Show Me Your Website!

Building or Rebuilding and Marketing Your Website

by

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The claims are coming fast and furious about your need to market on the web, "one personal injury firm picked up two new clients within a week after their home page was launched", "one corporate law firm picked up enough business to pay for its site" and so on. Do you need a presence on the web? Yes, for several reasons. But approach your involvement and investment with caution. It is very difficult to quantify the actual number of visitors to a site within a week's time and the reason you were visited.

Before developing your site, there are several questions that must be considered. For example, what image are you trying to project and how do you want to communicate that to your audience? What are the results you want - return visits to site, phone calls, or e-mail to your firm? What is the purpose(s) and audience for your site?

There can be several reasons why you will want to develop a web site. The main ones are to:

- Attract clients;
- Service current clients;
- Attract new attorneys;
- Provide information to the legal industry and press;
- Obtain referrals from other attorneys;
- Provide contact information;
- Enhance reputation; or
- Change your practice focus.

Once you decide upon the main purposes and audience, then the gathering of content can begin. For example, if one of the purposes of the web site is to attract new clients then give value to your targeted potential clients for visiting your home page. For example, a number of sites have firm newsletters, caselaw commentaries, analysis of legal news, and practice guides that provide existing clients with legal knowledge of an area that interests them. If your client is concerned about premise liability because of a number of properties they own, provide articles of interest to this group of clients. Not only will existing clients appreciate the value of such materials, but also other potential clients will also definitely visit your site. You may want to provide hypertext links to many other areas on the web involving premises liability issues such as insurance, pending legislation, and so forth. Firm materials such as newsletters, brochures, questionnaires, etc. should be downloadable at your site. Give away the basic law to the clients. The essence of the Internet is the capability to publish and provide the beginnings of a dynamic relationship with people or companies.

Also, provide resources that are not easily accessible. For example, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about a particular area of the law, such as automobile accidents, would be useful to someone who was just in an automobile accident. Or a law firm can provide basic information about a Chapter VII bankruptcy. If the FAQ is good it provides a very unobtrusive way of marketing your firm, since potential clients and others will be referred to your firm to view the FAQ. As an example, see the The Bankruptcy Law Finder (www.agin.com/lawfind/) web site.

Marketing Your Website:

A web site is a marketing and customer relationship tool and you need to market it. How are clients and potential clients going to find your site? You must prepare and implement a marketing plan for your site that should be in conjunction with your other marketing plans for the firm. Some suggestions:

- Plan your web site launch or re-launch. Send notice of the launch or web site by e-mail, postcard, flyer, and brochure or invitation to existing and present clients, potential clients, or maybe purchase a targeted "opt-in" e-mail list. Always keep in mind the ethical rules on this subject.
- Send out a news release and send news clippings to your client about your web site. Respond immediately to press calls regarding your site;
- Make sure everyone in the firm is aware of your site and markets it and stays involved. It will grow in importance. Paralegals may have great insight into what clients may want;
- Have your site address on business cards, stationary and brochures, fax cover sheets and other office marketing materials;
- Key words, such as firm name and specialty area, should be near the beginning of site so search engines can find it;
- Check your metatags to ensure search engines find the areas you should be indexed under;
- Register with search engines. Visit search engine sites and register under headings such as "getting listed" or "submitting a listing". Focus on the top half dozen search sites, since they get 95% of all hits. Some companies will register your site with search engines for a fee. Submit-It (www.submit-it.com).
- For information on how to promote your web site, visit www.wilsonweb.com and www.webpromote.com;
- For on-line marketing facts visit www.cyberatlas.com;
- Participate in newsgroups, listservs, and other conferencing and add your web site on your signature file;
- Ask others to include a link to your site;
- At your site have visitors sign up for your newsletter;
- Create an Internet e-mail mailing list of clients and potential clients for newsletters that focus on useful information. In the newsletter, list your site and note that the newsletters are archived on the site;
- Visit www.marketing.findlaw.com for other marketing tips;
- Refer potential clients to the site to read stories of cases and type successfully handled by the firm;
- Run a one-question survey - Why did you visit the site today?
- Study search engine logs to see what customers want;
- Place the 2 or 3 top customer needs directly on your home page – the zero click level; and
- Bring in users to see how they navigate the site.

Your WWW site can and will be the hub of communications with your existing and potential clients. Once you have a web site then you can solidify your communications and relationship with your clients by providing legal articles or other firm materials or "open" select environments or Extranets for your clients for form libraries, discussion forums, questions and surveys, and a host of other applications. In the next 5 to 10 years your site will eventually turn into an interactive sight where audio, video and real-time communications will take place on a daily basis with your clients from anywhere in the world. Begin preparing for this by building or rebuilding your web site today.

Law Firm Web Sites to Visit:

- This site employs a periodical style with a monthly feature on legal issues. Brobeck, Pheger & Harrison (www.brobeck.com/news_events/publications.asp)
- Easy to use, simple to navigate, and very accessible to the average browser. Cooley, Godware -www.cooley.com;
- Provides a version of their site in Spanish. Haynes and Boone - www.hayboo.com;
- "Internet case digest" is updated weekly and an excellent summary of Internet law. Perkins Coie - www.perkinscoie.com;
- Provides hundreds of free articles on consumer law. The Consumer Law page - www.consumerlawpage.com;
- E-mail with newsletters and on-line discussions. Arent Fox Kintner Plotkin - www.arentfox.com.
- Immigration law site – clients can fill in a form to participate in the green card lottery. Siskind & Susser - www.visalaw.com;
- Free initial consultation and fixed rates to help clients establish e-commerce sites. E-commerce Attorney - www.ecommerceattorney.com/incubator.html;
- List of useful resources about law firm web sites. Dennis Kennedy - www.denniskennedy.com/legalweb.htm;
- Communication law. Pepper & Corazzini - www.commlaw.com; and
- Tax information. The Tax Prophet - www.taxprophet.com.