

ADVANCED MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR LAW FIRMS

A FINDLAW WHITE PAPER



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Almost all highly successful law firms share one thing in common. They have a unique brand that stands out from the crowd, creates a memorable impression, and is consistently delivered in all marketing channels.
2. Brands are built on a combination of perception, reality and reputation:
Before clients meet a lawyer in person, they must rely on the perception that is delivered through online and offline marketing programs. The reality of a brand comes into play at every point of contact between clients and the firm. And because referrals are the lifeblood of many practices, your firm's reputation will be built on referrals from existing clients and how your firm is perceived in your business community.
3. A brand promise is a message that concisely describes what a firm does and how they do it. It should focus on the most distinctive aspects of your practice and communicate what makes your practice a unique value to your clients.
4. The long-term growth of a law firm depends on a marketing strategy that changes as marketing channels evolve. A historical shift in the way consumers and businesses interact has occurred with the growth of the Internet, and lawyers must take this into account as they build their brand awareness.
5. The change that has had the most significant impact on lawyers is the shift away from print directories like the yellow pages towards the Internet. Today's legal prospects are online, researching their legal issue and comparing law firms (consumers are usually referred to more than one lawyer).
6. As the shift to the Internet continues, online legal directories are an important consideration for lawyers looking to expand their visibility online. Because directories help consumers by focusing their search towards lawyers in a specific area of law, attorneys can target highly qualified clients that most closely match their "best-client" profile.
7. When it comes to search engine marketing, it is important for lawyers to understand that legal consumers do not search for lawyers in the same way that lawyers might search for legal assistance. There are three different categories of search types: Vanity, Branded, and Non-Vanity. All three search types deliver roughly the same number of inquires to a firm, and a successful Web site needs to be optimized for each type of search.
8. When advertising their practice, every law firm must take into account the ethical standards and legal limitations associated with law firm marketing. Lawyers should consult with their local bar association to obtain the pertinent rules that guide the attorneys in their state.

THE LONG-TERM GROWTH OF A LAW FIRM DEPENDS ON MARKETING STRATEGY THAT CHANGES AS MARKETING CHANNELS EVOLVE.

LAW FIRM BRANDING BEST PRACTICES

How can you develop a brand for your firm that stands out from the competition? What are the most important elements of a brand? What can your firm do to increase your brand awareness?

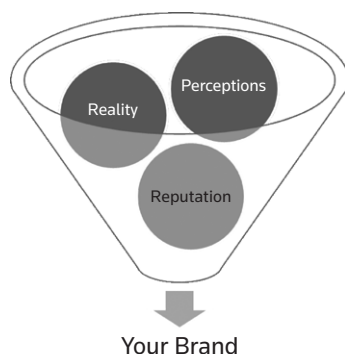
In today's world, many law firms face the same challenge, and the same opportunity. Even though they are busy, their firms would be more profitable if they could connect with a higher quantity of high value clients. A well-positioned, and consistently marketed brand can help your firm capture better clients and directly impact the profitability of your firm.

An overview of branding

A brand is much more than a logo or advertisement. It is the overall image that your firm projects to your prospects, clients, competition and even your community. Every city or region has a few law firms that are very well known, along with many other practices with significantly less visibility. How do the well-known firms develop such a high level of visibility? One thing is certain... they did not achieve their stature overnight. A successful brand takes a consistently applied long-term approach.

Three factors that influence your brand

Several factors influence a firm's brand, and they are most easily categorized into three general areas:



- **Perception.** How is your law firm positioned to prospects that have never heard of your firm? When someone is searching the Internet for legal assistance, your Web site might be the first impression a client has of your firm. First impressions are important, and your brand must reflect the focus of your practice and the culture of your firm in a way that quickly resonates with your target audience. Your brand must also be applied consistently in every marketing channel to achieve effective results.
- **Reality.** What is the "experience" clients have when working with your firm? Your brand is partially defined by how you interact with your clients. From the first phone call through the resolution of a client's case, the culture of your firm has a significant impact on how your firm is perceived. Every firm is unique, and the culture of a firm typically represents the partners and associates. It is also the case that law firms of different specialties naturally develop a culture that reflects their area of practice. So the experience of working with a firm that specializes in family law will be very different than a firm focused on patent law.

A WELL POSITIONED AND CONSISTENTLY MARKETED BRAND CAN HELP YOUR FIRM CAPTURE BETTER CLIENTS AND DIRECTLY IMPACT THE BOTTOM LINE OF YOUR FIRM.

- **Reputation.** What do current and previous clients, other attorneys and even the community say about your firm? Many law firms rely on referrals for their new clients, so the strength of your reputation is key to the long-term success of your brand.

Businesses of every type factor these elements into account as they build their brands, and successful law firms consistently implement on all three to achieve the best results for their practice.

Three important qualities of a unique brand

When it comes to building a unique brand that stands out from the crowd, there are three key elements that need to be taken into account. First, your brand must be distinctive, stand for something unique and offer a different point of view. Second, it must be relevant to your target clients and be positioned to satisfy the needs of your clients in a credible manner. And third, to be effective, a successful brand must consistently deliver the core message on your firm in an engaging fashion.

Strategies for building a successful brand

Developing a successful brand for your firm is quite straightforward if you focus your brand strategy on a few key elements and consistently implement this strategy over time. To begin, you need to document the following three elements that together will help you create your strategy:

Competencies: Your specialty is the foundation of a successful law firm brand. To stand out in the crowd you cannot be all things to all people. Everything about your brand will be focused on your specialty, so it is important to define it from the beginning.

Standards: How are your firm's services for your specialty positioned to help your clients? The tone of this positioning depends on your area of practice, and every firm takes a different approach to how they position their firm to their clients. Some specialties may focus on the "caring" aspect of their practice, whereas other practices will present a more aggressive tone, like "fighting for your rights."

Style: The style of your brand combines the competencies and standards in a manner that reflects the overall personality of your brand.

Once you have documented the competencies, standards and style for your brand, you can begin the process of implementing your brand program. This includes the development of the visual creative components needed for your marketing channels, as well as the story to be articulated to your target clients. Successful law firms also work with their employees to make sure the entire team is on-board with the overall objectives of their brand.

Developing a brand promise

A brand promise is a message that describes what you do and how you do it. It is the energizing component of your brand and should be used internally to guide your team in how you service your clients, as well as externally to deliver a focused message to prospects and clients. Successful brand promises reflect these critical elements:

- A brand promise must be consistently delivered and as short as possible. Some brand promises are just 5 – 8 words long, while others are a few sentences in length. A shorter version could also be used as your slogan or tagline.
- It should be action oriented, inspire confidence in your firm, and focus on the most distinctive aspects of your practice.
- Your brand promise should communicate a message on how your practice benefits your target clients.

It can take some time to develop a brand promise that communicates these points in a concise statement, but it is well worth the work. Your brand promise is one of the cornerstones of your overall brand, and will serve as a guide for all of your marketing campaigns.

WHEN IT COMES TO BUILDING A UNIQUE BRAND THREE QUALITIES MUST STAND OUT—IT MUST BE DISTINCTIVE, RELEVANT AND CONSISTENTLY DELIVERED.

DEPLOYING A BRAND ONLINE

What is the best way for a law firm to promote their brand online? What are the latest tools for building your online presence? And how can you manage your online reputation to increase the visibility of your firm?

The growth of the Internet has permanently changed the marketing landscape, and law firms need to make sure their brand deployment includes a significant online component.

Here are just a few important facts on the growth of the Internet:

- 95% of homes with annual incomes over \$75,000 are online²
- 80% of consumers now have a computer at home³
- 73% of American adults use the Internet regularly³
- 45% say the Internet played a significant role in making a major decision in their lives⁴

With more clients online than ever before, and with so many law firms competing for these visitors, it is very important for law firms to deploy their brand online so that their firms and their specialties clearly stand out from the crowd.

How does this shifting landscape impact your referrals? Most consumers get more than one referral when they are preparing to solve a legal issue and they often validate their referrals online. If your law firm depends on referrals, your Web presence must be easy to find and well-positioned to resonate with these potential clients.

The reduced importance of print directories

As consumers have shifted to the Internet, there has been a corresponding decrease in the use of printed directories like the yellow pages. Ask anyone who regularly uses the Internet how they research information... most people now "Google it."

Borrell Associates predicts that 39% of the ad spending on print yellow pages will disappear in the next five years.⁵ And Marketwire reports that search engines, like Google and Yahoo!, have already pulled ahead of printed yellow pages as the leading source for local business information.⁶

The importance of online directories

The growth of the Internet and the decreased use of print directories have led to another interesting trend in the legal marketing landscape. More and more people are now using online legal directories to research their legal issue and search for lawyers in a specific area of practice. These online directories are a common starting point for many people and receive millions of visitors every year.

Online legal directories offer many benefits to lawyers looking to increase their visibility and deploy their brand online. First of all, the clients searching these sites have a serious legal issue to resolve and they are ready to take action. Second, directories help consumers search for lawyers in a specific area of practice and zip code, allowing lawyers to position their firms in front of legal consumers that fall into their "best client" category. And third, these sites offer multiple "connection" opportunities, including links to law firm Web sites, phone and email contact information, and location maps. Overall, they are an excellent opportunity for law firms looking to increase their brand awareness and visibility to highly qualified candidates.

SEARCH ENGINES LIKE GOOGLE AND YAHOO! HAVE NOW PULLED AHEAD OF PRINTED DIRECTORIES LIKE THE YELLOW PAGES.

Video profile options for lawyers

Online video is a fast-growing component of the Internet that is ideally suited for law firms, and another proven way to promote your brand online. Some 55% of all adult Americans now have a high-speed Internet connection at home.¹ From viewing the latest news reports to YouTube, people are watching more videos online every day.

Lawyers can leverage this trend to their advantage by developing a video on their firm that communicates the personality and character of their practice. The lawyers in your firm are the best spokesmen for your practice, and online videos take the mystery out of the lawyers behind your brand while encouraging prospects to contact your firm. They allow lawyers to tell their story in their own words and help clients to quickly determine that a law firm is the best solution for their legal issue. Remember, the law can be intimidating to many clients, and talking to prospects in a video can help to lower their resistance to calling your firm and seeking counsel.

Social media and your online reputation

When it comes to increasing online visibility and controlling your reputation, social media can provide an extra boost to a firm. In today's world everyone can comment on anything online, in both a positive and negative fashion. As a result some lawyers (especially those in contentious cases) can find less than positive articles posted online when they Google their name.

Involvement in social media can help you control your online reputation by increasing the number of Web hits on your name. Promoting your online video on YouTube, for example can expand the number of hits on your firm. And every time you increase the number of inbound links (from an online directory, for example) you increase your online visibility. Social media sites are continually enhancing their search engine optimization, and involvement on these sites almost always positively impacts the number of hits when someone searches for an attorney's name. The objective is to present enough positive, well ranked articles on your firm in order to outweigh any negative online publicity.

Social media provides a medium through which current clients, potential clients, peers and your firm can converse together. All of these sites let you link back to your firm's Web site, and the more links to your site, the better your search engine visibility.

AN ONLINE VIDEO CAN TAKE THE MYSTERY OUT OF THE LAWYERS BEHIND THE BRAND AND HELP CLIENTS TO QUICKLY GAIN CONFIDENCE IN YOUR AREA OF SPECIALTY.

MAXIMIZING YOUR BRAND VISIBILITY

How can you maximize your online visibility? Do legal consumers search the same way as lawyers? How can you configure your Web presence to make it easy for your target clients to find your firm?

Maximizing the online visibility of your brand requires a thorough understanding of how clients search for lawyers. And the first thing to keep in mind is that most clients are not lawyers, so they do not search for help using the same phrases that lawyers would use in a similar situation. It is important to keep in mind that most people that have a legal issue to solve are quite emotionally involved with their situation, and this does have a bearing on how they look for help.

With this in mind, it is easiest to analyze legal consumer behavior patterns by understanding the following three search types:

- **Vanity Search Phrase:** This type of search phrase is commonly used by lawyers and other professionals. For example, every bankruptcy lawyer in Chicago wants to instantly find their firm with the search term: "Bankruptcy Attorney Chicago."

This search produced over 2 million results, making it rather difficult to compete for the top spot. The good news for lawyers is this, most clients do not search for help with such a generic phrase.

- **Non-Vanity Search Phrase:** This is the type of search phrase commonly used by legal consumers searching for assistance. For example, someone searching for legal assistance with a drug charge in New York City might search with one of the following phrases: "Busted in NY last night need a lawyer fast"; "DUI ticket trouble first offense New York"; "arrested and got ticket for drugs in queens need it gone."

One thing that most of these searches have in common is the location and expression of legal need. The challenge is that there can be thousands of ways of expressing a legal need and location.

- **Branded Search Phrase:** This is the type of search phrase commonly used by clients when they are validating referrals. For example: "Brandenburg and Johnson lawyer Dallas."

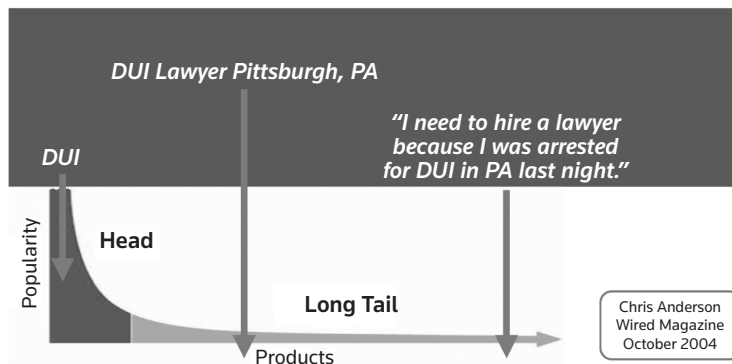
Branded search phrases almost always include the firm name, lawyer name, phone number or URL.

Converting search results to prospects

Conversion is the process of converting a search result to a prospect. After someone has visited your "Contact Us" page they have been "converted" to a prospect.

Many online searches are unique

Overall, 20 - 25% of daily Web searches on Google are unique,⁷ so it is important to keep in mind that searches are rarely duplicated. Non-vanity searches are often referred to as "long-tail" searches. This means if you had a monopoly over the top 1,000 search terms across all search engines (which is impossible), you'd still be missing out on 89.4% of all search traffic. To illustrate, if search were represented by a tiny lizard with a one-inch head, the tail of that lizard would stretch for 221 miles.⁸



The more specific the search, the more likely it is that a person who clicks-through from that search will be a better prospective client for you. If a law firm specializes in dog bite law in Arlington, TX, a person who finds the law firm through the query "Arlington TX dog bite law" is likely to be a far more qualified lead than someone who found the law firm through the query "personal injury law."

You can't anticipate every one-of-a-kind search, and your site would be unreadable if you tried. But a firm can improve its odds of generating traffic from long-tail searches.

CLIENTS DO NOT SEARCH FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE IN THE SAME WAY THAT LAWYERS WOULD SEARCH THE WEB.

Research study results on law firm search engine marketing

FindLaw conducted a study of law firm Web sites and client search phrases from December 2007 to April 2008. The objective of this study was to:

- Analyze 51,000 searches and categorize them in one of the three groups (branded, vanity and non-vanity)
- Measure frequency and conversion
- Calculate leads derived from each category

Overall, the intention of this study was to help lawyers better understand the phrases legal consumers use to search for lawyers and how these search phrases converted to leads.

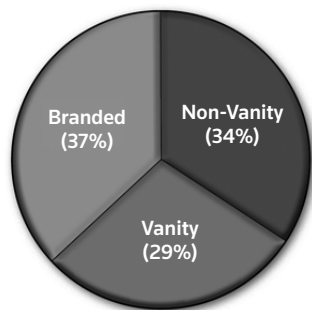
Study Results:

	Frequency of Site Visits	Conversion Rate	Total Leads Delivered
Vanity:	16%	15.1%	29%
Branded:	21%	16.2%	37%
Non-Vanity:	63%	4.7%	34%

Data Analysis. The “frequency of site visits” results are consistent with what we know about the Internet in general. In this study the non-vanity searches accounted for 63% of the total, clearly indicating that most people search in their own unique way.

It is not surprising that the conversion rate is much lower on the non-vanity searches compared to the other categories. Since we estimate that a significant number of the branded searches are referrals validating the law firm online, it makes sense that a higher number of them are also converting and actually contacting the law firm.

The most interesting point in the study is how everything leveled out when it comes to total leads delivered to the law firm. Even though the non-vanity searches had a low conversion rate, they delivered about the same number of leads to the firms because there was such a high number of clients searching this way in the first place.



Study Conclusion. What does this mean for law firms looking to optimize their search engine marketing and the visibility of their brand? First of all, it is important to optimize your Web site to take into account all three different types of legal consumers searching the Internet for assistance. Second, considering how much competition there is for the vanity search phrases, focusing your optimization efforts on the majority of the searches, non-vanity and branded searches, will help drive a significant amount of traffic to your site, and prospects to your firm. And third, make sure you are utilizing the resources of a professional with expertise in Internet marketing, legal marketing and search engine optimization to prepare your site properly to capture the clients searching for your area of expertise.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE ONLINE VISIBILITY OF YOUR BRAND, IT IS IMPORTANT TO OPTIMIZE YOUR WEB SITE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ALL THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ONLINE SEARCHES.

ONLINE ETHICAL STANDARDS

When it comes to building your brand and advertising your practice, there are a few guidelines that every lawyer should follow.

Most of the ethical standards governing traditional marketing tools such as print ads, brochures and radio spots also apply to online marketing activities. In addition to avoiding potential discipline, a law firm that operates its Web site ethically can take full advantage of the Internet's capacity to generate new-business prospects and develop client relationships.

Improper use of testimonials, case results, comparisons with other attorneys and other information on your Web site may violate the American Bar Association (ABA) ban on "false and misleading" communications. The ABA has set forward its Model Rules for consideration and adoption. Each state has the jurisdiction to determine their own ethics rules. As a result, rules vary by state and are regularly updated to address new and emerging online marketing practices. One good source for updated information is the ABA Web site, which provides links to lawyer marketing regulations in all 50 states at www.abanet.org/legalservices/clientdevelopment/adrules.

MOST OF THE ETHICAL STANDARDS GOVERNING TRADITIONAL PRINT ADVERTISING APPLY TO ONLINE MARKETING ACTIVITIES.

CONCLUSION

In today's highly competitive legal marketplace, it takes a unique law firm brand to stand out from the crowd. Brands are much more than a logo and tagline. They are a combination of the marketing images and messages, the day-to-day experience of working with your firm, and the reputation a firm has in the marketplace.

To build a unique brand, law firms must focus on a specialty or competency, determine the standards for their practice and develop a style that uniquely communicates their message. A brand promise is an important part of a law firm's brand and will help guide a firm's services and provide a focused message to clients and prospects. It should be as short as possible, inspire confidence, and focus on the most distinct aspects of the practice.

The Internet has changed the marketing landscape for attorneys and law firms need to re-evaluate how they connect with new clients in the digital world. This changing landscape has also impacted how referrals connect with law firms, as prospects often validate a firm online before contacting them on the phone. In short, law firms need to do whatever it takes to increase their online visibility to help ensure clients find their firm, and not the competition.

According to several studies, more people now go to the Internet to search for business information than print directories like the yellow pages. This makes it important for law firms to reconsider their marketing budget to focus it on the channels where the most clients are searching for legal assistance.

Online legal directories are an excellent opportunity for law firms to position their firm in front of clients with a pending legal issue. They help lawyers connect with highly qualified clients that are ready to take action.

It is important for law firms to take a proactive approach to managing their online reputation. Everyone can comment on anything online, and when someone searches for a law firm or lawyer it is important to provide multiple "hits" on the search results page. One of the most effective ways of increasing these hits is to engage in social media. Blogs and sites like Linked In, YouTube and MySpace can help you control your reputation online.

When it comes to search engine marketing, it is important to understand the different ways that clients search for lawyers. Preparing your Web site for the different types of searches requires a thorough knowledge of the Internet, law firm marketing and search engine optimization. Lawyers that optimize their site for the different types of client searches have a tremendous opportunity to increase their online visibility.

Lawyers should follow the same general ethical considerations for their online marketing campaigns as they do for traditional media like print ads. States have jurisdiction to determine their own ethics standards and rules can vary by state. A law firm that operates its Web site ethically can take full advantage of the Internet's capacity to generate new-business prospects and develop client relationships.

LEARN MORE

FindLaw, a Thomson Reuters business, is the legal industry's most effective provider of online marketing and client development services. FindLaw helps law firms use the Internet to connect with more well-qualified clients, creating Web sites and other online marketing strategies that combine technological expertise with deep knowledge of the legal industry. Findlaw Web specialists and local consultants provide the service and innovative solutions needed to make every law firm stand out from the crowd, converting the Internet into an effective client-development tool for attorneys.

Attorneys can also be prominently listed on our Web portal, **Findlaw.com**, the world's most-visited legal information site. To schedule an appointment with a FindLaw client development consultant, call **1-866-44-FINDLAW (1-866-443-4635)** or e-mail **west.info-findlaw@thomsonreuters.com**. Visit **www.lawyermarketing.com** for more information about law firm marketing.

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610 Opperman Drive
Eagan, MN 55123-1396

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