

Computing Needs: Getting more out of your website

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According to a 2009 report in the *New York State Bar Association Journal*, 65 percent of people seeking legal representation begin their search for an attorney online. With more people searching for legal services on the Internet, it is imperative that law firm websites are visible in search engine results. Not having a search engine-friendly and an up-to-date website that is consistent with your brand image can cost your firm the opportunity to convert prospective clients.

A law firm's website should attract new business, communicate with existing clients and aid in the sharing of information among the lawyers of the firm. Essentially the hub of all online communication, a law firm's website speaks volumes about a firm's credibility as it doubles as a firm's online portfolio. Having the access to keep this information fresh and updated will send the message to potential clients that your firm is an authority as well as increase your site's online visibility.

From an internal management perspective, too often a legal website is static, meaning even the simplest changes to the website can bog down internal website administrators or create added expense from outside technical services. Having stale content can also affect your online marketing efforts, since fresh Web content innately enhances your website's search engine visibility, which increases your firm's exposure to new clients.

Legal marketing research suggests that content management systems (CMS) streamline the process of modifying and updating time-sensitive information. Furthermore, a CMS is as simple to use as Microsoft Word, allowing users to update Web content, including copy and images, without having had previous experience or knowledge in HTML. Implementing a content management system to build your law firm's website is an effective way to maintain a professionally designed site that can be updated at any time, from any location by attorneys themselves or other office personnel. Many content management systems are completely customizable and designed specifically to meet the discerning needs of the corporate brand and required infrastructure. In addition, a proprietary content management system is highly secure, ensuring the right departments and users are authorized to review and add content to your legal site.

Productivity and marketing are merely interchangeable with a CMS. In the marketing sphere, content management systems multitask as a viable promotional tool by syndicating news and events to search engines ultimately distributing information among media outlets. Just as the *Associated Press* publishes breaking news, a content management system allows firms to disseminate information. Each time information is updated on your practice's website, major search engines, such as Google and Bing, index that information.

Whether it is a high-profile case, a partner's contribution to the community or a new attorney biography, a CMS makes it easy to publish firm updates and legal victories without any interrupted workflow. These enhancements emblemize a law firm's credibility validation by

demonstrating that the attorneys are industry leaders who are current in their areas of expertise. Frequently updated content increases search engine optimization (SEO), an important aspect of Internet marketing that increases your site's visibility by improving placement on search engine results.

Many law firms are missing out on new lead generation because their websites are not performing well in the search engines. SEO can position your law firm above the competition, resulting in an unmatched method for advertising. Law firms can improve their positioning in search engine results by including keywords in their content that are relevant to their practice areas and correspond with the terms prospective clients are searching. With an SEO compliant content management system, any CMS user can modify the Meta tags, headers and other SEO elements without compromising your site's Internet presence.

A law firm can also hire an outside marketing agency to implement a comprehensive Internet marketing strategy that encompasses SEO. Remember not to get discouraged if your firm's phone is not ringing off the hook a week after implementing an SEO strategy. Results from an SEO campaign take time - in most cases three to six months. During that time, your campaign should be frequently tested, measured and tweaked to ensure optimal results. When done effectively, an SEO campaign will help your legal firm gain prominence, targeted traffic and conversions.

The importance in having a search engine-friendly legal website cannot be taken lightly by any firm that wants to generate new business and maintain strong relationships with current clients. It has the power to maximize online marketing as well as ease the overall maintenance of a website. If an attorney website is skillfully constructed and has regularly-updated content, it will present your business in a professional manner, while serving as an effective tool for Internet marketing.