practice tips

Why a Law Firm Web Site Can be a Waste of Money

by Ingvar Grimsmo

How do most law firms get new clients? The old fashioned way: by holding free seminars, referrals from other attorneys and clients, newsletters and the old standby "send out many brochures and they will come" strategy. Personal contacts in the community helps too. Lots of hand-shaking and schmoozing. It works, it has always worked, and it will continue to work. People do business with people.

A few years ago lawyers caught on to the web. They envisioned mass exposure and a steady stream of potential clients calling them for an appointment. They signed up in droves with web designers to see who could create the most elaborate site. The results have been dismal to say the least. Most web sites produce more spam than leads. Why?

Web designers and marketers alike have tried to create web sites that both inform and entice potential clients to contact the web site's owner. Using three basic concepts:

- **Informative site with a large amount of data relating to the practice area of the attorney**
- **Brochure site—focusing on the firm itself**
- **Site with strong sales pitches**

None of these approaches seems to work well. The info-sites are just that—information. They may meet the visitor's need to get answers, but do nothing to persuade him or her to contact the information provider for help.
The brochure site simply bores people to tears with self-interest verbiage and "award-winning" graphics design. Consumers are very weary of strong sales pitches, especially on the web.

Most law firm web sites fall into one of these categories, and they spend a considerable amount of money creating these sites—wasting valuable money.

So what does work?

First let's think about why people might seek out an attorney on the web. It's simple; they are looking for an answer to a problem they have. For example, lawyers specializing in elder law often help people facing huge nursing home expenses and want to protect their estate. Web savvy children of elders in this situation will go to the web looking for help. Yes, they want free answers but are fully aware that the real solution will cost money. It's all about them and their problems, NOT about you, your firm, your offices, your staff etc.

So now they are on your web site of your elder law practice. What do they want to see first? Graphics? Pictures of your office? Your mission statement? No. They are seeking help—so the first answer they are looking for is: "Is this the right place for this problem?" What if your site comes right to the point and states: "Are you concerned about protecting your assets from nursing home expenses?" BAM. Now the visitor with exactly this problem will respond. Even better, your site immediately provides basic answers. Free of charge. In a friendly, non-threatening way. Just folks helping other folks. At this point the visitor is pleased. He or she got some answers, and is ready to move ahead seeking professional help. Where to go? Answer: "You have come to the right place. Call us and we'll help you—you know we can."

Point: Answer the visitor's most burning question before establishing credibility and seeking contact.

Why have a web site in the first place if they don't work well? There should be two main goals:

- **To persuade a qualified visitor to contact the firm for a consultation**
- **To educate the future client before the consultation (saves time). This might include providing intake questionnaires on the site**

To have even a small chance of a productive web site you must then:

- **First answer burning questions a visitor might have**
- **Establish credibility—real world feel (www.webcredibility.org)**
- **Make it human—people deal with people**
- **Make it real—real solutions to real problems**

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