

WRITING ATTORNEY BIOS FOR THE WEB: SEO TIPS

By Jayne Navarre, Rob Kahn and Adam Stock

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process by which Web pages are improved to better rank in the results of the most popular search engines. Attorney biographies, like all other Web pages, need to be optimized so that clients can easily find you (or your unique services) when searching in popular search engines like Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft (LiveSearch/MSN) and Ask. Following these few pointers will help your bio rise to or near the top of search engine results.

Your Name

For search engines, content is king. But remember, the most common search term that clients will be using to find you is YOUR NAME. Make sure your name is prominently featured on the bio, such as in the headings (<h1> or <h2> tag) as well as in the body of your bio. Your name should also be part of the pages title (in the <title> tag). You will know this is done correctly by looking at the very top of your Web browser while on your bio page. Does your name appear on the very top bar, next to the browser logo? If not, your name is not in the title tag. If you have a photo on your Web bio, the alt attribute of the image tag should also include your name. Does your name appear as a little pop up when you hold your mouse over your photo? If not, your image does not have a title tag with your name.

Many law firm Web sites manage attorney biographies with a database. Commonly, the database generates a number as the URL for each attorney bio page, which corresponds to the location in the database; such as www.yourlawfirm.com/attorney-517.asp. Since page URLs are the first thing a search engine catalogs, the bio page URL is best optimized when it contains the attorney's name rather than just a number. A sophisticated content management system (CMS) will allow you to assign a unique text URL to each page in your site. The attorney bio page should look something like this - www.yourfirm.com/attorney-james-brown.htm. Using the dash rather than an underscore between words in the URL tells the search engine that these are separate words. Typically, someone searching for "James Brown attorney" would not enter the search term as "jamesbrownattorney," "james_brown" or even brownj. Any combination that does not have the dash means the search engine sees the URL as one word. While it is likely that the query would return the same or similar results, it is simply a good idea to use a dash in the URL for better accuracy and a better shot at the top position in the search results.

Your Practice

Your Web bio is not the time for perfect prose. Consistency and repetition of key phrases help search engines understand that the term is highly relevant for your bio page. Are you a municipal bond tax specialist in Delaware? Say it proud! Several times. The same way.

Think of the various search terms people might use when seeking your special expertise. If you are unsure about how clients might be searching for your practice use the tools available on the Web

that are provided by many search engines to help you determine the most popular search words and phrases, such as the [keyword tool from Google](#). Of course, some issues are topical so don't get too nuanced or trendy. That's what client alerts are for. Remember, in addition to your legal practice, your location might also be important to potential clients looking for expertise in a particular jurisdiction.

Inbound and Outbound Links

Another important determination of relevancy and popularity of a Web page is inbound and outbound links. Inbound links are the links on other pages that point to your bio; outbound links are the links on your bio that take readers to other pages.

A rich source of inbound and outbound links for your bio is the other pages on your firm's Web site. Wherever possible, if your name appears on the firm's Web site, make it a link to your bio page. Ensure that all links are absolute, fully qualified and are written the same way. Similarly, link key words in the body text of your bio, such as practice group names (i.e. "climate change" or "environmental compliance"), to those practice group pages.

Search engines also like links out of a site. If you are comfortable linking out, for instance to case law, a client in a case study or involvement in a group or association that is highly relevant to your practice, take that text and link out to the Web site where it can be found. You might want to change your settings so linking out opens a new browser and does not lead the visitor out of your site.

Another good source of outbound links is attorney-authored articles that appear elsewhere on the Web. If your firm places a lot of content outside your Web site that includes attorney names, such as articles, alerts and press releases, make sure they are also optimized and that your name is a live link back to your bio. This includes when your name is in a PDF. Most search engines now scan PDFs as long as the document is not locked.

When you create links, always add the title tag and name the link with key words. Using the words "click here" as the link is less relevant to the search engine. For example, which of these do you think will be better indexed in a search engine?

For James Browns Bio, [click here](#), or
[James Brown's Bio](#)

Does anyone enter the search terms "click here?" Imagine how many returns you'd get for those terms!

For the marketing department, they should track important key words for each attorney. This will help them consistently refer to the same or similar key words when adding additional content elsewhere or writing media releases.

Also, do not overlook the power of alumni or philanthropic connections. When possible, link out to your law school or college alumni page. If you are an active donor for a cause or hold a board

position in a community or philanthropic organization, include a link to the site. If they have a page that lists member or alumni names or the board of directors is named on their site, request that a link be established to your bio page. A simple e-mail should get that done. Let them know that you have reciprocated with a link out to their Web site as well.

And finally, you may want to consider having the Web site address in your e-mail signature link to your bio rather than the firm's home page. Ditto for any hard copy announcement, press release or article you publish. Spell it out. www.mylawfirm.com/attorney-james-brown.htm or mylawfirm.com/attorney-james-brown.

As you can tell, optimizing a bio for search engines is a lot of work, but it can be fun too and help you to more clearly describe and focus your practice in simple terms.

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