



Legal Vertical Strategies

When is a Website More Than a Website?

By Debra Baker & Cathy Kenton
Principals
Legal Vertical Strategies
March 2010

When is a Website More Than a Website?

Successful web redesigns provide value beyond marketing alone

By Debra Baker & Cathy Kenton

For years, Legal Vertical Strategies has helped clients create compelling websites. So when we decided to redesign our own site, we thought it would be easy.

Our initial focus was twofold. We wanted a site that reflects the latest in design standards and a site that would serve as a platform for a broader online media strategy.

We weren't concerned about content. As messaging specialists, we had put a lot of time into our existing content. We were confident it reflected who we are and what our brand meant, both to ourselves and to our clients.

It wasn't until we delved into the design process that we realized our "story"—our brand position—was not as clear as we thought it was. The content we created nearly three years ago was strong, but it no longer reflected who we are today.

We see this all the time with clients, but it caught us off guard. It reminded us why we don't let our clients take short cuts when it comes to messaging. So we decided to apply the same successful methodology to our site that we use with clients.

We started with a situational analysis. We collected internal perceptions from our team. We looked at what other companies similar to ours were doing. And, most important, we talked to our clients to find out why they work with us, what they think we do best, and what makes us different.

These conversations helped us better define our target markets, improve our service offerings, and help us construct our story in a simple and memorable way.

This not only supported our website development, it helped us clarify our overall business strategy.

The Process

1. *Gathering the stakeholders* – We started by identifying what we were trying to accomplish with a website overhaul. In our case, our service offerings and positioning had changed since we created our first site.
2. *Content Organization* - Our original website navigational framework no longer accommodated our needs. We re-examined how we wanted to organize our information to make it easily accessible.
3. *Messaging* – Even though we had a clear vision of who we are as a business, we challenged ourselves to dive deeper and develop clear but simple messages to support the LVS value proposition – *Delivering Measurable Results*. We created, refined, and revisited our messaging until all of the stakeholders (and a limited number of outside supporters) agreed our messaging was on point.
4. *Design* – Being 'in the business', we knew that our website would be examined critically by clients and potential clients. Working with one of the best web development teams in the country, we were able to achieve a design that truly reflects the LVS brand and commitment. The design process was a collaborative effort. We challenged the designers to create a memorable and representative design. They challenged us to develop consistent messaging.

5. *Content* – While the design was being developed, we turned a critical eye to content. Using the navigational sitemap and the updated messaging, we determined that much of the content was still valid. Other areas needed to be updated or developed from scratch. Once we had it all written, we reviewed again to make sure we applied a consistent voice.
6. *Content Management* - In our practice, too often we see clients create a site and then fail to keep it up-to-date. Our developers implemented a simple content management system that enables us to add content, update the site, and integrate our social media strategy...keeping the website and our company current and relevant.

The Design-Content Dance

No matter how many web redesigns we do, there are hitches in the road. Ours was no different.

“Which comes first, the images or the headlines?” “The mockups and the development site don’t mirror each other equally.” “What do you mean you it costs more if I want to change the layout of this page?”

All of these issues and more come up when working with web developers and designers. The lesson? Know up front both the value and the limitations of your web team. You can expect your designer to come up with a compelling way to present your message, but it is not their job to tell you what your message is. If you aren’t able to develop your own story, you should find someone who can help.

At the same time, it’s important to trust the designer’s experience. We had a situation where we did not like a design element and wanted to change it. Our designer pushed back. Although they agreed to do it our way, they made a compelling argument based on industry standards as to why they chose that approach. At the end of the day, we trusted their expertise. After all, it was why we hired them.

The more questions you clarify at the onset the better, but there will always be unanticipated issues that come up. The key is to keep the lines of communication open and never assume if it hasn’t been discussed in advance.

The Collaborative Process Works

In our company, we each have different clients, goals, and perspectives. There is no question that we struggled on more than one occasion to balance architecture, design and content desires of our eclectic group of partners.

We made sure that everyone had a chance to be heard and made sure that decisions supported our business objectives. That made it easy to agree on the big picture issues. The rest was an artful negotiation.

What we thought would take days, ended up taking weeks. Nonetheless, the process works.

The result...We ended up with a website we love and that reflects who we are and what we bring to the table in terms of marketing, sales, and business development consulting. To see the final product, visit www.LVstrategies.com.

Cathy Kenton and Debra Baker are Principals at Legal Vertical Strategies LLC, a consultancy that provides marketing, business development, and sales services to help clients increase revenues and realize market potential. Ms. Kenton leads the Legal Vendor Services Group. Ms. Baker leads the Law Firm Services Group. They can be reached at ckenton@LVstrategies.com and dbaker@LVstrategies.com respectively.