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How To Make Your Website The Hub Of A Successful Online Legal Marketing Strategy

By Stephen Fairley

It is an undeniable fact that if you do not have a robust online presence, you are risking irrelevance. Without an online presence, your law firm is not even part of the discussion for the 75 percent of consumers who are looking for an attorney online. And yet, there are still attorneys who look at their online strategy as a “money waster” instead of a powerful marketing opportunity. Why? Most likely because they have been taken advantage of by one of the 800 pound gorilla SEO companies who lock you into three-year contracts with their “proprietary content management system” or perhaps they didn’t have clear expectations and goals when they launched their Web presence or maybe there was no accountability with their Web company. I come across attorneys every day who have poured tens of thousands of dollars into SEO and PPC only to get very little in return. On the flip side, there are attorneys out there who have had massive success with their website, bringing a steady stream of new clients into their practice. All Websites Are Not Created Equal! We have worked with over 18,000 attorneys and we have encountered just about every kind of website there is. There are some that are great, many that are mediocre, and a lot of the ugly and ineffective. As you can imagine, the attorneys who have the bad websites are the ones who think online marketing is a waste of money! And for them, it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy!

So what makes the difference between a great website and an ineffective one? It all starts with the planning that goes on when the process begins. Let me clear this up right away.

The purpose of a law firm website is to grow revenue by attracting a steady stream of the right kind of clients to your practice.

Stephen Covey, author of the book, “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” says that one of the cardinal rules is to “begin with the end in mind,” The “end in mind” you should be thinking about when deciding on a website is, how will my website generate quality leads?

Are there other desirable outcomes from your website? Sure, here are a few:

- Increase your law firm's brand.
- Create awareness of your law firm.
- Promote your services.
- Schedule appointments.
- Provide client support.

But please understand that all these points are moot if you do not get enough new clients coming through your doors and the No. 1 goal of your website is lead generation. So if your website is not producing the results you want, here is a thinking guide that can be a roadmap for you and your partners to follow that is actually the process we use with our legal consulting clients.

What Are Your Website Goals?

The primary goal of your website is to generate qualified leads. These leads will never be as qualified as a referral, but over time Web leads can exponentially outweigh the number of referrals you receive. From the beginning you want to set up measurable and realistic goals. For example, a 25 percent increase in the number of unique visitors per quarter, which leads to 10 new inquiries per month. Try to start out with modest goals; I have seen some firms that set unrealistic goals for a website (get on the first page of Google in 90 days) and quickly lose interest when they fail to hit those unrealistic targets.

What Do You Want On Your Website – Choose Your Weapons!

There are many features you can add to your website; some make more sense for certain kinds of practices. As you might imagine, some of the things you would expect to find on a personal injury firm's website may not work on a business litigation website. Below is a list of features you should consider adding to your website.

- *Video*: This is a proven conversion tool! Law firms that use video on their website convert more traffic into leads and Web visitors stay longer with video.
- *Instant chat*: Law firms who use live, monitored chat on their website typically receive 10-30 more leads per month.
- *Social media feed*: If you are active on social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter), you can connect your website to your social media account and have it live stream your updates.
- *Free resources*: This can be a free e-book, PDF or even a printed, self-published booklet. The topic must be something of perceived value to your prospects.
- *Blog*: If you want to drive more traffic to your website than start updating your blog at least three to five times per week with unique articles.
- *Newsletter signup*: Every law firm should send out a monthly electronic newsletter to keep in touch with potential clients, former clients and referral sources.

If one of your goals is to build a big list of possible clients, free resources and a monthly newsletter work better than anything! Offer a free report in exchange for the prospect's name and email address and you can quickly build a list of people who have "raised their hand" as someone who is potentially interested in your services.

Our clients have found live chat on their website to be the absolute best conversion tool! One of our family law clients was getting three to five good leads per month off their website ... until they started using live chat. In the first month of use, this firm had over 20 qualified leads – just off live chat. The next month, he received 35 leads from chat and it's been steadily increasing since then! We are a firm believer in live chat as one of the most cost-effective tools to generate more leads from your website. However, be aware that with instant chat, you must have someone who is watching for the leads to come in and responding to them as fast as possible. If you want more information on the live chat service we use visit www.RainmakerChat.com.

What 'Look' Do You Want Your Website To Have?

The look of your website will play a more important role in its success than you might imagine. Numerous studies show that you have less than 30 seconds to turn a browser into a visitor upon arrival on your website. Some studies have reported it to be much less. Your website must appear clear, clean and professional for it to be deemed credible and trustworthy or your visitors won't spend any time there. Website design is a constantly evolving field. If you haven't refreshed your website in the last three years, make it a priority to get started this year.

In order for you to know the look and feel you are after, you want to study your target audience, your perfect client. Keeping in mind your perfect client, consider some of the following styles:

- Corporate.
- Warm and friendly.
- Hi-tech and modern.
- Conservative.
- Small, personal office.
- Large law firm presence.

A firm specializing in business litigation would probably want to use more of a corporate, conservative, and large presence type of style, while a solo divorce attorney might choose the warm, personal and friendly style.

Who Is Going To Write All That Content?

Not everyone is good at writing the kind of content that can stir other people into action. The job of your home page copy is to intellectually connect with the visitor about a future outcome that is good for them, and then make them emotionally committed to take action to achieve that future outcome. That isn't as easy as it may sound!

Thou Shalt Not Be Boring!

Keep in mind that if someone is on your law firm's website, they aren't just cruising around with nothing better to do. They are there because they have a problem that they believe you may be able to solve. Your copy needs to convince them you have the solution to their problem, and that has to come up very early in the conversation to keep them on your website. This is crucial; the people who land on your website are looking for the solution to their problem!

You will have to decide whether to write your own copy, or have a professional assist or do it for you. Your content is crucial and this can make the difference between a website that delivers and one that doesn't.

We usually recommend to clients that they use the services of a professional copywriter because attorneys may know the law, but their writing is often too technical and stale to motivate a Web visitor to pick up the phone and call.

You Are NOT Your Client!

They don't think like you; they don't research like you; and they don't buy like you. A good copywriter knows how to talk and think like your prospect. A good copywriter will help you convey all your best thoughts and create a strong connection with your prospective clients.

How Will The Search Engines Know About My Website?

Getting Google to rank your website high is a much harder task than you might imagine. In fact, there is an entire industry that has been created based upon helping businesses get their websites ranked high on the search engines. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a multibillion-dollar industry. There are so many tricks of the trade that it is rarely worth the time for any attorney to attempt to become an expert. Instead, hire one. However, before you hire one I recommend you do some reading to learn the basics. Here are two websites that provide a lot of great education for people getting into SEO: moz.com and searchengineland.com.

Key Points To Remember

- To be without a robust Web presence is to risk irrelevance for your law firm.
- All websites are not created equal.
- The purpose of a website for your firm is to generate qualified leads.
- Law firm marketing is a process, not an overnight event.

Two-time international bestselling author, Stephen Fairley is CEO of The Rainmaker Institute, LLC, the nation's largest law firm marketing company specializing in marketing and lead conversion for small to medium law firms. Over 18,000 attorneys nationwide have benefited from learning and implementing the proven Rainmaker Marketing System. Over the last 16 years, he has become a nationally recognized legal marketing expert and been named, "America's Top Marketing Coach." He has spoken numerous times for over 35 of the nation's largest state and local bar associations and has a large virtual footprint with his highly successful Rainmaker legal marketing blog. For more information, please visit www.TheRainmakerInstitute.com or call (888) 588-5891.

