

Law Firm Blog Location and SEO

Steve Matthews | November 2010

My friend Kevin O’Keefe is debating the effectiveness of [placing law firm blogs within the law firm website](#), as opposed to setting up each blog with its own domain name. Kevin clearly supports the idea of giving each firm blog its own domain, and wrote on this [same topic last year](#).

An important piece of context here: Kevin’s most recent post refers specifically to larger firms’ blogs. I’m also assuming that he’s referring to firms that develop multiple practice area blogs and position those blogs as subdirectories (or subdomains) under the firm’s principal website.

Does this make sense? Mostly, yes; and because Kevin is addressing the larger firm scenario, I’ll agree with him. But before I give you the *pros* of putting a law firm blog on its own domain, let’s explore the counter-arguments, some of which are valid:

1. **Blogs on the firm website help generate domain trust.** This can help SEO on a site-wide basis, including producing better rankings for practice group pages, lawyer profiles and other genres of firm publishing. Blogs also draw deep links, which can be another sign of domain authority, and help inspire a more thorough indexing of your website by the search engines.
2. **If the subject of the blog and of the website are closely aligned,** it might make sense to consolidate your efforts. Consider the case of boutique practices, or solos and small firms with limited practice areas. Our SEO goal is to help Google understand each domain; making clear the core set of keywords, phrases and topics that each website covers. Larger firms’ websites and blogs are rarely this closely aligned, but boutiques, solos and small firms can be. When firm services and blogs are targeting a similar core set of keywords, it might not make sense to split your SEO footprint.

While these are both good arguments, neither is enough to sway me with respect to larger law firms. Domain trust for firms with more than 30 lawyers invariably isn’t much of an issue. Moreover, law firm domain names rarely gain enough subject authority to compete in the search rankings with niche-subject blogs. In almost every circumstance, I recommend that firms place each of their blogs on its own unique domain.

Here are the arguments in favour of separate blog domains from the SEO side:

1. **The absence of subject-aligned keywords embedded within the firm’s domain name hurts SEO.** Like it or not, PetersononBrainInjury.com — all other factors being the same — will outperform PetersonLLP.com.

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2. **The firm website is about the firm, as it should be.** With multiple areas of practice, a law firm website's incoming link text and other on-page factors can become so scattered that Google has trouble giving weight to the firm domain on any particular subject. Keeping a tight focus is a critical part of competitive SEO. That doesn't mean that a practice page can't compete in the rankings if we focus on the task; but for a law blog that wants to become a topical powerhouse, a single-subject and focused domain will outperform the firm website every time.
 3. **Law firms websites' link networks tend to be unfocused.** Having a strong set of links (both incoming and outgoing) to similar subject websites is another measure of subject authority and relevance. Blog links have this attribute in spades, while firm websites rarely do.
 4. **Links from practice blogs actually support the firm's website.** Strategically linking from blogs back to the sponsoring firm's practice pages can help your SEO. But doing that from *inside* the firm website *does not* have the same impact. Blogs on their own domain have their own status with Google, including PageRank, a different set of incoming links, different signals of subject relevance, and so on. It might be an investment to develop the online presence for *another* domain name, but this is a question of building assets. Long term thinking says having two (or 22) strong website assets is better than having one.

And here are a couple more arguments from a simple common sense perspective:

1. **You must let your blogs and your bloggers shine.** Let's face it: burying five or ten blogs within the firm website often means just repackaging the firm's newsletter content. Simply calling such repackaged content a "blog" doesn't make it one. There must be a change in how lawyers approach their writing; the lack of personal opinion on a blog can kill its chance of success. Putting blogs under the firm website risks stifling the personality of the website and of the lawyers who are blogging.
2. **Mixing commercial and non-commercial commentary runs several risks.** Blogs on a firm website will always appear tied into the commercial entity of the firm. This becomes not just an issue of optics, raising the question of whether bloggers are restricted from offering value-added opinion. It also runs an ethical risk: changing the nature of the firm's content and tone with an internal blog may draw unwanted attention of some state ethics panels.
3. **A separate blog domain will have a better chance of building readership.** Developing a blog's readership is difficult at the best of times and will be more difficult within the confines of a firm website. A unique and memorable domain is a big marketing plus for any website, no less so for law firm blogs. Blogs on law firm websites don't have that feature. Law firm website developers also tend to embed these blogs into their larger CMS product, frequently omitting the RSS feed and email alerts in the process. All of which is to say, blogging technology rarely gets utilized in a way that lets these blogs fully interact within the blogging community.

Are there circumstances when a law firm blog can exist within the structure of a law firm's website? Sure, but invariably, that scenario is not for firms with hundreds of lawyers and multiple practice groups. For reasons of SEO effectiveness, but even more importantly, for the sake of the blog itself, firms should park it on the driveway and not in the garage.