Consumer attitudes to online legal services

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Table of contents

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................3
2 About The Law Wizard ..................................................................................................................3
3 Conclusions ......................................................................................................................................4
4 Breakdown of results ......................................................................................................................5
  4.1 Use of the internet .......................................................................................................................5
  4.2 Where do consumers look first for legal services? ....................................................................6
  4.3 Awareness that some legal tasks may be performed on the internet ........................................7
  4.4 Experience using the internet to perform legal tasks ...............................................................8
  4.5 The appeal of using the internet to perform legal tasks ...........................................................9
  4.6 The appeal of online legal services by age and gender ...........................................................10
  4.7 Reasons for not using the internet to perform legal tasks .......................................................11
  4.8 Level of service and professional involvement .......................................................................12
  4.9 Reasons for using the internet to perform legal tasks ..............................................................13
  4.10 The probate process and probate online ................................................................................14
1  Introduction

“It’s time to populate the online legal desert”
- The Times, June 2011

1.1.1 Between 16 July and 5 August 2012, The Law Wizard conducted a survey to assess consumer attitudes to online legal services.

1.1.2 Broadly, our aim was to assess: (a) awareness amongst consumers about the use of the internet to perform legal tasks; (b) the demand for online legal services; (c) the level of professional support required; and (d) factors important to consumers when considering performing legal tasks online.

1.1.3 We received 503 responses, including 21 via a face-to-face street survey conducted in York city centre on 16 and 17 July 2012, 29 from York residents responding to a flyer left in their postbox and the remainder from publicising the survey online. All responses were gathered via an online questionnaire, except the 21 gathered in York city centre.

1.1.4 Additionally, we asked two questions specifically about probate, reflecting our focus on the subject.

2  About The Law Wizard

2.1.1 The Law Wizard’s mission is to make law simple, quick and accessible through market-changing technology. We are starting with probate.

2.1.2 Our solution, for probate organisations, law firms, IFAs and accountants is The Probate Wizard: White-Labelled. It is a client-facing solution for marketing to new clients, creating fixed fee probate packages and capturing details of an estate. It is due for launch in November 2012.

2.1.3 Though licensed to probate professionals, our solutions are built on our consumer-facing Probate Wizard. So we can continue to improve our systems and to help our professional clients to attract new clients in an increasingly competitive probate marketplace, it is important for us to understand consumer demand for online legal services.

2.1.4 We discovered a surprising lack of evidence on the topic, so we endeavoured to gather our own.

2.1.5 The survey and report was produced by Camilla Dutton, an intern at The Law Wizard and an undergraduate at the University of York Law School, and the rest of The Law Wizard team.
3 Conclusions

3.1.1 When in need of legal services, consumers are most likely to look first to the internet. 46% of respondents in need of legal services said the internet would be their first port of call; only around 35% would head first to a solicitor.

3.1.2 Though the internet plays an important role, this is not reflected in consumer awareness of online legal services. Despite the prevalence of online legal options such as wills, divorce and (more recently) probate, only 49% of respondents were aware that some legal tasks can be performed online.

3.1.3 Of those respondents who were aware that some legal tasks could be performed online, one quarter (around 10% of all respondents) said they had completed a legal task online.

3.1.4 There is an appetite for online legal services. 67% of respondents would definitely or probably consider performing a legal task online, or have performed a legal task online and would consider doing so again.

3.1.5 If performing legal tasks online, the majority do not want to go “DIY”, but want a balance between personal and professional involvement. 72.3% of respondents wanted some level of professional support if they were to perform a legal task online. Only 17% would prefer to do legal tasks online all by themselves.

3.1.6 The perceived benefits of online legal services are, overwhelmingly, value and convenience. Speed is relatively unimportant.

3.1.7 In view of our focus on probate, we asked two probate questions. Only 36% of respondents were aware of the process. Of those, 59% would consider performing all or part of the process online, similar to the proportion of respondents would consider performing legal tasks online in general. Only 10% would not consider performing any part of the probate process online.
4 Breakdown of results

4.1 Use of the internet

4.1.1 All respondents use the internet regularly, or have a member of the household who does. (As such, this survey could be considered a survey of internet users only, who, latest figures suggest, make up around 85% of the UK population.) As a rudimentary indication of the complexity of tasks performed online by the respondents, we asked what type of online task they perform regularly.

*Figure 1*

Which of the following do you regularly do on the internet?

![Pie chart showing internet activities]

4.1.2 The majority (over 450) of respondents use the internet for shopping. Over 350 respondents use the internet for banking. Around 10% use the internet for completing tax returns.
4.2 Where do consumers look first for legal services?

Figure 2

4.2.3 46% of the respondents said that they would first look to the internet for legal services, over 10% more than the number of respondents who would first look to a solicitor. Less popular answers include “Ask a relative / friend”, “Not sure” and “Phone book”.

4.2.4 10 respondents chose “Other”. The more popular responses included the respondent’s local bank (3) or their trade union (2).

4.2.5 This is not an indication of where or how respondents want to perform legal services; rather, their first port of call when something needs to be done. Traditional channels, including solicitors and the phone book, are lagging behind.
4.3 Awareness that some legal tasks may be performed on the internet

Figure 3

![Bar chart showing awareness of legal tasks performed online]

4.3.1 Just under half of the respondents (49%) were aware that some legal tasks could be performed on the internet.

4.3.2 This is lower than we might have expected, considering: all respondents are internet users; the internet is the most popular first port-of-call for consumers in need of legal services; and online legal services are becoming commonplace (it has, for example, been possible to create a will online for over 10 years).

4.3.3 Of those consumers who would look first to the internet for legal services (see 4.1), a little over half (118) were also aware that legal tasks can be performed online.
4.4 Experience using the internet to perform legal tasks

4.4.1 We asked those respondents who were aware that legal tasks could be performed on the internet (see 4.3) if they had done so. Over one quarter said they had (around 10% of all respondents).

4.4.2 Of those, the most common online legal task was creating a will (12).

“Around 250,000 people knock together their own wills every year without legal assistance... increasingly completed online”

-The Guardian, August 2011

4.4.3 Other types of legal tasks performed online included: conveyancing and Land Registry work (9); divorce (2); Small Claims Court documents (6); basic contract templates (6); powers of attorney (1).

4.4.4 Those respondents who had completed a legal task online we asked if they would do so again.

*Figure 4*

Would you use the internet to complete legal tasks again?

4.4.5 The results were overwhelmingly positive, with 83% of respondents saying they would use the internet to complete legal tasks again. 15% were unsure.

4.4.6 Fewer than 2% of respondents said that they would not use the internet to perform a legal task again. Reasons included: “lack of communication, they failed to respond when I needed them”; “the initial quote that I was given was not enough to cover the actual costs”; and “it was too messy, most of it had to done over the telephone”.

Consumer attitudes to online legal services, The Law Wizard, page 8.
4.5 The appeal of using the internet to perform legal tasks

4.5.1 We asked those respondents who were not aware that legal tasks could be performed on the internet (see 4.3) whether they would consider performing legal tasks on the internet.

*Figure 5*

Would you consider performing legal tasks on the internet?

4.5.2 Out of 260 respondents, almost 40% said that they would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ consider performing legal tasks on the internet. Around 42% were unsure, with 15% saying it was probably or definitely not for them (only 5% of respondents were totally against the idea).
4.6 The appeal of online legal services by age and gender

4.6.1 We were interested whether the attraction of performing legal tasks online correlates with age.

Figure 6

Age Brackets of respondents who ‘definitely’ would or ‘probably’ would consider performing legal tasks on the internet

4.6.2 Respondents under 30 were most likely to ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ consider performing legal tasks online, perhaps unsurprising as under 30s are generally considered the age bracket most willing and confident using the internet for complex tasks.

4.6.3 As age increases, the attraction to performing legal tasks online is, on the whole, reduced. Only 1% of the over 70 bracket would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ consider performing legal tasks on the internet.

4.6.4 We were also interested in the gender of respondents. 42% of females would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ consider performing legal tasks online, compared to 48% of males.
4.7 Reasons for not using the internet to perform legal tasks

4.7.1 Those respondents who would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ not consider performing legal tasks on the internet (see 4.5), we asked why.

Figure 7

![Pie chart showing reasons for not using the internet to perform legal tasks]

4.7.2 The biggest concern for the majority of respondents was security (52%), with comments including “I don’t know what sites to trust”. Many respondents felt that they did not have the confidence to perform legal tasks on the internet (48%), for example because of “the risk of doing it wrong and the consequences”.

4.7.3 Others reason given include the risk of viruses (17%), with a further three respondents saying they would prefer to complete tasks face-to-face.

Consumer attitudes to online legal services, The Law Wizard, page 11.
4.8 Level of service and professional involvement

4.8.1 We wanted to find out, if consumers were to perform a legal task online, how much support and contact would they want from a legal professional.

Figure 8

If you were considering performing a legal task on the internet, would you like it to be completed?

4.8.2 **72.3%** of respondents wanted some level of professional support.

4.8.3 Breaking this down, over **40%** of said that they would like to perform the legal task on the internet ‘mostly by yourself but with some reassurance’. **25%** of respondents said that they would like to perform the legal task on the internet ‘with plenty of professional support and with some input from you’. Around **7%** of respondents would prefer the task to be performed by a professional so long as they had limited insight into the process.

4.8.4 Around **17%** of respondents would prefer to perform legal tasks on the internet all by themselves, with no professional involvement.

4.8.5 The majority (**65.8%**) are, therefore, attracted neither by pure DIY nor by professional-led services, but by a hybrid. They seek the value and convenience afforded by online legal solutions combined with the reassurance and support of a legal professional.
4.9 Reasons for using the internet to perform legal tasks

Figure 9

What would attract you the most to the idea of performing legal tasks on the internet?

4.9.1 The two perceived benefits which most attract consumers to online legal tasks are value (47%), and convenience (44%).

4.9.2 One respondent who cited convenience added that “I would like to perform a legal task at my own ease, and not feel stressed about having to complete tasks quickly”.

4.9.3 A less significant factor was speed (9%). It seems consumers value quality over quickness when it comes to online legal tasks.
4.10  The probate process and probate online

“Overall, 54 per cent of respondents used professional probate services at some stage in the process”
- The use of probate and estate administration services, Legal Services Board, March 2012

4.10.1 As mentioned in the introduction to this survey, The Law Wizard has a particular interest in probate. For this reason, we included two probate-related questions.

4.10.2 There has been a significant amount of research into the probate market in the last few years, including the Legal Services Board report “The use of probate and estate administration services”, published in March 2012. We were keen to avoid duplicating the questions in this report, and asked instead about consumer demand for online probate services.

4.10.3 We asked if respondents were aware of the probate process.

Figure 10

[Bar chart showing responses to the question: Are you aware of the probate process that follows after a bereavement?]

Consumer attitudes to online legal services, The Law Wizard, page 14.
4.10.4 38% of respondents were unaware of the probate process, with only 36% aware. The rest were unsure.

4.10.5 Of those who were unsure, the feeling garnered from the face-to-face part of the survey was of a general understanding that a particular procedure had to be followed after a bereavement, though a lack of understanding about what this entailed or what it was called.

4.10.6 We asked the respondents who were aware of the probate process whether they would consider performing the probate process online.

*Figure 11*

Would you consider doing all or part of the probate process on the internet?

- Nearly 60% would consider doing all (35%) or part (24%) of the probate process on the internet, slightly less than the proportion of respondents who would consider performing legal tasks online in general (see 3.1.4).
- 31% were unsure.
- 10% of respondents said that they would not consider doing the probate process on the internet. Comments suggest this reluctance is due to the fear of attempting an unfamiliar yet important process. Comments included:
  - “I would be uncertain I was doing it correctly”
  - “It’s too hard and complicated”
  - “I wouldn’t want to make a mistake”
For more information about this survey or our professional solution, The Probate Wizard: White-Labelled, please contact us:

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For our further thoughts about this survey, please see our blog, www.blog.thelawwizard.com.
The Probate Wizard: White-Labelled is our groundbreaking client-facing probate assistant, the first of its kind.

For probate organisations, law firms, accountants and IFAs, it is a vital cog in your 21st Century probate offering. You can now provide fixed fee probate packages and reach out to new probate clients.

For your clients, The Probate Wizard simplifies the pre-grant part of the probate process. It makes data capture and estate valuation simple and quick, with the trust and reassurance of your branding and support options.

For more information, please see www.thelawwizard.com/pro

“A groundbreaking online probate service”
Legal Futures,
March 2012