

From the Great Jakes Blog

Your bio is not an obituary!

A conversation with Kelly Hoey, strategic networking consultant



By Robert Algeri, Founder
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Followers of our blog know that we champion attorney bios. In fact, the entire Great Jakes website platform is built on the premise that bios are the single most important part of a law firm website. So it was of great interest to me when my friend Kelly Hoey told me about a recent consulting project focused on – you guessed it – attorney bios.

Kelly, a noted “connector, advisor and project solver,” was invited by an AmLaw 200 law firm to conduct an attorney bio workshop. The goal was to help the attorneys make their bios more engaging and effective.



Kelly Hoey

Below are some highlights from our conversation about her experience working with the attorneys and their bios.

What prompted your client – an AmLaw 200 firm – to conduct a bio workshop?

They were launching a new website and the CMO was interested in rethinking what attorneys were communicating on their bios pages. The CMO recognized that there was room for improvement.

Did the firm consider the bios to be important?

Definitely. This particular firm closely watches their website user statistics. They know that the attorney bios are the most viewed pages on their site. However, they were particularly struck by a statistic from the 2011 BTI study “How Clients Hire” that showed that 45% of current in-house counsel (current clients) periodically review their attorney’s bio. That got everyone’s attention.

Why did this stat strike a chord?

Those are their current clients — and they could be re-assessing their choice of attorney! That stat made it super-clear that attorney bios are now a viable way to share information with both current clients *and* prospects. This means that updating the bio can't be a once-a-year endeavor. That's just not going to cut it anymore.

As I understand it, three attorneys volunteered to have their bios overhauled during the workshop.

What advice did you offer them?

This firm has an entrepreneurial mindset. So, every attorney had a willingness to consider new ideas, particularly the three brave souls that volunteered. Here are some key points I told them to consider:

1. **Perspective:** Try viewing the bio from your client's perspective. Does your bio highlight transactions or cases that *the client* would find significant?
2. **Appearance:** It's important to organize the content to make it readable. No endless paragraphs! No pages that scroll forever! Think bullet points.
3. **Curate:** You don't need to put everything up there. Have just enough information so that a potential client says, "This person clearly has the skill-set that I need, let's talk to them."

How did you help the attorneys think through what information they should include?

There are four questions that I encourage every attorney to ask themselves when they update their bio:

1. What work are you known for?
2. What type of work do you want more of?
3. Who is your target client?
4. Why should someone hire you – how are you different?

Did you make any across-the-board recommendations?

One thing I suggested was that they could share more about themselves. For example, if an attorney did lots of charitable work – or was really involved in her community — that should come across clearly in her bio. That type of information can really make a connection with people.

Also, their bios were very uniform in tone from attorney to attorney – and I recommended that they move away from rigid standards. One of the attorneys I worked with serves mostly owners of construction companies. It makes sense that the tone of her bio be less formal than an attorney whose clients are all corporate GCs. She might even want to refer to herself by her first name in her bio.

We're seeing more and more "oddball" content on law firm websites (like video, podcasts and photos). I'm curious if you expect this firm to add oddball content to bios in the near future?

It wouldn't surprise me! There was such an understanding and enthusiasm for differentiating their bios for the purpose of business development. This was not a group that was about to jump onto the next hot trend – *but* if there was a better way to connect with their clients, I think that they'd do it.

What about attorney profile photos?

I told one attorney – the moment that I met her – that she needs a new photo. She looked 25 years younger in real life! Coincidentally, the night before her client told her the same thing. I hate getting my picture taken, so I understand people that are reluctant. But it's sooooo important!

That's fascinating. Are you saying that she never met her client before?

That's correct, not until the night before the workshop.

That ties into a trend that we've seen – that geography matters less and less in the hiring of attorneys.

Exactly! One of the attorneys I worked with was a commercial real estate attorney with cross-border expertise. She never meets some of her clients – but they definitely look at her bio and the types of transactions she's handled.

So, what do you think, are these attorneys going to change their bios?

They were completely on-board. Within several hours of the program many of the attorneys had submitted changes to the firm's marketing department to revise their bios.

Do you have any parting wisdom to share about attorney bios?

Yes. Ask yourself, right now – at this very moment – why should you be hired? That's what needs to be in your bio. Also – remember that your bio is not an obituary!

Not an obituary? That's funny. What exactly do you mean by that?

Two things. First, it needs to communicate vitality – and lots of attorney bios fail to do this. Also, it doesn't need to be a catalog of your entire career. Just answer the question “why should you be hired, today.” Chances are, if it happened once in 1982, that's not really helping your cause today.