

Law Firm Landing Pages

Steve Matthews | August 2009

Once you remove content publishing from the equation, there are typically four major entry points into law firm websites: the homepage, practice pages, lawyer profiles and regional office pages. For this month's web law connected column, I thought it might be interesting to offer comments on each of these pages, and issues I've seen from a search marketing perspective.

The law firm homepage: The firm homepage is obviously the most important entry point for a firm website and can often be a prime battleground when stakeholders are trying to ensure the strongest aspects of the firm are reflected in the site design. But with regard to search exposure, there are two pointers that most firms could benefit from:

1. *Owning the short common form* of their firm name in the search engines – which is frequently the number one search phase visitors use to arrive at your site; and,
2. *Including important keywords in the homepage title* that clearly represent the firm's services.

Firms that consider keyword phrasing when developing their official 'tag line' also put themselves at an advantage for search placement.

Practice pages: These pages define your service lines and help clarify to visitors exactly what types of work you have experience with. If you don't explicitly detail each area of practice, the search engines won't have subject-relevant text to index, and the site will never be found for related searches. This sounds intuitive, and it is; but the vast majority of law firms are guilty of under-detailing their services online.

More considerations:

- Don't embed too many topics on a single practice page;
- Isolate any sub-elements of service descriptions that may have search demand;
- Use the practice homepage as a secondary index to sub-pages – bulleted lists can be very effective as jumping off points to more detailed descriptions;
- Don't forget to include a 'call to action' and to provide an appropriate contact point for the group.

Lawyer profile pages: Interestingly, lawyer profiles are probably the most intellectually honest targets that should rank for the terms *lawyer* or *attorney*. That's not always the case as they often compete with solo practitioner websites, but when properly coded (eg. proper page titles) these pages do have an excellent opportunity to compete. Probably the most common problem I see with profile pages, though, is the

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inability to rank well for the *short common form* of a lawyer's name. A problem that can normally be resolved with proper title tags, dropping (excessive) use of the middle initial, and increasing incoming link references using the more common form.

Lawyer profile pages are an extremely important element to online marketing, and being found for the common form of your name is critical. Consider this scenario: you just gave a lunch presentation to 200 industry insiders. How many of them will search for you? And do you know what they will find? In a working environment as large as some firms, lawyer profiles can be one of the few opportunities to stand out. Your profile page isn't just about Google-cold-calls. A findable lawyer profile means you're supporting all aspects of your chosen marketing efforts – both online and off.

Regional office pages: Larger multi-office firms, whether national or international, are sometimes seen at a disadvantage when it comes to ranking for regional search phrases, especially when local firms can put all their focus on homepage optimization, and larger firms must represent their brand as more geographically diverse. One work-around that seems to be gaining strength is to utilize the regional office pages as landing page opportunities. If the website's navigation structure includes an appropriate amount of cross-linking, and the on-page optimization is appropriately targeted, these pages will have a much better ranking in the search results. We don't see this tactic too often in the Canadian market, but it is being used by a number of US-based firms.

Conclusion

We tend to focus a lot on content when it comes to legal web marketing, and rightly so, as it remains an important key to long-term profile building. But what's easy to forget is that legal businesses (from the solo lawyer to the large law firm) have other facets that can create exposure and potentially drive work. Law firm websites are frequently accused of being 'brochure sites', but without some elements of a brochure, ie. *telling people what services you offer*, firms can potentially paint an incomplete picture.

If search engines are sending the vast majority of traffic to most law firm websites, then it is incumbent on firms to consider what's driving those visitors. Removing individuals with a prior firm/lawyer relationship, recruiting efforts, etc., I see two strong rationales relating to business development. First, is the sophisticated consumer conducting research – likely connecting to firm content published on their selected topic or issue. And second, is a far simpler proposition — the individual simply looking for a local practitioner with relevant experience.

Law firm websites need to meet both of these information-seeking strategies. Either exposure opportunity will do, especially if you leave a positive impression.

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