



## Is your firm developing its own voice online?

Most law firms understand that regular online activity helps with marketing efforts. But the formula for success can seem elusive, and frequent changes to search algorithms frustrate some firm's efforts. Your ranking may bounce about unpredictably, making it difficult to determine what is working and what is not. It is clear that blogging and social media can be a force for good, but they may also backfire, harming your reputation among clients and peers.

Google claims to be waging a war against unoriginal, robotic and repetitive content. Over the past several years, the search engine has targeted and taken out one technique after another that it considers to be cheating or in some way unethical. Some of these changes have succeeded while others have been less effective, and adapting is challenging enough. You must also factor in the additional weight that is now being given to social cues such as likes, shares and retweets. In this environment, social networks are becoming harder and harder to ignore.

One concept that permeates many of Google's updates is genuineness. More emphasis is being placed on originality and diversity of content. When you are thinking about how to shape your firm's search marketing efforts, you should be aware of how the rules are changing.

Quality matters. Content marketing is a hot topic, but it is not at all a new practice. Search marketers have been encouraging clients to increase their reach online with fresh content for many years. The methods that work best are simply changing. Content for content's sake is no longer effective. The length of an article or page is becoming less relevant than the substance. Smaller bits of well-written, original content will trump long pages full of meaningless repetitive phrases.

Keywords are out (sort of). Inserting a set of linked keywords into every page of website content used to be a fairly dependable way to help better your search engine ranking. This is no longer always the case. Keyword stuffing, the practice of cramming as many awkward but supposedly relevant phrases as possible into every page is now frowned upon and can hurt your ranking. Linking within your articles and blog posts must be less frequent and more diverse. Always linking the same words to the same urls is no longer effective – linked phrases should be varied and point to a mix of different urls.

Humans are in. The best, and perhaps most ambiguous advice Google likes to give search marketers is to write content that sounds like a real person actually wrote it. Content should be written from an individual perspective and touch upon subjects in a way that other websites do not. The ability to pull from your own personal experience when writing blog entries and develop a distinct voice for your firm is much more valuable than being able to increase the number of times you can fit a set of linked keyphrases into a sentence. No matter where you post new content, you are ultimately talking to fellow human beings. Your writing should reflect that.





People are not as interested in “engaging” as you think. Marketing professionals love to use the word “engage.” Engage with followers, engage with potential clients, engage with blog readers, they say. But to what end? Research has shown that consumers who are frequent users of social media do not necessarily want to be a part of your community. They want reward. For retail businesses, payoff can come in the form of coupons and special deals. For attorneys, providing value is a little trickier.

You cannot think of social media as something you simply put some arbitrary number of posts into every week to produce a stream of new clients. You must develop a voice, listen to peers and followers, deliver the right message to the right segment of contacts, reply to comments, give credit to others and generally act like a genuine person. Social media can help build professional relationships that lead to new clients but not if your only action is to broadcast without paying attention to others.

People know when they are being fed canned, cheesy marketing content. The worst social media activity is tone deaf social media activity. Provide value and, quite simply, be yourself. Building a network of trust is always good marketing.

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