

6 common attorney website mistakes – and how to fix them

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A website speaks for the firm it represents at all times, day and night. It must be professional, informative and easy to navigate, and it must accurately exemplify the firm's work and values.

Increase your website's performance and enhance your position in the eyes of your visitors by building a site that stands out. Give the people who visit your site a reason to follow through and contact you. Start by avoiding these common attorney website pitfalls.

1. Too much copy.

User expectations have changed dramatically over the past five years. Designers and developers continue to find new ways to streamline content and make websites easier to navigate, giving visitors quick access to the information they need. Simplicity is a prominent design trend, and its popularity shows no signs of waning. Search engines have improved their methods for evaluating a page's relevance and are no longer fooled by long, meaningless, keyword stuffed pages.

Too much copy can be a problem on both a macro and micro level. Site wide, an abundance of copy can be a sign of content bloat. Sites that suffer from content bloat house multiple pages with very similar content but with only slightly different keywords or page titles. Creating a page for every iteration of a keyword (or every office location) worked for some time but now makes sites susceptible to a Panda penalty.

This is not to say that websites cannot be big. Many firms have extremely large sites containing hundreds of pages. But each page must provide some unique value and give information that is not also easily available in many other places.

On an individual page level, too much copy can be a turn-off for visitors if it is not well formatted. Page content is still important. People visit attorney websites to find information about their issue and to determine which firm has the most experience with that issue. However, pages that contain paragraph after paragraph of unbroken text can be difficult to consume. Internet users scan pages for useful content, and they scan paragraphs — often not reading past the first sentence — to see if it is worth their time to continue. If you have pages that need to present a lot of content, break them up into small, easily digestible pieces. Consider using content drawers that open and close to reveal copy, and sectioning pages into relevant parts. Use lists and subheads. Pages that are easily scannable are more likely to hold a visitor's attention.

2. Inconsistent [branding](#).

If your firm hires multiple companies to handle different aspects of your marketing, be sure they are all communicating with each other. Billboards, brochures, television ads and social media profiles should all support the same brand story your firm is telling on its website. A potential client's experience with your firm must be consistent no matter how they first encounter you, and it should stay consistent as the relationship grows. Make your website a showcase that is wholly integrated with all marketing efforts, using the same colors, fonts, pictures, language and themes at all times.

3. Commonly used stock photography.

Choosing the right photography for an attorney website is tricky. Research shows that people are more likely to engage with images they know portray the actual people with whom they will be working. This supports the practice of using pictures of attorneys and staff throughout a site. But photos of attorneys and offices must be professional and current. Consider hiring a photographer to take portraits and candid pictures of interaction in and around your office.

If professional photography is not an option, research the [market](#) before choosing stock. Stock sites often display images by popularity. Dig a little deeper and try to find pictures not as commonly in use. Avoid using prevalent lawyer imagery, especially courtrooms. A potential client's reaction to a courtroom is likely very different from the attorney's. Visitors generally see court as a place to avoid, or at least an avenue of last resort. Courts are daunting from a visitor perspective, and from a branding perspective they say nothing distinct about your firm.

4. Poorly executed calls to action.

In the spirit of simplicity — and higher conversion rates — each individual page of a website should contain a limited number of calls to action, and all calls to action should be clearly defined. Consumer-focused research consistently shows that the more choices people are given, the less likely they are to make a decision.

Make a list of the actions you want visitors to take and prioritize it. Priority one may be filling out a form. Priority two may be downloading an ebook or reading about a very successful case. Through size, color and space, make the priority one action clearly a visitor's first choice. Any secondary calls to action should be smaller, and they should be placed near content that is relevant to the action.

5. Ignoring mobile.

There are two ways to approach the issue of mobile accessibility. One is through responsive design,

which allows pages to adapt fluidly as screen sizes change. Another is to develop a mobile-specific site, which sits on a separate [domain](#), like [mobile.lawexample.com](#). Google has indicated through its [blog](#) that it sees responsive design as the preferred method of the two.

Both strategies have their pros and cons, but the most critical decision is the decision to pay attention to your mobile users. Having a mobile-friendly site makes your website more effective and more likely to convert. It makes your firm more accessible to a large portion of internet users. And, Google is beginning to pay more attention to mobile. It introduced a Mobile-Friendly Test tool and began incorporating “Mobile-Friendly” labels into its search results pages in November of 2014. Google has also indicated that mobile-friendliness will some day become a ranking factor. From both a conversion and marketing perspective, firms can no longer ignore mobile.

6. Failure to speak to the right audience.

The content on a law firm’s website should not be written for the colleagues of its attorneys. Visitors are not impressed by use of industry jargon or unnecessarily long-winded sentences. Visitors simply want to find an attorney experienced with their issue whom they feel they can trust. To build that trust, your site should establish a connection with its website visitors that goes beyond the rational and into the emotional. It is the difference between “these guys are smart” and “I like these guys.”

When writing copy, think of the most common concerns of current or past clients and speak to those concerns. In addition to publishing written articles, try producing a series of [podcasts](#) or videos that specifically address some of the most commonly asked questions you encounter. Inform visitors both about your practice areas and about process where applicable. Some people who are in need of legal services for the first time might be nervous not knowing what to expect. Try looking at the case process from the perspective of a new client, and try to provide all the information they will need to understand what they can expect from your services. Speaking directly to client needs goes a long way toward establishing essential trust.

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