

LEGAL MARKETING: STRATEGIES FOR ONLINE SUCCESS

A FINDLAW WHITE PAPER



THOMSON REUTERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1** Among those consumers researching legal information 76% use the Internet. Regardless of gender, age, geographic location and even income, the vast majority of American adults are online regularly.
- 2** A successful attorney website has three key components:
 - Good visibility, to ensure that search engines (and the legal prospects that use them) can find the firm.
 - Effective site design that's easy to navigate and supports the law firm's brand through its use of color, photos and other visual elements.
 - Content that highlights the unique strengths and capabilities of the firm and is regularly updated.
- 3** Law firms that have a strong, unique brand are able to stand out from the crowd and generate more new business online. Strong brands are distinctive, relevant to the needs of clients and consistent. Your brand should reflect what you want to be known for and be applied across all marketing channels.
- 4** The two key forms of directional advertising, designed for buyers in search of sellers, are trending in opposite directions: while the printed yellow pages are declining, the popularity of the Internet continues to increase.
- 5** The search phrases people use when they're looking for an attorney fall into three categories: vanity, non-vanity and branded. All three deliver leads and are important to your success.
- 6** Online legal directories receive millions of visitors every year. They're an easy-to-use starting point for consumers to investigate a legal need and search for representation in a specific location and practice area. For attorneys, they can be a source of motivated prospects who fit your "ideal client" profile.
- 7** Local search, online video and social media are key Internet marketing trends that a law firm can capitalize on to drive growth and manage its reputation online.
 - Local search is an increasingly key part of effective SEM. About 1 in 5 searches are local, meaning the consumer is looking for a commodity, service or product within their area.
 - Online video is a potent brand-building tool for law firms that want to engage and inform potential clients. Today about 84 percent of Internet users watch video.
 - Social media is extraordinarily popular with consumers and, increasingly, with professional firms and other businesses. Facebook, Twitter and other social media resources can help you build credibility and initiate an online conversation with prospects.

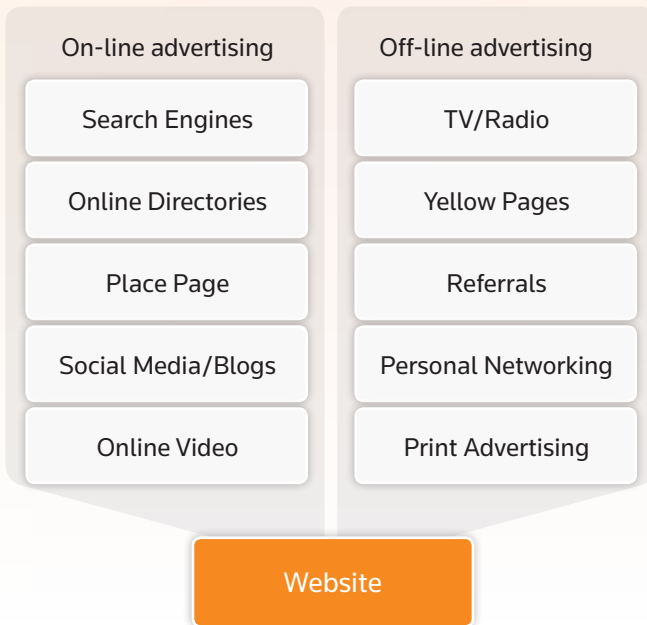
Incorporating these tools into your client-development strategy can help your firm enhance its reputation, fill Google search results and deepen its connection with prospects.

YOUR WEBSITE IS THE HEART OF YOUR MARKETING

While online marketing is about more than just having a website, your site is the heart of your Web presence. Regardless of how they hear about you, most legal prospects will visit your website to collect information and ‘kick the tires’ before they contact you.

Think of your website like a funnel where traffic from all your marketing efforts — from print ads to TV to legal directories — eventually arrives. An optimized, content-rich site is a key resource for establishing your brand, educating site visitors and converting them to clients. That’s why all of your advertising should include your Web address.

MARKETING EFFORTS DRIVE LEADS TO YOUR WEBSITE FOR INFORMATION



EVALUATION

THREE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL WEBSITE

There are three components of a successful, high-impact website: visibility, design and content.

Visibility: Can the prospects who need your expertise easily find you in the search engines? Achieving good online visibility is key to having your choice of the best cases, particularly now that most attorneys have an Internet presence of some type. Factors that can enhance your visibility include:

- Site optimization, meaning a website with a high percentage of keywords and phrases that are unique to your practice area and location, and reflect how your prospects search.
- Links from other relevant, law-related websites that direct users to your site. The more quality links you build from trusted, authoritative sites, the more popular and visible your site becomes.

Promoting your firm via a range of online marketing channels is another effective way to enhance visibility, since Google results now are as likely to include videos, maps and social-media results as they are traditional Web text.

Design: Effective site design engages people and projects a strong, persuasive image that reflects your brand. That can include:

- Photos and other visual elements that reflect your geographic location and key practice areas.
- Headlines, section heads and other prominent blocks of copy that stress unique capabilities.
- A consistent color palette and tone that appeals to your target audience.

Content: Site content can include everything from attorney profiles and FAQs to online video and blogs — all the compelling information that defines your unique value proposition. It serves two purposes. One is to bring search engines to your site. For that reason it should be clear and concise, optimized for search indexing and updated frequently, so that it's fresh for search engines and site visitors alike.

The second important purpose of website content is to highlight your areas of expertise in a persuasive way. Practice center pages, articles you've written, a blog devoted to your area of the law ... all are great ways to position yourself as an authority who consumers can trust.

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL LEGAL WEBSITES FOCUS ON THREE ESSENTIAL AND RELATED AREAS:

- VISIBILITY
- DESIGN
- CONTENT



BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE LAW FIRM BRAND

Most successful law firms have a strong, unique brand. An effective brand stands out from the crowd and creates a memorable impression. It's a key part of building the type of practice that you've always wanted to have.

Brands typically are associated with consumer product companies. But every law firm has a brand as well, whether they're aware of it or not. It's based in the value you deliver and how you're perceived by prospects, clients, competition and the community. A well-positioned, consistently marketed brand can help your firm capture better clients and improve profitability. The key is to create a brand that reflects what you want to be known for.

Brands are built on:

- 1 Perception:** how people view your firm before they meet you. First impressions matter. All law firm marketing efforts should be branded to reflect the unique expertise and culture of a firm in a way that resonates with the target audience. That's particularly true for websites, since they're often the first point of contact.
- 2 Reality:** the experience of working with your firm. Your brand is defined by how you interact with clients, from the initial meeting through to case resolution. Every firm has a unique culture that reflects its area of practice: the experience of working with a patent law firm, for example, is different than a firm that focuses on personal-injury matters.
- 3 Reputation:** what people say. What do current and previous clients, and your colleagues at other firms, say about you? Since many law firms rely heavily on referrals, the strength of your reputation can be key to the long-term success of your brand.

Brand-building requires time and consistency. Marketing (how you define your firm), advertising (ongoing communications that promote your firm) and public relations (creating awareness and positioning the firm in the marketplace) are effective ways to influence brand, but personal interaction is just as important. Attorneys who take every opportunity to communicate a distinctive, relevant brand message are well on their way to success.

Consider, for example, a family law firm that builds its brand around being family-oriented.

- The firm's advertising stresses its unique approach to collaborative divorce mediation.
- Profiles on the firm's website have information on the attorney's own family life.
- Members are involved in community outreach programs focused on supporting parents and kids.
- When clients visit the office, they find a play area for children.

By delivering a clear, consistent message across multiple points of interaction, the firm can successfully reinforce its family-friendly brand.

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ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL BRAND.

A strong brand has three important qualities. It's distinctive, meaning that it stands for something unique. It's relevant to your clients and potential clients, and satisfies their needs in a credible way. And it's consistent in delivering your core brand message to those key audiences.

To develop a successful brand strategy, focus on what sets you apart. Consider how you position your firm to clients. Do you stress the caring aspect of your practice? Or a more aggressive, "fighting for your rights" approach? That core expertise and style are the building blocks of a strong brand that resonates with those you want to reach.

A useful way to clarify your thinking is to craft a brand promise: a concise, 1–2 sentence statement that communicates what you do, how you do it and how your firm benefits its clients. A brand promise can serve as the cornerstone of your marketing efforts, helping to ensure they're consistent and cut to the essence of your firm.

The next step? Communicating your brand to the marketplace to get credit for your uniqueness and connect with more new clients.

3 IMPORTANT BRAND QUALITIES:

- IT'S DISTINCTIVE
- IT'S RELEVANT
- IT'S CONSISTENT

COMMUNICATING YOUR BRAND

Law firm advertising falls into two categories. Motivational advertising — such as radio, billboards and direct mail — is used by sellers looking for buyers. TV ads are another example. The consumer did not ask for a commercial to interrupt the television program he or she is watching. As a result, only a small percentage of the audience will be interested in the content of that commercial.

Directional advertising, on the other hand, is designed for buyers who need a particular product or service and are searching for a solution. The Internet and yellow pages are the two prime examples of directional advertising.

The yellow pages, which for many years was the only form of directional advertising available to attorneys, is being replaced by people going online to “Google it.” U.S. print yellow pages revenue declined by nearly 12 percent in 2010, continuing a multiyear slide.¹ Do-not-deliver legislation, opt-in requirements and other nationwide trends further threaten the future of the yellow pages.

Yellow pages publishers have aggressively tried to reinvent themselves as an online-based resource, with limited success. A study conducted by FindLaw, which surveyed more than 5,000 law firms with both a website and a yellow pages directory listing, found that only 1 percent of their traffic was generated by those listings.²

Legal prospects are online. The number of people going online to search for information and solutions, including legal services, continues to increase, permanently changing how law firms market their services.

Why is it so critical to reach prospects via the Web? Consider that:

- 77 percent of Americans use the Internet regularly.³
- 45 percent of online users say the Internet played a significant role in helping them make a major decision (a key financial decision, for example, or hiring a professional).⁴
- 96 percent of homes with \$75,000-plus incomes are online.⁵

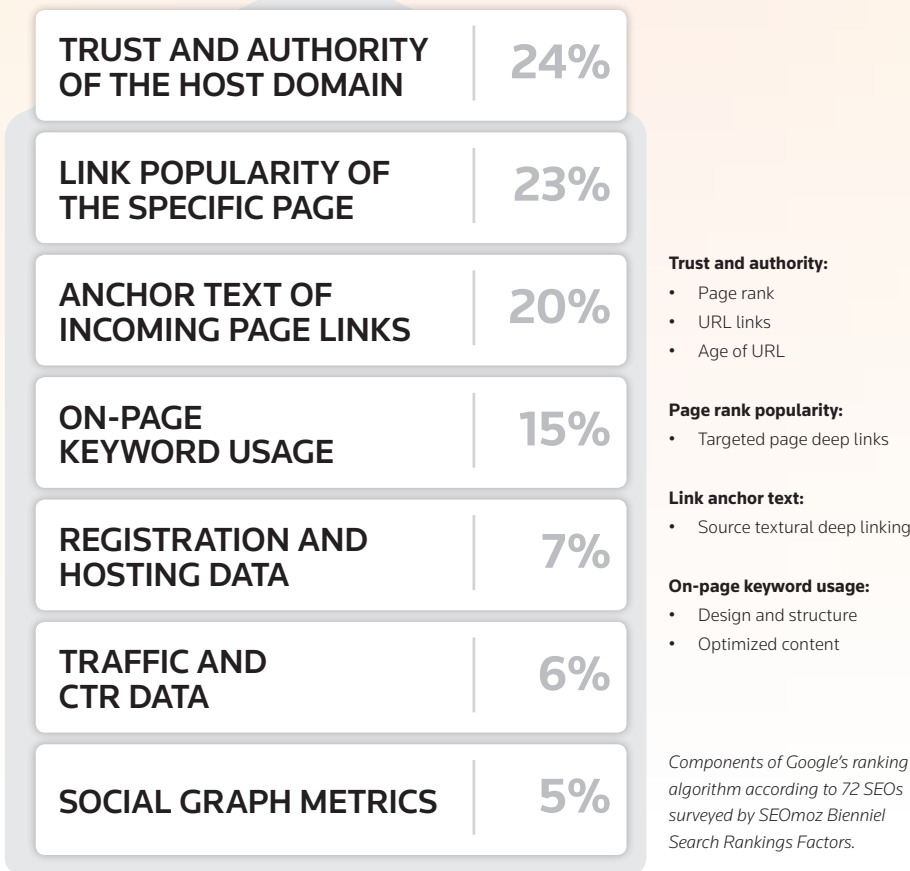
But it's not just the well-off who are connected. About 79 percent of homes with incomes in the \$30,000–\$50,000 range use the Internet as well — above the national average. Men and women are represented in roughly equal numbers. Older people and those who live outside of cities aren't missing out either: More than three-quarters of consumers ages 50–64, and two-thirds of people in rural areas, regularly go online.⁶

A FindLaw study of U.S. consumers and their legal needs found that 90 percent of Internet users start at search engines like Google when they go online for legal information. They're highly motivated — 62 percent contacted a legal professional and did so within one week. And when they take that next step, the most important factor influencing their choice of an attorney (cited by 48 percent of those studied) is “expertise in the particular legal field.”⁷

90 PERCENT OF INTERNET
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“Recommendations from others” is the second most important factor.⁸ Since consumers typically validate referrals online, that's one more reason why it's essential to have a website that's easy to find and drives conversions.

WHAT MATTERS MOST IN SEARCH RANKINGS?



SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

As the number of online clients — and law firms competing for them — expands, the importance of search engine marketing, or SEM, has increased as well. Since most online prospects use search engines as a starting point to find an attorney, understanding a few key points about how they work and how consumers use them can be a competitive advantage for your firm.

Consumer searches on the Internet typically fit into one of three categories:

- 1 Vanity.** "Bankruptcy Attorney San Francisco." Broad search terms that, for lawyers, are highly competitive.
- 2 Non-Vanity.** "Arrested in NYC for possession of illegal drugs need a lawyer." How most consumers search for help with a specific legal need.
- 3 Branded.** "Atlanta lawyer Max Keller." How a person following up on a referral might search for your practice.

BREAKDOWN OF TOTAL LEADS DELIVERED:

37% Branded **34% Non-vanity** **29% Vanity**

- All three types of searches end up delivering roughly the same number of leads to law firms
- Every search type is important to the success of your practice

Source: FindLaw Customer Web Site Study, December 2007 – April 2008.

A FindLaw study that tracked attorney websites and client search phrases over a four-month period, analyzing 51,000 searches, found that the majority of searches (about 63%) are non-vanity. Most people search in their own unique way. Not surprisingly, however, the conversion rate for non-vanity searches tends to be much lower compared to the other two categories. Since a significant number of branded searches are referrals validating the law firm online, it makes sense that a higher percentage are converting and actually contacting the firm, even though the quantity is lower.

The study's key finding was that when it comes to total leads delivered to a law firm, everything roughly levels out. Vanity, non-vanity and branded searches generate about the same number of leads.⁹ Thus each type of search is important to your success. A firm that focuses only on high-profile vanity searches, for example, neglects more than 70 percent of its potential clients.

When prospects enter a search query, Google and other search engines use a complex algorithm to provide the best possible set of results. That algorithm takes a number of factors into account to determine how trustworthy, authoritative and relevant the search engine judges a particular Web page to be, relative to the search query that was submitted. Key factors that search engines consider include site characteristics such as keywords used in the content, but also related factors such as inbound links to the site.

As a result, effective SEM requires a focus on both on-site and off-site optimization.

On-site optimization. To maximize visibility, a law firm's website should be optimized to take into account all three different types of legal searches. One key step is to fill your site with keywords and phrases related to your firm's specific practice area, geographic location and client base. Since most searches are one-of-a-kind non-vanity searches, it's important to focus on words and phrases that are unique to your audience, and relevant — because there is no point going after high rankings for keywords that no one searches for, or that are irrelevant to your firm.

Use a variety of keywords and phrases to describe your firm's practice areas and location: "Milwaukee," "Wisconsin," "eastern Wisconsin" and "Milwaukee County," for example. Remember that your prospects are not attorneys and likely won't use legal terms when they search the Internet — so include references like "car crash" and "auto wreck" in addition to "motor vehicle accident." When you have prospects on the phone or in your office, what words and phrases do they use to describe their legal needs? Incorporate those terms into your site without falling into "keyword stuffing," or repeating the same phrases over and over in a way that affects readability.

Keeping site content fresh and updated is another critical part of effective on-site optimization. Posting an attorney video, an article on a high-profile topic in the headlines or other new content helps to attract search engines and also makes your site more compelling and informative for prospects.

Elements of your site's HTML programming are important for optimizing its visibility to search engines as well, particularly title tags. Title tags are the anchor text on a search-engine results page and also appear at the very top of the Web browser. Similar to the title of a book, the title tag tells users and search engines what the topic of a particular page is. The text within your title tag is given more weight by the search engines than any other text on the page, and as a result it's the best means of improving both search rankings and the click rate from organic search. Ideally, you should create one unique title for each page on your site, using keywords you've chosen carefully.

KEYS TO ON-SITE OPTIMIZATION:

- KEYWORDS
- HEADLINES
- HTML TAGS

Off-site optimization. Third-party endorsement is one of the signals search engines use to help them determine which websites are most relevant to the searcher. By looking at the number, quality and relevancy of websites linking back to your site, search engines are better able to place a value on it. Inbound links tell the search engines that a site has authority for a particular keyword or phrase in the eyes of the web community.

To understand why inbound links are important, think of a website like a restaurant. If a person has the choice between two restaurants — one that's filled with customers, the other virtually deserted — they'll naturally assume that the restaurant with more patrons has better food. That's similar to how search engines evaluate a website. The more websites that point to yours as an authority, the more that search engines will trust your site and rank it higher.

But link quality is as important as quantity. Generating links from law-related websites such as other law firm sites and legal directories is particularly valuable in establishing your relevance, and enhancing your visibility to search engines and prospects.

Search engines frequently update their algorithms, as they apply more and more analytical firepower to matching your content with the searcher's intent. As a result, law firms should regularly review their on-site and off-site optimization strategy. Because this is a complex area of online legal marketing — but one that's absolutely vital for reaching prospects — law firms often rely on professional SEM to maximize their firm's visibility.

KEY ONLINE MARKETING TRENDS

Legal directories, local search, video and social media are key areas for attorneys who want to engage more deeply with prospects and convert them at a higher rate. Now that search engines utilize "universal search" — meaning that the search results they serve up include videos, maps, local business listings, Facebook profiles and other forms of information in addition to traditional text websites — these tools also boost your chance of ranking high in searches that matter to your firm.

Online Legal Directories

The growth of the Internet and the decline of print directories have led to another trend in legal marketing: more people using online legal directories — which pool attorney bios and legal information in a central online location — to research legal issues and find lawyers in a specific geographic location or practice area.

Online legal directories receive millions of visitors every year because they provide:

- An easy, accessible starting point for people who need a lawyer and do not use the yellow pages (a growing majority).
- Search tools that help the user find the right attorney for their specific situation.

Online directories benefit lawyers as well, by linking you to prospects who've come online specifically to solve a legal problem. They need answers and, more often than not, a lawyer. The fact that they're motivated, and can easily search by location or legal need, often means that they're better-qualified leads.

Legal directories are an opportunity to disseminate links to your website, location maps, contact information and other details about your firm — to make a strong impression, in other words, with people who are likely to be serious about taking the next step.

Which online directory is right for your firm? A key factor, of course, is popularity — you want to be seen by as many prospects as possible. One way to analyze traffic statistics is via free, third-party sites. You may also want to focus on directories that offer both

KEYS TO OFF-SITE OPTIMIZATION:

- LINK BUILDING
- WRITE ARTICLES
- BLOGGING

LEGAL DIRECTORIES ARE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISSEMINATE LINKS TO YOUR WEBSITE, LOCATION MAPS, CONTACT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS ABOUT YOUR FIRM.

attorney listings and comprehensive legal information for consumers. That's because about 90 percent of the time, a person will first research their legal need online before deciding to move forward and hire an attorney. Also, keep in mind that it's important to cast a wide net. To ensure that search engines and prospects can find you, take advantage of bar association directories, sites like FindLaw.com and SuperLawyers.com, and other opportunities to generate links and disseminate information about your firm.

Local Search

The Internet reaches legal prospects everywhere, from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine, but for most law firms it's your own backyard that matters most.

Partly due to recent changes to Google results pages, local search is an increasingly key part of effective SEM. A growing number of searches conducted (1 in 5) are local, meaning the consumer is looking for a commodity, service or product within their area. Search results are increasingly local-oriented as well: 1 in 13 results includes a local map, for example.¹⁰ In total, about 57 percent of local searches result in a person contacting a business in their area, and those local leads tend to be high quality – the prospect is more likely to know your firm, and more likely to follow up given their proximity to your office.¹¹

Location and information are two keys to being optimized for local search. When a prospect types in a local search query, Google looks for businesses that a) are close to the geographic center of the searched area, and b) have a Google place page that's optimized for the keywords and phrases used in the search. Law firms should take advantage of the business directory listings that Google Local and other search engines have to offer. Fill them out completely with search-optimized language – because listings with more robust information typically rank higher.

DECODING A GOOGLE SEARCH RESULTS PAGE

The screenshot shows a Google search for "houston personal injury attorney". The results are categorized into several sections:

- BANNER ADS:** Includes ads for "Injury Lawyer Chicago | MaimanLaw.com", "Personal Injury Lawyers | mendon.com", and "Rick McGuire Attorney | rickmcguirelaw.com".
- LOCAL BUSINESS RESULTS:** A map of Houston, TX, with pins for several law firms: Abraham, Watkins, Nichols, Sorrels, Agosto and Friend; Michael P Fleming & Associates PC; Brian White & Associates, P.C.; The Crim Law Firm; Fitts Zehl LLP; Smith and Hassler; and Neese Law Firm, PC.
- LOCAL RESULTS:** A section titled "Local business results for houston personal injury attorney" with a "TX" tag.
- PAY-PER-CLICK:** A pink box highlights ads for "Auto Accident Attorneys", "Personal Injury Lawyer", "Aggressive Injury Lawyers", "Wrongful Death Attorney", "Accident Attorney", and "Personal Injury Lawyer".
- ORGANIC RESULTS:** A yellow box highlights organic search results for "Houston personal injury attorney", "Houston Personal Injury Lawyer | Texas Injury Attorney | Austin...", "Houston Personal Injury Lawyer, Attorney, Houston Car Accidents...", and "FREE Case Review! Texas Personal Injury Lawyers | Houston Car...".

ORGANIC SEARCH RESULTS ARE THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE

Validation is also important. A local listing that's not supported by citations on other websites are unlikely to rank high, because search engines have no way to confirm that listing. The key is to build trust by getting your firm name, contact information and other details out via a wide range of relevant, reliable sites. Links to your website from law-related sites such as online legal directories are particularly valuable. By taking advantage of directories, local community websites and other opportunities to promote your firm, you may generate more leads directly. But just as important, you'll help search engines validate your site as a trustworthy legal resource, increasing its chances of ranking high in relevant local searches.

Keep in mind that most search engine result pages contain both organic and sponsored (pay-per-click) results. The organic, unpaid listings typically are the most cost-effective way for law firms to generate visibility, both in local searches and overall. While pay-per-click can be useful in some cases, particularly for law firms with a niche practice, six out of every seven "clicks" on a search engine are generated by organic links.¹²

Online Video

Online video is filling a large part of the void created by the decline of print yellow pages. About 84 percent of Internet users watch video.¹³ Increasingly, it's how people entertain themselves, get news and gather the information they need to make important decisions. The online video channel YouTube, for example, is now the Internet's second-largest search engine behind Google.

Video's popularity is only expected to go up. It's estimated that by 2014, more than half (57 percent) of traffic on the Internet will be video traffic.¹⁴

Online video is a potent brand-building tool for law firms. The power of video to both engage and inform — to promote a business in a warm, personal way while still providing useful information — makes it ideally suited for law firm marketing. Placing videos on your website and other popular sites can enhance brand awareness, give you high-impact exposure points across the Internet and help prospects verify that "this is someone I want to work with." It's the next best thing to a face-to-face conversation.

What style of video drives visibility most effectively? For law firms, clips that feature you and your colleagues describing your practice — the unique strengths that set it apart, what prospects can expect, next steps should they decide to move forward — can go a long way toward minimizing the intimidation factor and encouraging viewers to follow up.

Additionally, creating video that addresses a specific legal issue or topic (birth injuries, for example) with practical next steps further establishes your expertise in the area. It also provides indexable content for search engines, so that consumers searching for legal help on that particular topic will be able to find your firm.

Creating a compelling video that people respond to is important. To ensure it makes an impact, however, distribution is also critical. The goal is to be seen by as many people as possible, on your website but also on legal directories and third-party sites like YouTube. Disseminating video across as many services and viewers as possible attracts more eyes, generates increased traffic to your website and enhances search engine optimization as well — because video listings are one more way to appear in search results that are relevant to your practice.

Online video is a dynamic, evolving area. It's key to select a video provider that combines knowledge of the legal industry and online advertising with strong technical expertise. One critical emerging issue, for example, is compatibility with mobile devices such as cell phones. There will be 74 million U.S. mobile Internet video users by 2015, up from 21 million in 2010.¹⁵ Reaching your share of those video-savvy people will be a challenge — and a significant opportunity — moving forward.

ONLINE VIDEO

A proven strategy for communicating your message and enhancing your brand awareness.



84 PERCENT OF INTERNET USERS WATCH VIDEO.

Social Media

Social media — a range of Web properties, tools and applications that help people connect with each other online — includes some of the Internet’s most popular sites, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Internet users spend 906 million hours monthly on social media.¹⁶ Businesses are embracing social media as well. More than 700,000 local companies have active Facebook pages, for example. Forrester Research estimates that by 2014, business will spend more than \$3.1 billion yearly in the social media space.

An effective social media presence helps educate people about your firm, build relationships and generate word-of-mouth recommendations. A blog, a Twitter feed, your presence on Facebook: they’re tools that enable you to proactively manage your reputation, build credibility and generate search hits (since search engines like Google “read” Facebook, Twitter and blogs).

To extend your firm’s reach on social media, it’s important to build an audience by establishing “friends,” “connections” and “followers.” Connect to the businesses, people and pages relevant to the firm and its practice areas. A few creative ways to build your audience include:

- Connecting with members of your local bar association as well as fellow attendees at legal events, seminars and CLEs.
- Joining online legal professional or practice-area-specific networking groups.
- Commenting on other people’s blogs, posts and tweets, to get your name out and show that you are an active part of the online social media community.
- Including “connect” messages in your printed materials and TV or radio ads.

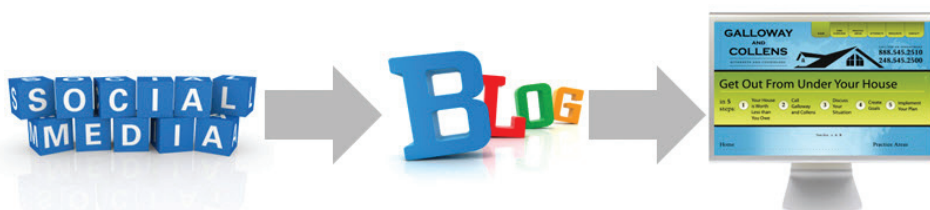
Here are a few general rules that can help you drive engagement and establish your authority across all social media channels:

Rule #1: Listen. It may seem paradoxical, but one of the best communication tools you have at your disposal is the ability to listen to what people are saying in the social media sphere. Whether you set up a Google Alert for a particular topic or simply devote a small amount of time each day to scanning Twitter updates, active listening will inform you about others’ interests and give you insights into new opportunities for your firm.

Rule #2: Invest time. Social media is a conversation. By setting aside time on a regular basis to post updates and respond to comments, you’ll help ensure that your information is engaging and that users who want to connect with you don’t feel ignored. You’re busy and have a legal practice to run, but devoting even five minutes to day to social media can generate real value for your law firm. Keep your profiles up to date and ensure they reflect any new accomplishments or changes at your firm.

AN EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE HELPS EDUCATE PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR FIRM, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND GENERATE WORD-OF-MOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS.

PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND BLOGGING CAN EFFECTIVELY DRIVE POTENTIAL CLIENTS TO YOUR WEBSITE AND TO ULTIMATELY CONTACT YOU.



Rule #3: Don't be afraid to have fun. It's important to stay professional, but most consumers of social media will react positively if you take the periodic opportunity to lighten the mood and put a relatable, human face on your firm. Step back occasionally and ask yourself a few questions. Are my updates "push" only, meaning that I'm only sharing information and never asking questions or sharing at a human level? Do my updates give the impression that I'm overly serious and lack a sense of humor? Rely on your natural conversational skills to guide you.

The final rule is to understand the rules. Be sure to check with the ABA and your state bar for the guidelines surrounding social media usage.

Given the nature of the legal industry, you may not experience an overwhelming amount of audience engagement through social media. Every time a follower does mention your firm or re-tweet your message, however, it's an opportunity for your firm. Treat every mention as an enquiry and every retweet as a social referral, and respond to them just as you would to a potential client who leaves you a voicemail. Likewise, just as you would thank a colleague or client for a referral or endorsement, thank the social media users who go out of their way to promote your firm and its online content.

The bottom line is that done well, social media can help you build a positive, authoritative presence online — one that drives referrals, generates traffic to your website and brings new clients through the front door.

CONCLUSION

The Internet is a chance to create your own destiny — to define your firm and build the type of practice you want.

A key step in that process is to identify your brand: what it is today, and where you want it to be moving forward. A strong, distinctive brand that consistently stands for something unique is a competitive advantage in a legal marketplace where consumers often are overwhelmed by choice.

Attorneys traditionally used the yellow pages to build their brand, but today most consumers go online to find legal help. The website now is at the heart of most legal marketing strategies. The keys to a successful website are good visibility, site design that reinforces your brand and content that engages site visitors. Professional search engine marketing is one way to help ensure your site is found by prospects who need your help.

But increasingly, online legal marketing isn't just about a website. As an attorney, your online opportunities are expanding and taking on innovative new forms. Today, everything from maps to tweets to blogs appear in Google results. Resources like online video and social media are powerful, emerging ways to connect with new clients.

Leveraging those online marketing trends in support of a strong, clearly defined brand is the key to a cost-effective, successful client development strategy that can help your law firm achieve its goals.

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 websites 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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