

Elevate Your Game

Building Profile Online for Solo Attorneys and Small Firms

Steve Matthews | May 2011

The Internet is the great leveler for solo and small-firm lawyers. It's a printing press, distribution network and broadcast tower, all rolled up into one package. As far as marketing investments go, online tools deliver incredibly good value; and should be considered 'a must be done' for any lawyer who wants to stand up against the larger law firms and giant companies that have dominated the legal landscape for years. You simply won't be able to make yourself seen and heard otherwise.

Here are ten things you can do right now, to build your professional profile online.

- **Start a blog or commentary-driven website.** It all starts here. Any lawyer who can coherently express insight into, guidance about, and knowledge of his or her field in an accessible, client-friendly way is a candidate to blog. It's easy and almost free. Not every lawyer should blog, but every lawyer can.
- **Add contacts to your LinkedIn network.** You've already signed up with LinkedIn, right? If so, chances are your LinkedIn network isn't as wide and deep as its real-world counterpart. Build your base: identify your community of contacts, colleagues and clients and either find them on LinkedIn or invite them to join.
- **Write a new article for an online industry publication.** If you're not sure what industry publications are read by your clients, ask them. Then review the last six issues, come to understand the audience, identify gaps in legal content, and contact the editor with a carefully researched proposal for a free article.
- **Deconstruct your competitors' websites.** Sometimes, the winning formula is right in front of you. Spend an hour reviewing the websites of your three top rivals or a successful practitioner out of State. What are they doing right that you're not? Learn from them, plan improvements to your own site, and execute.
- **Interview someone influential to your daily work, then write about it!** Ideally, this could be one of your clients, who may love the attention and whose thoughts will be of interest to his or her colleagues and competitors. More to the point, conducting interviews underlines your legitimacy and authority as a knowledgeable expert in your field.
- **Start a new web project with partners.** Collaborate with others who complement your business services. This works equally well in small communities and in niche industries. Raise awareness of a key issue, co-author a guide or publication, or even start a charity. Relationships count online, so why not base that relationship on something of substance?

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Steve Matthews is the Founder and Principal of Stem Legal, a company dedicated to bringing web visibility to the legal industry. A prolific blogger, Steve co-founded the Canadian legal blogging cooperative Slaw (www.slaw.ca), and maintains his own blogs: Law Firm Web Strategy (www.stemlegal.com/strategyblog) and Vancouver Law Librarian Blog (www.vancouverlawlib.blogspot.com). Steve can be reached at steve@stemlegal.com.



- **Claim your Google Places listing.** Here's an overview and explanation of Google Places: <http://www.google.com/places/>. It's an easy and inexpensive way to promote your business through Google's increasingly powerful location searches. Encourage some of your happy clients to write reviews there.
- **Rewrite your lawyer profile.** Chances are, you created your current profile months or even years ago. Does it adequately and accurately reflect your current expertise and practice focus? Write a new one from scratch, and no peeking at the old one; this is about making a fresh start. Same goes for your law firm's "About" page.
- **Dig into your business plan and ask, "What's on deck?"** Most online projects that fall flat have poorly defined goals at the outset. Isolate service lines, reread your practice plan, define your audience of decision-makers, and then craft an appropriate plan to position your commentary and services in front of them online.
- **Invest in your knowledge of online demographics.** Build lists of websites that have a connection to your business, those belonging to associations, community groups, industry hubs, blogs, education, and so forth. Review your website statistics or your site's status in Google Webmaster Tools. With whom are you now connecting? Expand your successes and rethink the ones that aren't working.

Taking even two or three of these steps would greatly advance the online brand and profile of any small law firm. Pick one today, and get started.

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