window is not competitive in a market where prospective clients are making decisions within the first few minutes of outreach.



Contact Persistence Across Three Days

Of the 29 firms that made contact on Day 1, only 15 continued their outreach on Day 2, and only 8 followed up on Day 3. This drop-off is significant. Many firms treated the first contact attempt as the only contact attempt. If the prospect did not respond to that initial call or text, the firm largely stopped trying.

Five firms never contacted the prospect at all across the full 72-hour window. These firms had active websites with functional contact forms, and in several cases they also had chat tools deployed. The form submission generated no response.

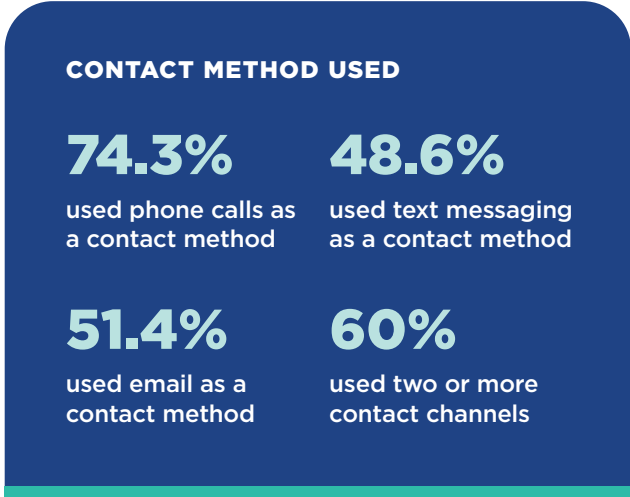


PRIMARY FINDINGS

Contact Method Mix

The most capable firms in this study understood that a single channel is not a strategy. The top performers combined phone calls, text messages, and email into a coordinated multi-day outreach cadence. The firms at the bottom relied predominantly on phone calls alone, and some made only a single attempt.

Text messaging as a follow-up tool was used by just under half of the firms tested. Given how central text communication has become for most adults, this represents a meaningful gap. Several firms that made no text contact could have substantially increased their reach-out success rate simply by adding this channel.



Standout Performers

Four firms distinguished themselves through the combination of speed, persistence, and multi-channel follow-up.

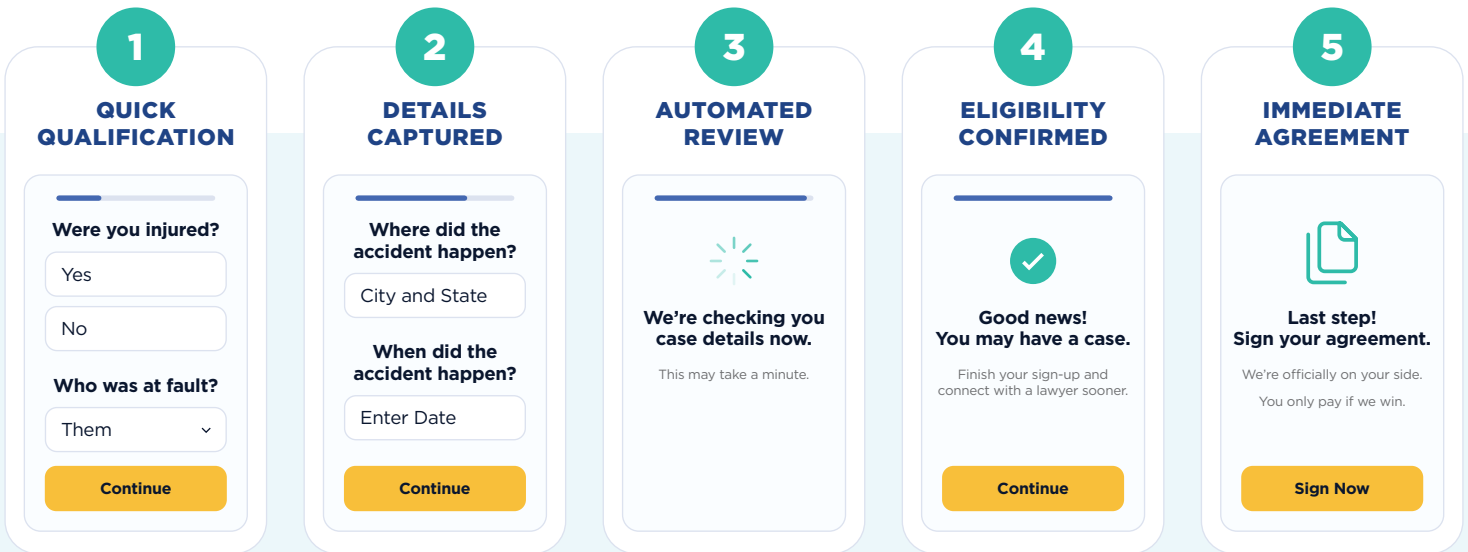
| | CALLS | TEXTS | EMAILS | TOTAL ATTEMPTS |
|--------|-------|-------|--------|----------------|
| Firm A | 18 | 0 | 2 | 20 |
| Firm B | 6 | 6 | 3 | 15 |
| Firm C | 4 | 4 | 7 | 15 |
| Firm D | 8 | 1 | 3 | 12 |
| Firm E | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Firm F | 4 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| Firm G | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 |

PRIMARY FINDINGS

A Note on Morgan and Morgan

Morgan and Morgan warrants specific discussion because their intake process operates in a different tier from every other firm in this study. Their first contact was a text message sent within approximately one minute of form submission, followed by an email within four minutes. Calls followed throughout Day 1 and continued through Days 2 and 3.

What makes Morgan and Morgan categorically different from every other firm in this research is what happened at the form submission stage itself. Their web intake form was the only one in the study to immediately trigger a DocuSign agreement. Before a single phone call had been placed, before the prospect had spoken with any representative, the form process populated a client representation agreement for the prospective client to review and sign electronically.



This approach removes the most friction-prone step in the entire intake journey: the gap between initial outreach and signed client. Every other firm in this study relies on human follow-up to get to that agreement. Morgan and Morgan begins closing the case the moment the form is submitted. That is not a tactical advantage. That is a structural one.

PRIMARY FINDINGS

Chat Technology: The Website's Forgotten Front Door

Chat has become a standard feature of consumer-facing websites across most service industries. In personal injury law, it offers a distinct advantage: a prospective client who is reluctant to call or who is researching options outside of business hours can begin a conversation immediately. The question is not simply whether a firm has chat, but whether the chat they have deployed is actually working for them.

CHAT DEPLOYMENT

57.1%

Firms with chat technology deployed

42.9%

Firms with no chat technology



HUMAN VS AUTOMATED

30%

Chat agents that were live (human)

70%

Chat agents that were automated / AI



DISPLAY STYLE

25%

Chats displaying a video of an attorney

75%

Chats displaying as static text



INTAKE METHOD

70%

Chats using a case-type selection method

30%

Chats using a generic inquiry method



PRIMARY FINDINGS

The Vendor Landscape

Among the 20 firms with chat deployed, Intaker was the dominant vendor, accounting for 10 of the 20 deployments. Blazeo/ApexChat appeared at 3 firms, Kenect and Juvo each appeared at 2 firms, and Scorpion, Client Chat Live, and Answering Legal each appeared at one firm.

Intaker's prevalence is notable because it functions primarily as an automated AI intake tool. Most of the Intaker deployments in this study were confirmed as automated rather than live. The tool is capable and well-designed for legal intake, but it is not a human agent.

| VENDOR | DEPLOYMENTS |
|-------------------|-------------|
| Intaker | 10 |
| Blazeo / ApexChat | 3 |
| Kenect | 2 |
| Juvo | 2 |
| Scorpion | 1 |
| Client Chat Live | 1 |
| Answering Legal | 1 |

The Live Chat Gap

Of the 6 chat deployments confirmed as live, all 6 that were tested for human presence passed the confirmation test. Live chat agents were providing genuine engagement and were capable of handling substantive questions. This is the standard that chat should meet.

The risk for firms running automated chat tools without live backup is a mismatch between the expectation they create and the experience they deliver. A prospective client who initiates a chat conversation expecting human engagement and instead encounters a scripted bot may disengage entirely, leaving without any contact information captured.

Morgan & Morgan, the strongest performer across every intake dimension, does not use chat at all. Their bet is on the form-to-DocuSign pipeline.

That is one approach to removing friction. For firms not yet ready to build that kind of automated intake infrastructure, a well-staffed live chat is the more accessible alternative.

The gap is not permanent. But it is widening.

The pattern that emerges from this research is consistent and clear. The firms at the top of the response curve share a common profile. They have built dedicated intake infrastructure. They use multiple contact channels from the first minutes after a form is submitted. They persist across multiple days and multiple attempts. And at least one of them has automated the most critical step in the intake process entirely.

These are not advantages exclusive to national firms with unlimited budgets. The analysis found that local firms that have made deliberate choices about how they handle incoming leads have also experienced success.

The implication for local and regional firms that are underperforming on intake is that the gap is not permanent. It is a systems gap and a process gap. Systems and processes can be built.

But the gap is also widening. National firms are continuing to refine and invest in their intake operations. The DocuSign-on-form-submission approach from Morgan and Morgan was not a lucky accident. It is the output of sustained investment in removing friction from the client acquisition process. Local firms that delay addressing their intake operations are not standing still. They are falling further behind.

There is also a specific financial dynamic worth naming directly. If your firm is currently outspending competitors on marketing while underperforming on intake, you are not just losing cases. You are generating qualified leads that your competitors are picking up. Every dollar you spend on a television spot, a billboard, or a Google search ad that produces a form submission you do not follow up on is a dollar spent on your competitor's client pipeline.

FINANCIAL REALITY

If a firm is outspending competitors on marketing while underperforming on intake, it is generating qualified leads that competitors may capture.

Five concrete areas for immediate and measurable improvement.

The data from this study point to five concrete areas where personal injury firms can make immediate and measurable improvements to their intake operations. None of these recommendations require a complete technology overhaul. Most can be implemented with a combination of process changes and targeted technology adoption.

1 Set a Five-Minute Response Standard

Every web form submission should trigger a human or automated response within five minutes, without exception. This means identifying who is responsible for form submissions at every hour the firm is operational, building a documented escalation protocol for after-hours submissions, and measuring actual response times against this standard on a weekly basis.

If your firm does not have the staffing to support a five-minute response during business hours, an automated text or email acknowledgment triggered by the form submission can bridge the gap until a human follows up. The goal is to confirm to the prospective client within five minutes that their message has been received and that someone will be reaching out shortly.

2 Build a 72-Hour Multi-Channel Follow-Up Cadence

A single call attempt is not a follow-up strategy. Firms should build a documented outreach cadence that spans at least three days and uses phone calls, text messages, and email in combination. The cadence should include at minimum: an immediate acknowledgment by text or email, a phone call within the first hour, additional call and text attempts on the afternoon of Day 1, and follow-up calls and messages on Days 2 and 3 if no contact has been made.

The firms in this study that made the most contact attempts were not harassing prospects. They were providing the repeated, accessible touchpoints that injured people, often dealing with significant stress and competing demands, actually need in order to connect with someone who can help them.

3 Audit Your After-Hours Intake Coverage

Car accidents do not happen only between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. on weekdays. Forms submitted on Saturday evening or Sunday morning should receive the same urgency of response as those submitted on Tuesday at noon. If your main phone line goes to voicemail after business hours, you are systematically losing weekend cases.

After-hours coverage options include a dedicated intake line staffed by a live agent or answering service, automated text responses that capture the prospect's information and confirm receipt, and a chat tool with extended or 24-hour live coverage. The right solution depends on your firm's volume and resources, but the absence of any solution is not acceptable in a competitive market.

4 Deploy or Upgrade Chat Intentionally

If your firm does not have chat deployed, that is a gap worth closing. If it does have chat deployed, the more important question is whether that chat is actually working. An automated chatbot that fails to engage the prospective client, routes them incorrectly, or simply collects a name and email without meaningful interaction is not a competitive asset.

The standard to aim for is a live agent during business hours with a well-configured automated system for after-hours coverage. If a live agent is not feasible, select a vendor whose automated tool is genuinely capable of conducting a substantive intake conversation and capturing the information your intake team needs to follow up immediately.

5 Measure Intake with the Same Rigor as Marketing Spend

Most firms track their marketing metrics carefully: cost per click, cost per lead, impressions, calls from ads. Very few track intake metrics with the same discipline. The metrics that should be on your weekly dashboard include average response time by channel, contact rate by lead source, follow-up attempts per lead, and contact-to-retained ratio.

If you do not measure it, you cannot improve it. And if you are not tracking intake performance, you have no way of knowing how much revenue is slipping through the gap between your marketing and your first conversation with a new client.

ABOUT HIGH10 & THIS RESEARCH

High10 helps firms close the gap between visibility and conversion.

This research was conducted by High10, a digital marketing agency serving personal injury law firms in Louisville, Lexington, and Northern Kentucky. The mystery shop methodology was designed and executed by High10's research team using a standardized scenario and a consistent tracking protocol applied uniformly across all 35 firms. No firms included in this study were current High10 clients at the time the research was conducted. All findings are based on observed and documented data collected during the 72-hour tracking window.


High10 works with personal injury firms on both sides of the equation this research examines: visibility and conversion. Generating qualified leads through digital advertising, search, and brand strategy is one part of the work. Ensuring that those leads are captured, contacted, and converted is the other. The firms that win in competitive PI markets are the ones that treat both sides of that equation with equal seriousness. High10 helps firms get there

Ready to know where your firm stands?

High10 offers a complimentary Digital Presence Score for personal injury firms in the Kentucky market. The score evaluates your firm's visibility, intake responsiveness, and web technology against the benchmarks established in this research.

To request your firm's Digital Presence Score or to schedule a strategy conversation with our team, visit high10digital.com or contact us directly. The intake gap is real, but it is fixable, and the firms that fix it first will be the ones capturing the cases their competitors are leaving behind.

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