

The Internet and Telecommunications

Content and Appearance

The claims are coming fast and furious about your need to market on the web, “one personal injury firm picked up two new clients within a week after their home page was launched”, “one corporate law firm picked up enough business to pay for its site” and so on. Do you need a presence on the web? Yes, for several reasons. But approach your involvement and investment with caution. It is very difficult to quantify the actual number of visitors to a site within a week’s time and the reason you were visited. We know that there are millions of users, but do they actually connect to your site? If so, the reason is not entirely clear.

The ideal web site is one with substantively useful content that attracts repeat visitors and becomes known as the “expert” in a particular specialty area. Before developing your site, there are several questions that must be considered. For example, what image are you trying to project and how do you want to communicate that to your audience? What are the results you want - return visits to site, phone calls, or e-mail to your firm? What is the purpose(s) and audience for your site?

Once you decide upon the main purposes and audience, then the gathering of content can begin. There can be several reasons why you may wish to develop a web site. The main ones are:

- Attract clients;
- Service current clients;
- Attract new attorneys;
- Legal industry and press;
- Referral from other attorneys;
- Provide contact information;
- Enhance reputation;
- Increase revenue for the firm while decreasing costs;
- Changing your practice focus;
- Marketing.

For example, if one of the purposes of the web site is to recruit lawyers, then you want to include the following content.

- Tell recruits why this would be a great place to work;

- Describe anticipated work experience and opportunities;
- List significant clients;
- Don't be stuffy, provide the truth and about the firm and what is expected of recruits;

- Provide the firm demographics of the counsel - men vs. women, minorities, partners vs. associate, average time to become partner, etc.;
- Hiring policies - selection criteria, grades, experience, past experience, personality type sought after - rainmakers, etc.
- How many positions are available?
- Do a profile story of an associate.

Most law firms see client relationship management and their web site as separate initiatives. They are not separate initiatives and can assist in creating and supporting existing client relationships. For example, on-line systems that trace your client's whereabouts on your web site or extranet can help a firm track your client's needs and wants. Their on-line experience with your web site should carry over to e-mail contact with their attorneys or follow up phone calls. This type of recurring relationship will cement your relationship with your clients. Technology interactive relationships can assist getting feedback from your clients. Customers are beginning to demand immediacy in their interactions with legal professionals, they want substance to their on-line interactions, want to be involved in their case with the attorney either administratively or through Extranets, and they want the firm information to be relevant to their individual business or client needs.

Your WWW site can be the hub of communications with your clients. There are many present communication methods to solidify your relationship with your clients. Today, we can send e-mail to clients containing legal articles or other firm materials. Along with files, we have the capability to "open" select environments or Extranets for your clients for form libraries, discussion forums, questions and surveys, and a host of other applications. Your clients are also constructing web pages for a presence of their own on the WWW. Don't forget newsgroups. If your clients and potential clients engage in discussions with others in specific newsgroups, be sure you participate. The capabilities of the WWW are being updated and now full motion interactive video with sound is available. In essence, one will dial you up through the web for dynamic one-on-one communication. For example, new "collaboration technology" allows firms to take control of a customer's browser, and like looking over their shoulder, enable the law office clerk or attorney help the potential or existing client directly. If an existing client has trouble locating certain information, he could instantly share the problem with someone from your firm who could take control of the client's browser and push appropriate web pages to them. For an example of this technology visit the Lands End site (www.landsend.com).

Content

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

Provide resources that are not easily accessible. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about a particular area of the law, such as automobile accidents, would be useful to someone who was just in an automobile accident. The content will convey the firm's image.

Clients can also use FAQ's on your web site for review. For example, law firms can provide basic information about a Chapter VII bankruptcy. If the FAQ is good it provides a very unobtrusive way of marketing your firm, since potential clients and others will be referred to your firm to view the FAQ.

Other content suggestions:

- Newsletters, memoranda, book excerpts, articles, briefs, seminar material, sample forms - contracts, etc.
- Audio - speeches, presentations, informative videos on substantive legal areas.
- CD-ROM briefs, multimedia trial documents, video, or audio feed from a trial. Voice or audio clips are a plus if well done and professional.
- Download now - 10 steps to preserving your rights after an automobile accident, etc.

- PowerPoint clips of seminar presentations, etc.
- Date your pages.
- All materials, such as newsletters, must be updated at reasonable intervals.

- Have a reason why they would want to return to your site, such as a starting point for their research.
- Material should be written in a conversational rather than a “legalese” method.
- Presentations can be made to clients and others on the Internet, Intranet, or Extranet. You can create a central repository of presentations which can be accessible on-line or for downloading.

Suggested links to other sites for your clients to keep them returning to your site:

- Links to related professional or government agencies regulating your clients;
- Links to newsgroups or mailing lists on web sites with information related to your practice area;
- Other organizations that may offer useful information to your clients, link to your client’s sites, unpublished decisions, new regulations, agency memos, etc.;
- Discussion forums.

Visitor or client information:

- Client intake forms;
- Guest book survey forms;
- E-mail subscription forms;
- Interactive content;
- Consultation intake forms.

Site tips:

- Ease of navigation;
- Search engine for site;
- Site index;
- Make sure links are up to date and are working;
- Last update notation;
- Make sure it is fast loading;
- Simple, clear and uncluttered;
- Easy to navigate with Table of Contents, etc.;
- Easy to remember domain name;
- Appropriate font size;
- Law firm name on each page;

- Ensure a text only alternative;
- Minimize graphics, it slows down the navigating;
- Make your site browser friendly. Ensure that Netscape, Internet Explorer, Mosaic, CompuServe, and America Online browsers all view your site appropriately.

Client area

- Password protected;
- Updated relevant links;
- Interactive features;
- Coordinate with individual marketing efforts.

Firm information

- Determine how to distinguish yourself from other firms and attorneys. Tell what you do, do not over emphasize who you are;
- Firm content - provide a service description, resumes and other credentials of your firm;
- Photos of firm - provide exterior and interior photos of the firm;
- Contact Information - provide a lawyer biography, picture, e-mail address, phone number, address, etc. Consider an audio or video of the attorney;
- Representative clients - list clients represented by your firm;
- Location - provide branch office locations and directions to firm;
- Fees - provide a description of your fees;
- Encryption information - set forth where public keys for the firm's lawyers are located.

Review the WWW pages of other law firms.

- Easy to use, simple to navigate, and very accessible to the average browser. Cooley, Godware - www.cooley.com ;
- Provides a version of their site in Spanish. Haynes and Boone - www.hayboo.com ;
- "Internet case digest" is updated weekly and an excellent summary of Internet law. Perkins Coie - www.perkinscoie.com ;

- Provides hundreds of free articles on consumer law. The Consumer Law page - www.consumerlawpage.com ;
- Reviews law firms web sites twice per year (past sites are available, no longer reviewing sites) - Redstreet - www.redstreet.com ;
- E-mail with newsletters and on-line discussions. Arent Fox Kintner Plotkin - www.arentfox.com .
- Immigration law site - clients can fill in a form to participate in the green card lottery. Siskind & Susser - www.visalaw.com ;
- Publications available on ecommerce, etc. E-commerce Attorney - <http://www.ecommerceattorney.com/publications.html> ;
- List of useful resources about law firm web sites. Dennis Kennedy - www.denniskennedy.com ;
- Lots of free content and links - Cooley Godward - www.cooley.com ;
- Communication law. Pepper & Corazzini - www.commlaw.com ;
- Tax information. The Tax Prophet - www.taxprophet.com ;

“The Internet plays a vital role in just about every aspect of our practice. I myself do client consultations

We want to be the online source for information on Mark Siskind's immigration law. We have worked for five years to