

Scaling for Success:

The Contingency Fee Law Firm Playbook for Strategic Growth



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INTRODUCTION

As a contingency fee law firm owner, your day-to-day is likely focused on acquiring cases, managing your clients and your staff, litigating cases, preparing for trial, attaining settlements, collecting fees, and more.

These activities require immense intellectual and emotional energy, leaving little time and space for future planning. In addition, the aggressive entrance of private equity in the legal industry means leading firms are rapidly expanding both through mergers and acquisitions, as well as geographic and service expansion. This creates an incredibly cutthroat landscape for growing law firms looking to find their footing.

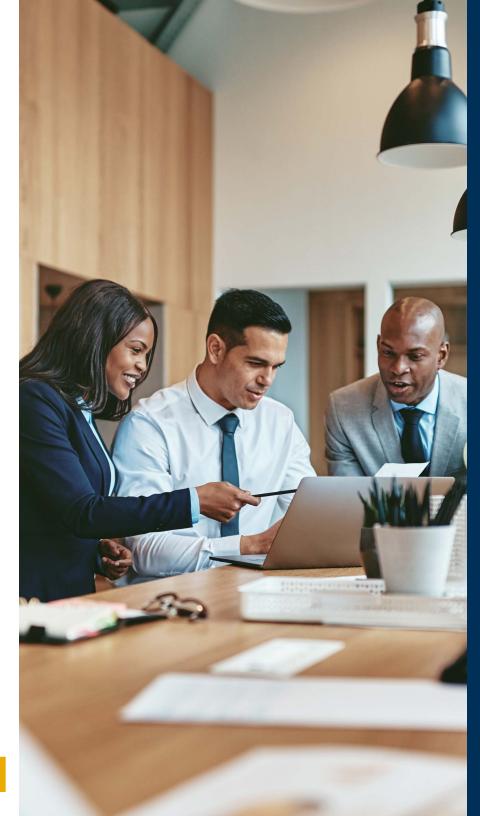
Not only do you need to manage all this as seemingly everything is more expensive, from retaining experts, hiring talent, commercial rents, etc., which can cut into your firm's cash reserves.

The bottom line is this: sustainable law firm business growth doesn't happen overnight. Every successful law firm is built on the sturdy foundation of a detailed, well-considered growth strategy.

But before diving into designing your growth strategy, it's imperative that you understand your law firm's current growth stage. Each stage is characterized by distinct priorities and challenges which have different requirements to ensure sustainable expansion.

Continue reading to learn the key characteristics of each growth stage, clearly determining where your firm stands today so you can find the right strategies to accelerate growth tomorrow.





PART ONE:

The Stages of Law Firm Growth

Before jumping into formulating growth strategies, you need to clearly understand how your law firm is currently operating.



Growth Starter



Growth Improver



Growth Leader



Growth Optimizer

Assessing the landscape of your contingency fee law firm's status involves:

- Examining core business functions and processes (intake, marketing, talent acquisition, etc)
- 2 Scoring these on a scale of 1 to 5
 (1 meaning "I need a complete overhaul of the function" and 5 meaning "things are running smoothly")
- Considering the key leadership roles that you've already established







Growth Starters are newly founded contingency fee law firms focused primarily on acquiring cases and generating revenue to finance firm operations.

As newer firms, Growth Starters have not yet established mature functions like marketing, IT, or finance departments. As revenue increases from growing case inventories and fees, investing in these foundational business structures will be essential to support scale.

The key strategies for Growth Starters center on swiftly building case volume to consistently grow fees over time. This can be done through costeffective measures such as:

- Employing digital advertising campaigns
- Leveraging client referrals
- Acquiring business from referring firms instead of partner firms

With limited resources, determining the optimal balance across case acquisition strategies is imperative.

Additionally, Growth Starters need to implement an excellent intake process to quickly qualify and convert prospects into signed clients. Hiring the right staff to conduct consultations that educate and persuade potential clients is as important as following standardized procedures around initial case assessments and client agreements. With marketing spends dedicated to case acquisition

efforts, maximizing conversion means ensuring budgets translate efficiently into secured inventory.

In the early days, keeping expenditures low allows Growth Starters to stockpile funds to reinvest into growth initiatives once case settlements create steadier and more predictable cash flows. Prematurely wasting precious working capital hinders the law firm's future ability to properly finance initiatives like implementing technology infrastructure, hiring talent, improving processes, and other means to scale effectively.

Eventually, key functions become mandatory, specifically marketing, IT, and finance departments. Even if cash is plentiful, lacking mature business processes significantly caps growth potential and threatens the law firm's ability to weather unexpected events such as worsening market conditions or the departure of top talent. Investing early on to build operational prowess makes riding out future adversity seamless. By understanding foundational transformations required to shift from a fledgling practice to an improving one, Growth Starters equip themselves to embrace change at the most opportune moments.





Key strategies for Growth Starters:



Swiftly build case volume through client referrals and digital advertising



Build out mandatory functions to attract leads and improve operations like marketing, IT, and finance



Create and implement an excellent intake process that converts leads into clients



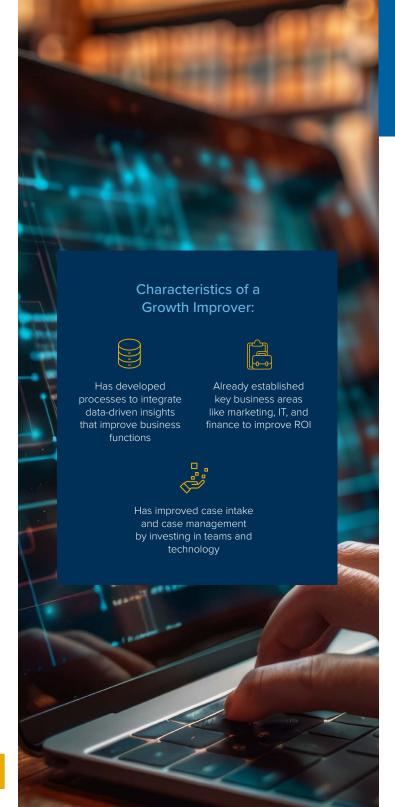
Growing Beyond the Growth Starter Phase

In the beginning, BD&J had a high concentration of high-volume, quickly resolving cases. These cases provided a consistent income stream allowing the firm to run its daily operations, paying for rent, staff, and expenses for on-going cases. However, Kevin Danesh, BD&J Managing Partner, knew that this daily grind would not translate to significant growth for the firm. Kevin focused his long-term growth plans on catastrophic injury cases, but he realized that in order to achieve his goals he needed the flexibility to invest heavily into these cases.

Looking to inject significant cash into his firm, Kevin determined that taking on financing would be the quickest and most efficient strategy. However, when he went to his current banker, he learned that traditional banks couldn't offer him the flexibility he was seeking because they didn't have the expertise to evaluate his case inventory and the future value of the fees associated with it.

Download the BD&J Case Study to learn how Kevin found an innovative financial partner who understood the unique contingency fee business model and believed in his growth strategy.







For Growth Improvers, case acquisition efforts result not just in initial revenue but also data-driven insights that enable departments to drive further expansion.

Developing expertise across areas like marketing, IT, and finance sets law firms up to compound gains consistently over time.

Once case fees provide a comfortable cash runway, it becomes imperative to reinvest funds back into operational infrastructure. As revenue fluctuates, disciplined financial planning around measured budgets and strategic growth investments smooth out variability.

So rather than suffer whiplash from irregular cash flows or windfalls, contingency fee law firms are in control and intentionally driving their ascent.

Integrating datadriven insights



Improving business functions to ensure a high ROI



Reduced variability, sufficient margins, and consistent revenue

This financial discipline also allows for calculating smart risks, including taking on ambitious cases. Balancing riskier highvalue cases with shorter duration wins can quickly build cash reserves while securing funds for business operations. But simply adding cases without the infrastructure to support delivery only leads to disappointing both new and existing clients. For larger and riskier case opportunities, securing financing to fund litigation costs protects the client experience. Any excess returns should be reinvested into the business to fuel further growth efforts across people, systems, and processes.

Additionally, Growth Improvers have developed processes to integrate datadriven insights to improve business functions. This ensures high ROI from capital-intensive activities such as marketing to reduce variability, provide sufficient margins, and keep revenue consistent. Smoothing total law firm cash flows eases when trying to forecast budgets accurately or handle surges in demand.

Finally, implementing transparency across all cases through centralized systems and structured workflows flags potential problems earlier and prevents unpalatable surprises. Establishing processes where staff members consistently update case





management systems gives leadership visibility into individual client experiences, allowing them to course correct before a disgruntled client can mar the law firm's reputation by complaining publicly. In the age of Google Reviews, positive brand identity and reputation management are essential for growing firms. Proactively identifying issues, trends, or opportunities through data-driven insights generates continuous improvements to maximize client retention and satisfaction.

While scaling brings inevitable growing pains, it paves exciting pathways to

becoming a market leader. Investing skillfully to turn legal expertise into business excellence means attracting top talent who can further accelerate collective growth. Smart operational refinements set law firms apart from rivals unable to dedicate similar focus towards streamlining systems and processes to optimize the client experience at scale. Sustaining an upward trajectory relies upon both effort and patience — requiring equal parts ambition and discipline with pragmatic decision-making to catapult Growth Improvers towards achieving their vision.

Key strategies for Growth Starters:



Leverage financing for case acquisition as volumes increase to pursue larger, riskier cases



Use data-driven insights across your business to help build intake and smooth cashflow



Create case transparency across all cases through centralized systems and structured workflows



Atlas Consumer Law: Investing in Tech to Lead the Market

Due to the high-volume nature of consumer cases, Atlas Consumer Law recognized a key strategic priority included improving the law firm's case management system and intake capabilities.

According to Ahmad Sulaiman, Atlas Consumer Law Managing Partner:

"The only way you can have a system-based business in our field in the service industry is if you are dealing with enough volume to make it effective. We were never going to have enough volume unless we had a case intake call center."

Faced with the need to invest in technology, Atlas Consumer Law encountered traditional banks that didn't have the knowledge to understand the unique nature of litigation funding.

Partnering with Esquire Bank in 2018, the firm used its credit facilities to establish a hi-tech, industry-leading intake call center to manage the increasing volume of consumer protection case inquiries, becoming the representative for plaintiffs in the highest number of consumer protection cases filed in the three-year period from 2020 to 2022.









Growth Leader contingency fee law firms have built such impeccable reputations that clients come eagerly, driven by referrals or online reviews.

Where competing firms tout credentials, Growth Leaders highlight achievements, including record settlements, landmark favorable verdicts, and community impact. Differentiating themselves this way provides leverage to take on prominent cases other attorneys may refuse and charge commensurate premiums due to greater expertise and demand.

At this stage, marketing investment is not only focused on acquiring cases but also building brand value. Cementing mindshare regionally against local rivals ensures market dominance. This brand awareness also creates the leverage to secure favorable terms for referral partner contracts and M&A opportunities. Consistently converting awareness into case inventory compounds and accelerates a contingency fee law firm's ability to scale.

Growth Leader law firms internalize previously outsourced functions such as technology, analytics, and financial planning. This necessitates adding savvy executives skilled in mapping and leading strategies for ambitious growth rather than delivering legal counsel. Successful contingency fee law firms are capable of so much more than winning litigation; they are also equally excellent at achieving business objectives. Bringing on C-Suite—

level leadership (e.g., a CFO or COO) solely focused on driving business growth and transitioning towards centralized oversight of target markets, new services, M&A opportunities, budget decisions, talent growth, and succession planning unlocks efficiencies from scale.

Investing in technology to standardize and automate repetitive tasks allows attorneys to focus on litigating. Collaborative tools centralize accessibility to documents across organizational hierarchies and physical locations. Constantly striving to improve staff efficiency, productivity, and accuracy makes each investment dollar work harder.

Custom web applications can provide dashboards and reporting to identify trends and give data-driven recommendations. Data from streamlined systems quantitatively measure performance across individuals to inform optimal team configurations and process improvement. Digging deeper can uncover insights into which teams incrementally add excessive overhead requirements that exceed their return potential.

Growth Leaders are fiercely protective of their brand and continue to address areas of improvement, becoming formidable opponents in and out of the courtroom.





It's essential for leadership to have their finger on the pulse of the industry as trends change and emerging competitors raise the stakes each year. Honing growth strategies to fit a dynamic landscape underpinned by solid performance creates the foundation of bold success.

Key strategies for Growth Leaders:



Invest in case
acquisition and brand
building to convert
awareness into
business growth



Appoint C-Suite leadership to develop strategies for sustainable growth, forecasting, and expansion



Invest in technology to standardize repetitive tasks and make documents accessible across locations

POND LEHOCKY

Pond Lehocky Giordano

Even before partnering with Esquire Bank, Pond Lehocky Giordano had set the law firm on a path for growth. At that stage, founders Sam Pond and Jerry Lehocky bolstered their attorney team with business professionals, most notably in the areas of management, finance, marketing, and IT. This approach to their business functions enabled the law firm to proactively establish Pond Lehocky Giordano in a digital and modern world.

According to Bryan Reilly, CFO:

"The legal space is at this crossroads, like many professional services, where they are beginning to take a step forward and start acting like big businesses. From the starting point, our partners are very entrepreneurial, very sophisticated, very forward thinking. And one of the first things that they did was bring in more of a professional management team, real accountants, real financial

professionals, real marketing professionals, real IT professionals, and that kind of formed the foundation between that professional team and the partners."

The introduction of business professionals allowed Pond Lehocky Giordano's star litigators to focus on bringing home the big wins while the professionals brought in the big fish.









The industry-leading Growth Optimizer operates flagship locations across major US metropolitan cities, runs ads akin to Fortune 500 companies, and maintains a vast case inventory diversified across areas of expertise, disciplines and geographies.

Public awareness is grown through appearances across major media outlets, viral social campaigns, partnerships with key industry influencers, and consistent coverage from high-profile publishers reinforce the firm as the unequivocal market leader.

But before attempting a national expansion, Growth Optimizers are uniquely skilled in identifying market gaps — uncovering what motivates specific market segments, developing differentiated strategies to provide solutions for said gaps and motivations, and delivering such satisfying case outcomes that the influx of referrals necessitates expansion.

Operating in multiple markets introduces entirely unforeseen complexities and challenges. This requires an entrepreneurial dexterity to manage the varying growth stages of each market while continuing to drive expansion together as one. Sustainable success depends on building a firm nimble enough to adapt to changing times and markets but focused enough to channel the momentum of each market into optimizing the firm as a whole.

Growth Optimizers invest in emerging technologies such as AI to test and learn, keeping ahead of less-funded competitors. Automation and standardization across markets improve efficiency and productivity, allowing staff to focus on higher-impact work. Mining internal data with comprehensive analysis of past performances, forecasting algorithms can inform case evaluations to optimize financial return against limited manpower.

Working with key business functions, the IT teams of Growth Optimizers develop proprietary scoring models to assess strategic markets and acquisition targets, weighing dozens of essential factors that are pivotal to the law firm's success. Optimizing for highest-return prospects, optimal sequencing and appropriately timed expansion maximizes the likelihood of seamless integrations.

Having achieved truly dominant success, the greatest challenge facing even elite Growth Optimizers is the continual disruption to their own business through their efforts to aggressively expand into new markets. A natural byproduct of aggressive expansion is the gradual deviation from a standard set of business





processes and a culture that made the law firm successful in the first place. The objective should be twofold: to exceed their once-defining past performances (using it as a platform for future success and acquisitions); and to also ensure that the culture and business processes remain consistent across the entire organization. This will allow the law firm to steer what is now a fully-fledged legal enterprise.

Key strategies for Growth Leaders:



Identify market gaps and develop strategic solutions for filling those gaps



Integrate automated systems and processes to manage growth stages of each market



Invest in emerging technologies like Al to gain an edge against less-funded competitors

TORKLAW CHAMPIONS OF THE PEOPLE

Since partnering with Esquire Bank, TorkLaw has grown to a staff of 60, doubled the value of its case inventory, increased its case fees by +16%, increased marketing spend by +71%, and grew revenue by +74% while expanding nationwide.

Fueled by increased access to capital, the law firm has invested significantly in building operational resources, onboarding senior level members. Additionally, the firm implemented new technology and adopted a digital approach to marketing, brand building and data analysis that has resulted in a Marketing ROI of 255%.

According to Reza Torkzadeh, CEO & Senior Partner:

"One of the greatest challenges was not having access to the capital. We needed to really grow and scale the firm at the pace that we wanted."







PART TWO:

Addressing the Challenges of Growing Your Law Firm

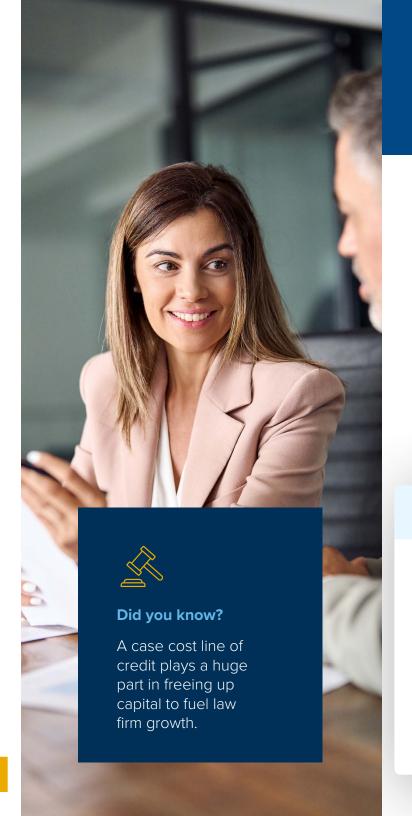
From Growth Starter to Growth Optimizer, each growth stage has its unique challenges. However, there is one consistent truth across all four stages: to accelerate the velocity of growth, it takes capital...and lots of it. Lack of funding has stymied the market domination dreams of many excellent contingency fee law firms, and the landscape is littered with others that will never reach their full potential.

Owners of growing law firms often leverage their personal assets to fund their businesses, then discover that the funds deplete faster than they can replenish them. In the capital-intensive industry of contingency fee litigation, fighting for justice against deep-pocketed corporations can be daunting without the confidence of a solid financial foundation. Even market-dominating Growth Leaders and Growth Optimizers can benefit from external investment to drive business success.



Capital fuels growth, and as every good business manager knows, healthy financials provide a solid foundation for sustained expansion.





STRATEGY 1:

Choosing the Right Financial Partner

Growing a law firm business can be done alone—something many self-funded attorneys have accomplished—but is much easier to do with a committed, strategic banking partner who understands your business and your needs. Capital fuels growth, and as every good business manager knows, healthy financials provide a solid foundation for sustained expansion. According to Reza Torkzadeh, CEO and senior partner at TorkLaw, "I realized that capital is really the fuel for any business. And if you don't have enough or don't have access to enough, well, then you don't have enough fuel to scale and grow." That's why choosing the right financial partner for your law firm is

pivotal to its ability to grow at scale.

As the trusted provider of financial services for leading contingency fee law firms over the last two decades, Esquire Bank has partnered with firms at every growth stage. Whether it's no-fee deposits, case cost financing, bespoke lending solutions, technology solutions referrals, or expert guidance on business stewardship — Esquire Bank intimately understands the nuances of running and expanding a contingency fee law firm. Take advantage of our specialized expertise as you establish, improve, lead, or optimize your firm's growth.

Focus your efforts on building out these 3 key business functions:

IT

Finding skilled technology specialists to support your litigation practice could improve operational efficiencies which can positively impact your firm's ability to manage cases and client relationships, optimizing your attorneys' time and labor.

Marketing

Marketing departments often use temporary staff at first to provide creative or copywriting services to ensure that the law firm's brand is communicated consistently. Law firms may also need to onboard an external marketing agency to provide creative services along with digital marketing execution capabilities.

Finance

The key task of the finance department is to put budgetary processes, as well as financial and case inventory forecasting in place to provide your law firm the confidence needed to invest in growth-based initiatives and/or improving the operations of the firm.



STRATEGY 2:

Managing Irregular Cash Flows

Many businesses experience revenue fluctuations, but the contingency fee legal industry is defined by an especially dynamic cycle of feast or famine.

Achieving steady and consistent bottomline growth becomes imperative if a law firm is serious about success. For most contingency fee law firms, cash flows are reinvested into case expenses, often collectively totaling in the millions of dollars for a single law firm's case inventory. The opportunity cost of these expenditures is the law firm's ability to invest in more return-efficient spending such as marketing to acquire more cases, technology to improve efficiency, or top talent to improve productivity.

Savvy law firms search for external funding to supplement their own abilities to finance growth. Esquire Bank offers Case Cost Financing to eliminate the high-opportunity cost of case expenses. With a case cost line of credit, contingency fee law firms can focus on investing their cash flows into stabilizing bottom-line growth,

growing cash reserves, and building a comfortable runway to implement expansion strategies.

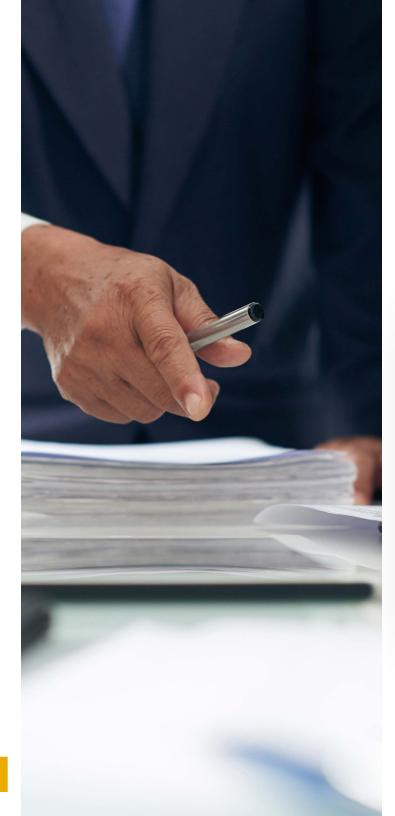
There are many providers of law firm financing, however, not all providers are created equal. Because contingency fee law firms operate under a unique business model and a highly specialized industry, leaders often find traditional institutional bankers cannot accommodate their needs. These traditional banking institutions treat contingency fee law firms like any other business looking for a loan, failing to see the lucrative future value of a law firm's case inventory. It often comes down to their lack of expertise to assess the contingent case inventory and the ability to lend against it.

Traditional banks often require a law firm's partners to put up personal assets as collateral for business loans with unfavorable terms and onerous covenants. To address this limitation, Esquire Bank was founded by trial lawyers who had experienced this familiar frustration.

Scan the QR code to find out more in our blog.

"Understanding Law Firm Funding Options: Contingency Fee Law Firms"



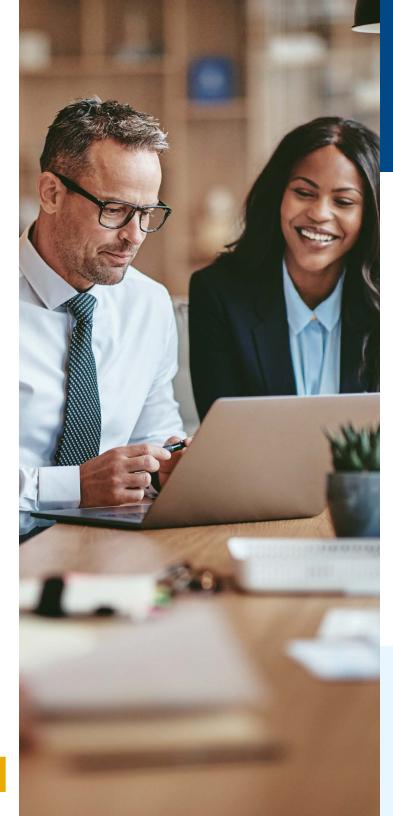


Esquire Bank is staffed by attorneys across multiple practice areas, offering the expertise to accurately value a law firm's case inventory and understand its growth trajectory. This often culminates in Case Cost Financing that is tailored to optimally support each law firm's expansion goals, without onerous terms or covenants.

"Esquire Bank has skilled lawyers who came in to see us, and they asked the right questions. They understood what the issues were in the cases and got right down to what they thought the parameters of our case inventory value were. It was a conversation, and not a confrontation."

- Martin Edelman, Co-founder Edelman & Edelman

Financing with:		
A Traditional Bank	VS.	Esquire Bank
 Treats contingency fee law firms like any other business Fails to see the future value of case inventory Requires personal assets as collateral for loans with unfavorable terms and covenants 		 Founded by trial lawyers with intimate understanding of the contingency fee model Offers Case Cost Financing to help law firms invest cash flows into growth strategies Tailored to support expansion goals without onerous terms
 Lacks experience to assess contingent case inventory and ability to lend against it 		Provides expertise to accurately value case inventory and understand growth trajectory



STRATEGY 3:

Building and Expanding Core Business Functions

Even with stabilized cash flows, some contingency fee law firms find that their appetite for growth and ability to increase its velocity is greater than their cash reserves allow. A timely and significant cash injection to invest in key business functions can quickly expand the capabilities of a particularly successful Growth Starter consistently experiencing greater demand than it can service. Esquire Bank designed its Working Capital Line of Credit to precisely address this scenario.

With Working Capital Financing, law firms can access the cash to invest in expanding core operations today instead of waiting for cases to resolve to build up their cash reserves. With a Working Capital Line of Credit, you can invest in marketing to: increase lead generation, improve intake, streamline technology processes to boost productivity, or open new markets. No matter the goal, big or small, Esquire Bank customizes each law firm's credit facility to support it in achieving and exceeding its growth goals.

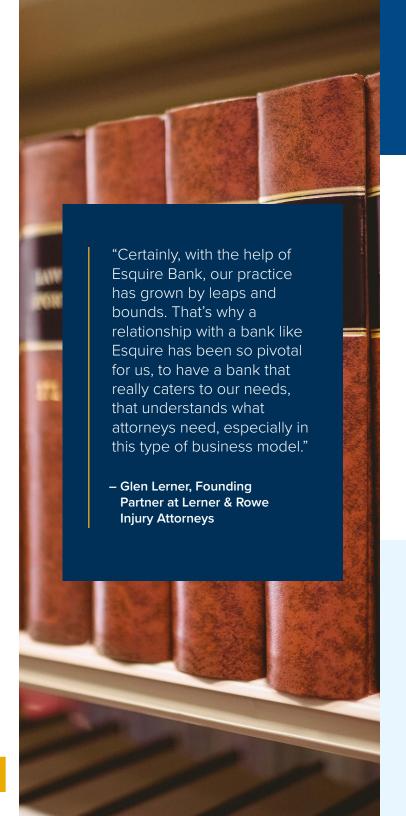
"Esquire Bank helped me obtain all different types of lines of credit. My working capital line of credit, which assists in my dayto-day needs, as well as covering costs for medical malpractice and personal injury cases. Then a case line of credit which helps with including the mass tort area. Instead of me waiting for financing, I can actually get finances out now to go to the next project."

 Mick Grewal, President/CEO at Grewal Law

Scan the QR code to find out more in our blog.

"Investing in Law Firm Business Operations as You Scale"





STRATEGY 4:

Stewarding Sustainable, Long-Term Growth

Prolonged sustainable contingency fee law firm growth is a balancing act of understanding industry nuances, accurately forecasting trends, identifying opportunities before rivals, and taking strategic risks at the right time. Without the capital to support its business growth initiatives, even the best litigation team will languish in mediocrity. The continual progression to create more value and better client servicing requires consistent investment in improvement.

In seeking funding from external parties, choosing a partner with specialized financial products, educational resources, and talent that understands the unique business model of contingency fee law firms is pivotal to the successful stewardship of your firm's growth journey.

The knowledge and support of a partner who has the confidence of executives of the nation's top firms is invaluable.

While first understanding your law firm's growth stage is critical to mapping out and realizing its full potential, Esquire Bank's expertise can assuage any roadblocks around capital constraints and bridge knowledge gaps related to optimizing operational infrastructure or investments. Partnering with Esquire Bank not only fuels the acceleration of your law firm's growth, but also gives you the peace of mind that a capable and trustworthy partner has your back. With more than two decades in the industry, the professionals at Esquire Bank have backed law firms from early founding all the way to achieving industryleading status.

LERNER&ROWE

Since allying with Esquire Bank and leveraging its case cost financing solutions, Lerner & Rowe has grown case fees by 26%, marketing expenses by 22%, and significantly increased profits in a single year.







PART THREE:

Is Your Law Firm Ready for Growth?

Take the Growth Assessment Today

If you haven't yet, we encourage you to try Esquire Bank's **Growth Assessment Tool**. Not only will it determine your law firm's current growth stage, but you'll also receive in-depth advice on strategies to take your law firm to the next level. Simply answer a few short questions and then receive your analysis and recommendations via email.

Scan the QR code on this page to start your assessment.







Ready to Succeed Boldly?

If you're ready to discover the benefits of banking with Esquire Bank, scan the QR code to schedule a consultation with an Esquire Bank law firm banking expert.



