

Business Development

Should Your Law Firm Have a Web Site?

A law firm with a Web site generates more referrals and has a better chance of being hired.

Your law firm should have a Web site as a professional looking online presentation, but not necessarily to grab your share of clients who may be looking for your lawyer advertising on the Internet. The second consideration is whether and how much to spend on Internet advertising which includes keyword bidding, search engine optimization, and lawyer directories.

Marketing brochures are effective business development tools for law firms with business practice areas, such as antitrust, labor, M&A, and patent. They are less important for firms whose clients will usually retain a lawyer at the initial meeting, such as personal injury, individual bankruptcy, and divorce. Potential clients responding to direct response marketing will usually meet with the lawyer and the personal relationship established, whether positive or negative, will overshadow any impression created by a firm brochure that they may or may not have seen.

However, clients who have retained a lawyer may later go on the Internet to view the lawyer's Web site. You don't want your client's latest impression to come from a poorly designed Web site. With a professionally designed Web site, your clients are more likely to refer you to their friends.

Today, people routinely check out a business by looking at its Web site. Your Web address should appear on your business card, letterhead, marketing brochures, newsletters, etc. While your firm's "old" marketing brochure was thrown in the garbage long ago, your "current" Web site is always readily available. Not only will potential clients be unimpressed with a Web site that looks like a novice built it, but so will competitors, adversaries, and in the case of personal injury matters, insurance company claim representatives.

Don't expect to launch a Web site and find that people hurt in an accident will go to the computer, look on the Internet, find your law office Web site, and call you. First of all, the Internet is a big place covering not only the United States but the entire world, while your law practice is probably only looking for clients in the same region as your office.

Second, it is extremely unlikely that your Web site will show up within the first pages of a search result, because lawyer Web sites typically only have a few pages. Search engines are programmed to look for good informative content, not a short blurb about your firm, the cases you handle, and some verdicts you won.

Third, if your law practice is one that can benefit from direct response advertising, such as personal injury, divorce, bankruptcy, or criminal, the Web site is less important for advertising. For the amount of time and expense required to obtain clients through the Internet, your money is better being spent first on traditional means of direct response advertising that directs people to your Web site.

To get around the problems with search engines, many law firms bid on keywords which will guarantee you first page placement if you bid high enough. Web sites appearing in the search results because of keyword bidding will appear in a special section marked sponsored Web results or sponsored links. People frequently ignore these results and go directly to the non-paid search results. Keyword bidding is best served by larger law firms which can afford the cost. One reason is that there is a lot of fraud due to competitors clicking on your advertising and computer robots that click on links. Fraudulent and robot clicks can cost you many thousands of dollars.

Proper Optimization

While most of the major search engines like Google, Yahoo and MSN have algorithms that favor larger sites, a 20 page solo practitioner Web site can still get first page rankings on those major search engines if the Web site is optimized proper-

ly. Web sites that are optimized for specific keyword phrases can do exceptionally well at being able to generate new business via the Web. The more localized and specific the keyword phrases are, the greater the chance of turning that visitor into a prospective client.

Another factor is in bound links to a Web site. This can be done through link exchanges with other attorneys or even listings on free legal directories

Then, of course, there are paid directory listings. If you're not sure if it's a good directory to list in, do some localized searches. Consumers typically search the Web in this fashion: (location) + (practice area) + (attorney or lawyer). An example would be "Los Angeles personal injury lawyer".

The Bottom Line

Compared to other advertising options, having a marketing strategy that includes a distinctive Web site is the most cost effective use of your business development dollars.

About WorkingDialogue

By combining strategic thinking, creative design, and marketing expertise, WorkingDialogue helps entrepreneurs, businesses, and organizations meet their marketing and communications objectives — creating brand awareness, impacting behavior, and generating new opportunities. WorkingDialogue designs and produces marketing literature, Web sites, corporate identity and print advertising.

WorkingDialogue 1022 Violet Avenue Hyde Park NY 12538 tel: 845-233-4217 www.workingdialogue.com