

AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERNET MARKETING FOR SMALL LAW FIRMS

A FINDLAW WHITE PAPER



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. An increasing number of Americans are using the Internet to search for information and solutions online, including legal services. Consumers are also facing an increasing number of legal needs, although the growing number of lawyers is also increasing the competition for clients.
2. The consumer shift to online search is changing the way businesses advertise to their customers and how law firms connect with new clients. A growing percentage of consumers use the Internet to search for lawyers, making it possible for law firms with an effective Web presence to connect with new clients online and distance their firms from the competition.
3. The growth of the Internet has also changed the way clients validate referrals. Most consumers receive multiple law firm referrals when they are preparing to address a legal need. These consumers go online to validate the firms to which they have been referred, making it important for lawyers that rely on referrals to have a Web presence that clearly communicates their specialty and distances their firm from the competition.
4. The most successful Internet-based marketing plans focus on all three components of effective online client development: visibility, design and content.

Visibility: Search engine optimization (SEO) is a critical part of improving a law firm's online visibility. It includes the process of enhancing elements of a Web site to attract qualified traffic through directory placements, link building, and natural results from search engines like Google, Yahoo! and MSN.

Design: Effective site design enables a law firm to communicate its unique identity and appeal to its target audience. Good design provides intuitive navigation and focuses on clarity, not complexity.

Content: Well-written content serves two purposes. First, it makes it easy for search engines like Yahoo! and Google to find your site. Second, it resonates with the needs of your clients by communicating your area of specialty, validating your expertise and motivating visitors to contact your practice. Developing content that serves these two goals requires an in-depth understanding of the Internet and law firm marketing expertise.

5. Evaluating return on investment (ROI) and adjusting a law firm's marketing mix to focus advertising on the channels that deliver the most qualified clients can help a law firm grow its practice. ROI measurement shows which marketing channels are delivering for your firm and where you need to make adjustments in order to improve performance.
6. A diversified marketing program focused on attracting well-qualified clients who match the specialty of the practice is a proven strategy for success.

THE CONSUMER SHIFT
TO ONLINE SEARCH IS
CHANGING THE WAY
LAWYERS CONNECT
WITH NEW CLIENTS.

TRENDS IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

How are today's legal consumers searching for lawyers? What selection process do they use to find an attorney? How is the Internet changing the way consumers begin their search and how should a law firm's advertising strategy be positioned to match this behavior?

It is important for law firms to understand how the Internet is changing the purchasing behavior of consumers and how advertising can be positioned to intersect with these patterns. This section presents information on how consumers are using the Internet, the process they use to select an attorney, and the two main categories of advertising available to law firms.

Facts on consumer Internet use

According to the January 2008 edition of eMarketer, the average Internet user spends 15.3 hours per week online. This same report estimates that by 2012 over 217 million Americans will use the Internet. Reports indicate that 73% of American adults use the Internet regularly¹, 95% of homes with \$75,000+ incomes are online² and 45% say the Internet played an important role in their life³. Whether an upcoming meeting is with an accountant, doctor, realtor or attorney, consumers today find it helpful to do their homework online before meeting with any professional.

In a study of how people solve problems, the Pew Internet & American Life Project reported the following answers to the question: "Where do people go to get help?"⁴

The Internet:	58%
Professionals (doctors, lawyers, financial experts):	53%
Friends and Family:	45%
Newspapers and Magazines:	36%
Government Office or Agency:	34%

MORE PEOPLE TURN TO THE INTERNET FOR HELP THAN PROFESSIONALS, FAMILY OR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES.

In short, more people go to the Internet for answers than family members or professionals!

Declining print directory trends

As more people go online for information, fewer consumers are using print directories like the yellow pages. A study by Borrell Associates forecasts that 39% of the ad spending on print yellow pages will disappear in the next five years.⁵ Even more significant for lawyers today, search engines like Google and Yahoo! have already pulled ahead of printed yellow pages as the leading source for local business information.⁶

Consumers facing increased legal needs

In an increasingly complex society, it is only natural that consumer legal needs are also increasing. Many even had to deal with several different legal issues at the same time. How are consumers coping? One thing is apparent: consumers are not passively sitting by waiting for the legal issues to resolve themselves. Instead, consumers are aggressively seeking credible legal help using a variety of resources at their disposal.

Legal needs vary by age, gender, place in family

Most legal needs extend to the entire family and beyond. For instance, while men are more likely than women to have a legal need, spouses are often involved in addressing the need. So are children, parents and other family members.⁷

Most consumers who went online to research a legal need or legal resource were married, employed, well-off and well-educated; a majority (63%) were between 35 and 54 and had a mean income of \$67,000.⁷

Consumers want depth, breadth and convenience

Although some consumers may be frustrated with the multitude of online choices for legal information, most consumers are satisfied with the Internet in terms of the ease of finding information, the depth of that information, and the amount of usable content.

How do consumers find the legal information they need online? Of those users that commonly use the Internet, 85% of them begin with a search engine (Google is the most popular), and 31% use legal information or directory Web sites (like FindLaw.com). Approximately 30% of consumers look for Web sites that focus on legal specialties.⁷

The role of the Internet and referrals

Most consumers receive multiple law firm referrals when they are preparing to address a legal need. These consumers tend to go online to validate the firms to which they have been referred, making it important for law firms to have a Web site that is easy to find, professionally designed, and written in a way that resonates with consumers and motivates them to contact the firm.

Managing your online reputation

With the number of people searching for legal information online, if your law firm does not have a Web presence, you are at a serious disadvantage for two important reasons. First, when consumers are searching online to check referrals or search for a lawyer, they will not find information on your practice, but they will find information about your competition. Second, avoiding the Internet allows others to control your reputation online. Social networking Web sites allow anyone to comment about anything, and the best way to control your online reputation is to present a comprehensive story on your practice and your specialty through a professionally designed Web site.

The Internet and its relationship to motivational and directional ads

As the purchasing behavior of today's consumer shifts towards the Internet, it is important for law firms to understand how advertising relates to this trend. In general, advertising can be grouped into two categories: motivational and directional ads. Billboards, television, radio and direct mail are all examples of motivational advertising. These types of ads use a "sellers looking for buyers" approach to how they are positioned in the marketplace. Directional advertising is just the opposite and is positioned for "buyers looking for sellers." Examples of directional advertising include the yellow pages and the Internet.

Many lawyers focus on directional advertising because it makes their firms more visible to people actively searching for legal assistance. Before the Internet was invented, print directories like the yellow pages were almost the only form of directional advertising available to lawyers. Now that the Internet is the leading source of information for many legal consumers, it is important for lawyers to update their advertising strategies so their firms are positioned in front of these "online consumers."

NOW THAT THE INTERNET IS THE LEADING SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR MANY CONSUMERS, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR LAW FIRMS TO UPDATE THEIR MARKETING STRATEGIES.

COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE WEB PRESENCE

What are the most important elements of an effective Web site? How can law firms make their sites easy for clients to find on the Internet? Can just anyone build a successful law firm Web site?

In the expanding online market for legal services, the most successful law firms focus on three essential (and related) areas: building visibility via search engines and directories; using distinctive site design to set the firm apart; and delivering persuasive content that engages prospects and deepens client relationships.



Visibility

More than two-thirds of all solo and small law firms now have a Web presence.⁸ If you've been online to survey the competition, you know the importance of visibility—of taking steps to make sure that your firm stands out.

Sponsored vs. organic links

Search engines are Web sites designed to help Internet users find information. The most popular—Google, Yahoo! and MSN—together account for more than 90% of online searches.⁹ Most search results pages contain both organic and sponsored search results. Sponsored results are a form of pay-per-click advertising (the advertiser pays the search engine to present this link when specific keywords are used). Organic listings are unpaid search results and the most cost effective way of boosting your visibility to clients searching for legal assistance. The good news for lawyers marketing their practice online is this: six out of every seven clicks on a search engine are generated by organically listed sites,¹⁰ which draws into question the value of the sponsored links. A properly built Web site will significantly improve your organic link visibility!

The process of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

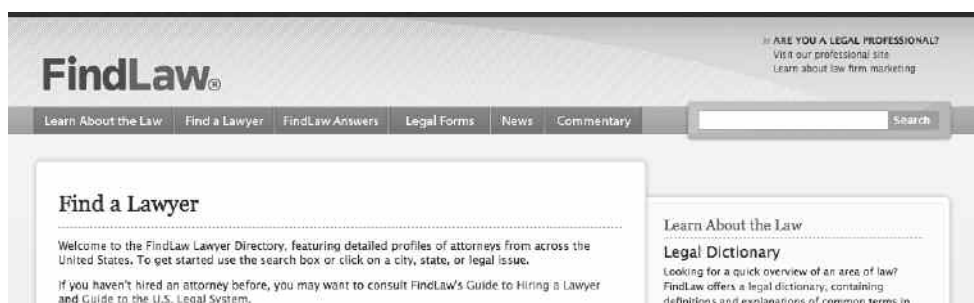
The process of boosting your visibility with these highly trafficked, influential search engines is called search engine optimization, or SEO. The goal of SEO is to attract more, and better qualified, prospects to your site. This allows your firm to focus its time on more profitable clients, as most law firms would prefer to work with a smaller number of high-value cases than a large number of lower value cases. The higher a Web site ranks for a given search, the greater the chance that it will be visited by a search-engine user seeking a specific specialty.

GOOD VISIBILITY IS A CRITICAL ASPECT OF A SUCCESSFUL LAW FIRM WEB SITE. IT ALLOWS CLIENTS SEARCHING THE INTERNET FOR A SPECIFIC AREA OF SPECIALTY TO EASILY FIND YOUR FIRM.

A multitude of factors can affect search-engine rankings:

- **Site optimization:** A Web site with a high percentage of keywords and keyphrases unique to your practice area, geographic locations and client base.
- **Keywords focused on how your target customer searches:** Your clients might not use legal terms when they search the Internet, so it is important to include references like “car crash” and “auto wreck” in addition to “motor vehicle accident.”
- **Use unique keywords and keyphrases:** Over 89% of online searches are unique,¹¹ so it is important to focus on unique keywords and keyphrases targeted at your audience to help you capture those one-of-a-kind searches.
- **Keywords that cover your geographic area:** For example: “Milwaukee,” “Wisconsin,” “eastern Wisconsin,” “Midwest.”
- **Inbound links from other sites and law firm directories:** Links from other relevant, law-related Web sites that direct users to your site increase your visibility. Examples include links from other law firms, online directories, and legal sites such as FindLaw.com.
- **Title tags:** These words are used as the anchor text on a search-engine results page and also appear at the very top of the Web browser. They are particularly important for optimizing the visibility of your site.

THE MORE QUALITY LINKS YOU BUILD FROM RELEVANT, LAW-RELATED SITES, THE MORE POPULAR AND VISIBLE YOUR SITE BECOMES.



The Bottom Line on Visibility: *Optimizing your site for search engines is critical to driving more business to your firm and having your choice of the best cases. Key elements of successful search engine optimization include keywords and keyphrases, increasing inbound links from authoritative Web sites, and your site’s HTML programming, particularly title tags.*

Design

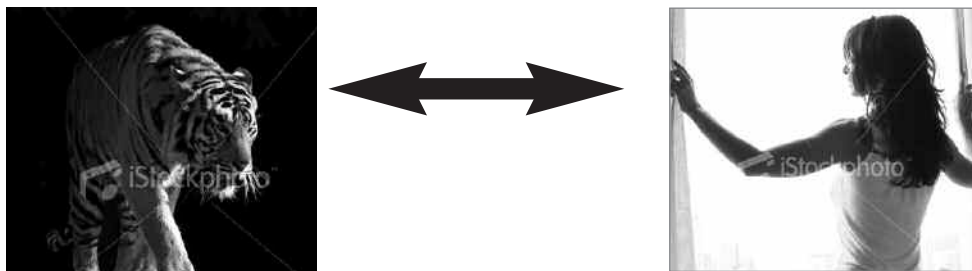
Improved visibility drives traffic to your Web site. Can you hold the attention of those prospects and convert them to clients? Your window of opportunity is small, because studies show that users judge the value of a site in only 1/20th of a second!¹²

One key to engaging potential clients is effective Web site design. Like a well-decorated office lobby, site design can create a positive first impression about your firm. Like good lighting in a store, it can make your “product”—the legal expertise that you communicate on your site—more appealing. Site design is an opportunity to project a strong, professional image and to communicate directly and persuasively with your target audience.

Establish a niche. One of the most important choices a law firm makes in designing its Web site is what it leaves out. That's because on the Internet, being all things to all people is a great way to reach no one. Instead, focus on what sets you apart. Use images, words and the organization of your site to communicate your firm's unique identity. That can include:

- Photos and other visual elements that identify the city or region you serve and represent your practice areas.
- Headlines, section heads and other prominent blocks of copy that target your niche and stress unique capabilities (Spanish-language expertise, for example).
- A consistent color palette and tone that appeals to your unique audience.

While an aggressive tone and bold colors can work for a personal injury plaintiff firm, for example, visitors to a family-law site may be swayed by a softer approach.



Strive for clarity, not complexity

Keep your site straightforward and easy to navigate. A user-friendly Web site should welcome the visitor with a layout that's clear and intuitive and with instructions that are plain and unambiguous.

Is your contact information displayed prominently on every page, for example? Can a visitor easily navigate your site without clicking the "Back" button? Is any important information buried in the navigation hierarchy where it's difficult to find? Good design minimizes confusion and allows your prospect to concentrate on the site's content.

Clear, straightforward site design can also promote visibility. Complicated multimedia bells-and-whistles, for example, are often barriers to entry for both site visitors and search engines. They can drive search rankings down, besides making for a poor customer experience. Many people find the law intimidating. Your Web site shouldn't reinforce that view.

The Bottom Line on Design: *A well-designed Web site does more than just look good. It captures the attention of prospects and helps you stand out. Use images, colors and words that appeal to your target audience. Most importantly, ensure your site is easy to use.*

USERS JUDGE THE VALUE OF A WEB SITE IN ONLY 1/20TH OF A SECOND.

Content

Effective site design encourages prospects to stay for a closer look. Well-written content can convert them into clients and turn new business into a long-term relationship. Good content provides a quality user experience for visitors, informs users about your background, focuses on your unique proposition and converts prospects into customers.

The content on your Web site needs to serve two purposes. First, it must be written in a way that makes it easy for search engines like Google and Yahoo! to find your site. These search engines use advanced technology tools to search the content on Web sites so they know how to return search results when one of their users searches for a specific item.

This makes it critical to write the content on your page so that it is “search engine friendly.” An online marketing professional with legal marketing expertise can help your practice develop content that differentiates your firm from the competition in the search engines.

The second important purpose of the content on your page is to write a story that highlights your area of expertise and resonates with your clients. A lawyer’s expertise in a specific field is the single most important factor in selecting an attorney, more than recommendations from others or cost.⁷ Your Web site should do everything possible to reinforce your expertise in your area of specialty. Practice center pages that include articles you have written, FAQs, success stories, and additional information on your specialty are a great way to establish your expertise in your practice area.

Strive for content that’s up-to-date, clearly written and concise, because on the Web, readers scan for information and will move on quickly if they don’t find what they need. A good rule of thumb is roughly 250 words of text per Web page, an easily scannable amount for most Web users. Effective content educates first-time visitors about the law and your firm and brings existing clients back for more.

Keep your site fresh and relevant. This makes for a better client experience but can also boost your visibility on the Web. Search engines typically reward sites that have regularly updated content and assign a lower rank to outdated material.

Today’s consumer clicks past outdated articles and clichéd marketing-speak. Online success depends on engaging people with content that’s relevant, timely and in dynamic formats that encourage repeat visits.

Here are a few additional tips on writing successful Web site content:

1. **Focus:** Identify certain attributes that distinguish your practice from the competition.
2. **Play to your strengths:** Factor into account the strengths and weaknesses of your practice (and your competitors’).
3. **Exclusivity:** Do not try to be all things to all people. Look for smaller markets you can own versus bigger markets you have to share.

The Bottom Line on Content: *Once prospects find your Web site, you need to capture their attention with compelling, useful content focused on establishing yourself as an expert to potential clients. Typically, Web sites with relevant, frequently updated content are ranked higher by search engines, further increasing your chances of being seen by potential clients.*

EFFECTIVE CONTENT SERVES TWO PURPOSES: IT INCREASES YOUR VISIBILITY TO SEARCH ENGINES AND RESONATES WITH YOUR TARGET CLIENT.

THE LAW OFFICE OF
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YESTERDAY'S VICTIMS. SAVING TODAY'S CHILDREN.

HOME FIRM OVERVIEW ATTORNEYS FRANKIE JARVIS BROUEN LINES CONTACT US

LEARNING CENTER

OUR AREA OF PRACTICE

- ARTICLES
- NEWSLETTERS
- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
- LEGAL NEWS HEADLINES
- INSPIRATION FOR PRACTITIONERS
- TIMOTHY D. KOSNOFF'S BLOG

Information for PolicyMakers

An legal professionals, we have a duty to abide by state and federal regulations as well as to advise the laws we are involved to protect our clients. Every state has a duty to protect the health and well-being of its citizens. Unlike many states in the Northwest that have taken on the duty to protect the victims and future victims of child sexual abuse, Washington State has failed to provide the legal assets necessary to protect victims and justify wrongful abuse.

Many Factors contribute to the delay in bringing sexual abuse cases

The effects of abuse may not be felt for years after the actual abuse. Many survivors are intimidated and unwilling to confront their abusers. In many institutions and organizations, there is a lack of transparency and oversight, which contributes to the future of abuse. This is a cycle of many reasons that sexual abuse cases go unreported and are latent throughout a victim's childhood and even adulthood.

Many Victims Do Not Realize the Effects of Abuse until It Is Too Late

In Washington State, it is often too late for victims to bring an action once they realize the consequences of their abuse. They may have had backaches, mood and drug addiction problems, or mental and sexual dysfunction. All of these instances can be traced to sexual abuse that an individual has endured as a child. In other states, such as Idaho, an individual is able to bring an action when the actual injury is discovered.

Without an appropriate legal framework, victims will never be afforded the opportunity to confront their abusers. Our lawmakers are responsible for the appropriate laws to confront abusers and to prevent future abuse.

Legal Action Can Engage Perpetrators and Prevent Future Abuse

The current legal system limits the rights of the abusers and ultimately shuts the courtroom door for the thousands of victims. Any law enforcement agency would concede that if there were a known list of reporters, we would do everything in our power to expose those abusers. With the knowledge of abusers, the system is committed to bring evidence and reveal abusers to prevent future abuse. These victims are in the BEST POSITION to inform law enforcement agencies of who the perpetrators are. They will still be required

1. Client and professional testimonials
2. Attorney referrals

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It was **NOT** your fault.

EVALUATING RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Does your investment in advertising deliver measurable results? How can a law firm determine which marketing channels are the most effective for their practice? Is the channel that delivers the most prospects the best channel or is it more important to measure the quality of each client?

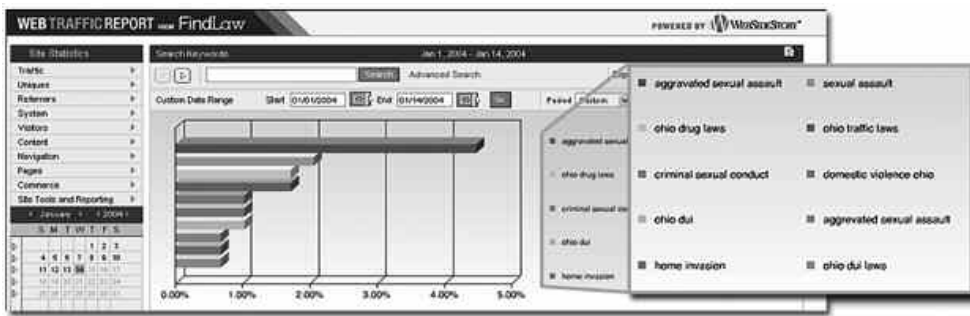
Many law firms are busy serving a steady stream of clients. The problem is that many of the clients served do not fall into the “most profitable client” category. Measuring return on investment, or ROI, from your marketing budget can help you generate more new clients that fit the profile of your target customer by focusing your budget on the marketing channels that drive these clients to your firm. ROI measurement is an opportunity to review your marketing practices and can help you make smart, informed decisions about the future. You’ll know which strategies to emphasize, what’s working and what’s not, and whether your message is connecting with prospects or needs to be fine-tuned.

You don’t need a marketing degree to evaluate your marketing tactics, just a commitment to incorporating ROI into your day-to-day practice management. Step one is to track—via a software system or manual procedures—the leads generated by your marketing channels. Step two is evaluating which channels are delivering (in terms of new clients, value per case and other key factors) for your firm.

One of the benefits of online marketing is that it allows you to easily track statistics (that are difficult or impossible to measure in other kinds of marketing) on how consumers are searching for your firm. You can track search terms used to find your site, entrance and exit pages, the number of contacts from a form, as well as phone numbers and emails. One of the leading Web analytics software is called HitBox, a tool that allows users to easily track visitors of their online marketing campaigns.

With this information in hand, you can proceed to the final stage of effective ROI measurement: using the data you generate to periodically review your marketing strategy and make changes that allow you to generate more prospects and then convert them into valuable clients for your law firm.

ONLINE MARKETING IS ONE OF THE EASIEST WAYS TO TRACK HOW REFERRALS AND CLIENTS ARE CONNECTING WITH YOUR FIRM.



Evaluating the ROI of a specific marketing channel

Let's use an online marketing program to demonstrate the ROI evaluation process. In this example, we will assume that a family law firm in a large metro area is ready to analyze the effectiveness of their Web site. Using their Web analytics software (like the one shown above), they report an average of 250 visitors per month to their firm's site. Their prospect tracking also tells them that 15 of the Web visitors emailed the firm and 30 Web visitors called the firm, for a total of 45 inquiries from the Web site. This firm also knows that, on average, they convert 10% of inquiries into actual clients. This means that, on average, the Web site is delivering 4.5 new clients every month. With an average retainer of \$3,000, these new clients are generating \$13,500 in revenue per month for the firm. With these numbers in hand, a law firm can determine how to adjust its marketing investments in other channels compared to its online program.

Of all the marketing channels available to law firms, online marketing is the easiest one to track and calculate ROI. Many lawyers use this channel as the benchmark from which to measure the effectiveness of all marketing channels.

A DIVERSIFIED MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Which practice areas and customer segments are most vital to the long-term growth of your firm? Are some marketing channels more successful in reaching prospects in those areas? Which channels will help drive incremental revenue from your existing clients?

A process for tracking and evaluating the ROI of your marketing campaigns can help you answer these questions and create and execute the most effective strategy going forward. Ultimately, the goal of ROI measurement is to make smart, better-informed decisions about your marketing spending. ROI-generated information can be used to adjust your strategy, to invest more where you're seeing results, and trim back or rethink your investment in marketing channels that aren't delivering.

One key barrier to overcome is the "that's how we've always done it" factor. Don't let history substitute for thinking! To maximize your ROI, be ready to move away from marketing tactics that are well-established at your firm but no longer effective, like sponsoring the same event year after year although attendance is declining or maintaining alliances with other organizations that no longer serve a strategic purpose.

You may choose to modify your online marketing strategy by:

- Improving your firm's visibility on the legal directories and search engines that drive the most valuable traffic to your Web site.
- Redesigning your client inquiry or registration forms to be clearer, easier to complete, and reachable from every page of your site.
- Focusing resources on the most-visited areas of your site as determined by your analytic software.

There's a synergistic relationship among different marketing channels. For example, channels affect a prospect's decision-making process at different times. Radio and television, for example, drive name recognition. They're channels that put your name in the mind of the prospect but do not normally give that prospect a decision to hire you.

The Internet, on the other hand, is indeed a "Web." It holds prospects. Once they reach your site, prospects are strongly influenced in their decision to hire your firm or take the next step towards doing so. ROI information can help you strike the right balance among channels—to put the right number of eggs into each marketing basket.

TRACKING AND EVALUATING THE ROI ON YOUR MARKETING CAMPAIGNS CAN HELP YOU ANSWER KEY QUESTIONS AND CREATE AND EXECUTE THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGY GOING FORWARD.

CONCLUSION

A growing percentage of consumers begin their search for information and assistance on the Internet, making it more important than ever for law firms to have a professional Web presence that stands out from the competition.

The most successful law firm Web sites focus on three essential areas. If you outsource your online marketing, look for a provider who can assist you with the entire process:

1. **Visibility:** Bringing potential clients to your Web site through search engine optimization.
2. **Design:** Creating a positive impression of your firm via design strategies.
3. **Content:** Communicating your specialty and motivating clients to contact your firm.

Many law firms launch their first Web site with a provider that does not cover the most important aspects of online marketing and, as a result, receive very few new clients from their Web site. If this is the case, it is important for these law firms to reconsider their Web vendors and evaluate a source that specializes in law firm Web site development.

Evaluating return on investment, or ROI, from your marketing budget can help your firm identify the optimum marketing mix for your practice by determining which marketing channels are driving new clients to your firm. Since online marketing is the easiest channel to measure, it can also be used as a benchmark for analyzing the effectiveness of all advertising programs. It is important to focus your marketing investment on channels that deliver high quality leads, not just a high quantity of prospects. This allows your law firm to concentrate on the most profitable clients that best match your expertise.

When it comes to referrals, it is important to remember that most clients have been referred to multiple law firms and will often research your practice online before they call you on the phone. A successful Web presence will help to validate your expertise and make your firm stand out from other referrals.

Law firms that harness the power of all three aspects of successful online marketing—visibility, design and content—have a great opportunity to win business and maximize the return on their Internet investment.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF ALL THREE ASPECTS OF SUCCESSFUL ONLINE MARKETING—VISIBILITY, DESIGN AND CONTENT—WILL HELP YOUR LAW FIRM WIN NEW CLIENTS.

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@thomson.com**. Visit **www.lawyermarketing.com** for more information about law firm marketing.

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