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### Marketing on the Web

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Google. Pay-per-click. Yahoo. Keywords. Search engine optimization. Hits. Web searches. Search engine ranking. Sponsored ads. Title tags. In many ways, these words blur together. You probably know some of them. Others, like Kanoodle, bots or metatags, may sound like gibberish. Welcome to the world of Internet marketing.

What is a law firm to do? How does your firm sort through the thicket of geek-speak and determine the best way to market its Web site? Unfortunately, there is no single answer. Instead, there are numerous options, just as there are when you advertise on television, in newspapers or in the Yellow Pages. Although many concepts behind Internet marketing are merely traditional techniques applied to a new medium, there are differences. The greatest distinction is the technology. But the goal is the same -- getting new clients.

#### THE WEB SITE

Of course, in order to attract clients through the Internet, you need to create a Web site. The statistics demonstrate that more and more people go online not only for e-mail, but also to shop, to stay informed and, yes, to find a lawyer. According to research from the October 2005 Pew Internet & American Life Project report, the following is true of the legal world online:

- 68 percent of American adults (approximately 137 million people) use the Internet
- 65 percent of legal services buyers have gone online to locate a law firm
- 38 percent search online for legal services at least weekly
- 89 percent use search engines to find law firm Web sites
- 86 percent go directly to a law firm's site
- 71 percent enter law firm Web sites through portals such as Findlaw and Martindale Hubbell



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Surprisingly, many lawyers and law firms ignore this reality, and have no Internet presence.

Creating a Web site is not as easy as typing up an advertisement and sending it to the newspaper. Web site creation is both an art and a science. There is the front end -- the design visitors see -- and the back end -- the computer code that helps drive traffic to your Web site. You could set up the Web site yourself, using off-the-shelf software (such as Microsoft FrontPage). Or, you could use whatever software your Internet host provides.

You also could create a Web site from do-it-yourself templates supplied by many providers, including Martindale Hubbell and Thomson West. You could also commission a custom Web site from Martindale, West, a Web marketing company, or one of the many businesses focusing exclusively on Web marketing for lawyers. In general, however, you should leave Web site design and marketing to professionals.

A well-designed Web site is the first step. Frequently, your Web site is the first impression visitors receive of your firm, conveying your style and other qualities. If your site is too garish, too blah or too hard to navigate, you probably will not attract many new clients. Or maybe you will. After all, car dealers sell lots of cars by screaming at us, so the Web equivalent presumably works, at least for some.

When planning your Web site, decide what segment of the population you want visiting your site. Are you satisfied with your current client base, or are you seeking to expand the nature and scope of your clientele?

Next, determine the content of your Web site. Content is critical to Internet marketing. It is the food that feeds search engines -- a lack of quality content will almost certainly cause search engines to ignore your site or rank it at the bottom of its listings. The choice of content is literally boundless. You could recreate your firm's brochure electronically, or include a wealth of other information. Your Web site might feature landmark verdicts or detailed descriptions of your practice areas, with links to articles you have written and appellate cases you have handled. If your practice is based upon referrals, you may include resources for those attorneys. Some Web sites feature video, some feature content that changes daily, while others have static/unchanging content.

Remember that most people whom you want to attract, and most people who search the Web, are looking for information. You need to present information that is useful, informative and tells visitors why they should hire you, and not the lawyer next door. One of the biggest mistakes law firms (and other businesses) make is writing content attorneys want to read. You are not your audience -- potential clients are. Thus, content should provide information your visitors want; in other words, avoid legalese.

Having readable, high-quality content, which focuses on the needs and expectations of potential clients, does not always require mountains of information. Rather, it means that your Web designer and your content provider (some designers prefer that clients supply the content, or at least a detailed outline from which they will craft the text) must work together and understand your targeted audience.

There are other basic design ingredients. Your site should be easy to navigate, and it should be easy for visitors to find information quickly. If they cannot, they will not stay very long. Also, while some Web designers love graphics and other gimmicks, I do not recommend these features because they generally do not serve your site's central goal of attracting new clients. For example, flash pages, containing pictures and video that pop up as visitors come to your site, look nice, but slow down many visitors. Similarly, many sites are attractive because they contain colorful, large graphics, which often take a long time to load, especially for visitors using older computers or who are dialing into the Internet.

## **GET TRAFFIC MOVING**

After deciding on the design and content of your Web site, the real work begins -- driving visitors to it. This phase is often called "search engine optimization." Again, content is critical. After your Web site goes "live," your Web designer submits its listing to search engines, Web indexes, and other sites. The search engines then "crawl" your site to discover what information your pages contain. To do this, they use tools called crawlers and bots to read the text and "tags." Unlike you and I, they do not read what you see on the screen; they read raw computer code. Take a second and see what I mean.

For instance, visit [The Legal Intelligencer](http://www.law.com/jsp/ltn/PubArticleFriendlyLTN.jsp?id=1140775518340). Click on "view" on the toolbar (the words below the blue title bar at the top of your browser's screen), and click on "source." A new window with text should open; you may have to scroll down a bit before the text begins. You should see a garbled variety of information, including keywords such as attorney, lawyer, counsel, government legal news, law, legal cases, legal developments, law news, legal information, current legal news, daily legal news, decisions, statutes, Supreme Court, appeals court, appellate courts, state specific legal resource and law.com.

This is the information search engines seek, and these words (and all the others you see) can make a difference

between a Web site showing up at the top of a Google search or on page 10 for Yahoo. The reason is simple. Search engines go to your Web site and search for these "tags." Then they examine your site to determine if the content matches or is similar to these words.

When tags and keywords are well chosen to accurately reflect your site's content, it is more likely that your site will appear closer to the top of the search results. On the other hand, if *The Legal Intelligence's* Web site included "Britney Spears" among its keywords, and her name did not appear on the Web site, search engines would discover this, and the site's ranking would be lowered.

There is an art to determining effective keywords. Web sites such as [www.wordtracker.com](http://www.wordtracker.com) provide statistics showing how frequently any keyword is used. These sites also help calculate the efficacy of keywords, and help determine which keywords will be most effective. Other factors can improve search engine rankings. Perhaps most important are links -- places on other Web sites that send visitors to your site. The more sites linking to your Web site, the greater the probability yours will show up higher in the search engines' results. Thus, listings on sites like Findlaw and Lawyers.com linking to your Web site help you rank higher.

Here is a way to see this for yourself. Go to [Google](http://www.google.com), type in "miserable failure" and click "I'm feeling lucky." You go directly to President Bush's page on the White House Web site. Why? Obviously, the president's page does not include "miserable failure" on it. But because so many Web pages characterize the president as a "miserable failure" -- and link to this page -- it is the number one result for that search.

(A statement was issued Sept. 16 by Google's Director of Consumer Web Products explaining that this case is an example of "googlebombing," in which "a number of Web masters use the phrases [failure] and [miserable failure] to describe and link to President Bush's Web site, thus pushing it to the top of searches for those phrases. [Google does not] condone the practice of googlebombing, or any other action that seeks to affect the integrity of our search results, but we're also reluctant to alter our results by hand in order to prevent such items from showing up.")

#### **ADVERTISING AIN'T CHEAP**

Tags, keywords and links are the beginning of a Web marketing strategy. The next level of promotion costs more and, like advertising in newspapers or on radio, has varying rates of success. Go back to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), type in "Philadelphia lawyer," click "search," and look at the results. At the top and along the right side are "sponsored ads." The links at the top are banner ads that appear whenever certain words are searched. Companies pay for the privilege of always appearing at the top of pages showing results for that search phrase. In fact, these prime spots are often expensive and sold-out.

In the right column are "sponsored links," which also appear when specific words are searched. The cost of a "sponsored link" depends on the popularity of the search words (with advertisers bidding for position) and other factors; every time a person clicks (called "pay-per-click") on a "sponsored link," the advertiser pays a fee. Currently, the average cost-per-click for "Philadelphia lawyer" is \$9.38 for searches in the Philadelphia area.

In addition to sponsored links and payper- click campaigns, you can participate in more specialized campaigns. You can buy banner ads on Web sites. You could employ pop-up ads, or send e-mails to prospective clients. You could also partner with another Web site, such as a TV or radio station, and co-promote.

Nowadays, as more people rely on the Internet as a primary source of information, law firms must include the Web as part of their marketing strategies. For most law firms, Web marketing will focus primarily on keywords and well-placed links. To be effective, your Web marketing should include a budget for the Web site and a separate budget for marketing campaigns. Monitor your marketing closely to determine whether you are attracting visitors and turning them into clients. Your competitors also use the Web, and your next new client is almost certainly using the Internet, searching for you.

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