

Legal Web Marketing in a Web 2.0 World

Steve Matthews | Summer 2008

Not more than five years ago, a lawyer's web presence could almost exclusively be found on a firm website. But in recent years, many lawyers and firms have greatly expanded their online presence with a variety of new web tools that help create a more complete online persona and a greater indication of their practice expertise.

Is the firm website still relevant in a Web 2.0 world? Absolutely! The firm website remains an important cog in the business development process – it qualifies the lawyer, establishing trust, experience and expertise. Other Web 2.0 tools may grab the attention, but the firm website establishes credibility.

Think: practice group pages, detailed lawyer profiles, success stories, client lists, transaction lists, speaking engagements, media quotes, publications, and so on. The firm site should: 1) tell the visitor your experience with the issue; 2) show you're good at what you do; and 3) that others have trusted and benefited from your past service. Regardless of how someone arrives at your website, it must close the lead opportunity – convincing him or her to pick up the phone or make e-mail contact.

The following list reflects a sampling of the more popular techniques for marketing a modern legal practice online:

- Law blogs – Personal blog commentary can be used for an infinite number of reasons, but for lawyers, the goals are: crafting an image of expertise, networking, and increased exposure. Blogging is an easy way for lawyers to rapidly expand their web presence. Regular posts can position a lawyer for mainstream media quotes, referral network expansion, and increased exposure in the search engines. Leveraged properly, the value of incoming blog-to-blog links can also be passed to the firm website, ensuring the firm is found for its core areas of expertise.
- LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) – LinkedIn is a social networking site developed exclusively for business professionals (unlike Facebook). It's widely used by the Fortune 500, and currently lists more than 216,000 lawyers. The value proposition of LinkedIn is putting your formal CV online where it can easily be found by other business professionals.
- Facebook (www.facebook.com) – Larger firms are blocking Facebook access in the name of business productivity. Justifiable? Perhaps. But for solos and small firms this also represents an opportunity. Identifying and targeting relationships with key industry decision makers, especially when a younger and less formal demographic is involved, can be good for business.
- Wikis – Most people have heard of Wikipedia these days, but the exciting part of wiki technology

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is what's going on with closed groups collaborating in a public way. Expect to see more firms developing industry based wikis, or using wikis to collaborate with clients.

- YouTube (www.youtube.com) – In the next year or two internet video will be the next big thing. You can expect video based blogs, web-based TV programs, video whiteboard discussions and other video genres. For the incredibly persuasive lawyer or ‘the storyteller’ in your firm – it might be a perfect match.
- Lawyer-specific social networking sites: Legal Onramp (www.legalonramp.com) and JD Supra (www.jdsupra.com) are examples of legal community-specific social networking sites.
- Twitter (www.twitter.com) – The newest and hottest Web 2.0 tool of influence is Twitter. Sometimes called “micro-blogging”, the big selling point of Twitter is that it captures human reaction. News stories are reported before media outlets can respond, and discussion between groups – including lawyers – can provide candid and quotable commentary. But, with entries capped at 140 characters – about one sentence – brevity is both desired and required.

Bringing it all together is Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Search engines are still a big part of the digital lifestyle. With all the talk of blogs, wikis and social networks, it's easy to forget that search is the number one tool available to drive new readership. Lawyers who employ SEO tactics actively market and position their content at the top of the search results – thus driving increased volume and the potential for leads. SEO is also about employing an overall strategy that makes the collection of web tools mentioned in this article work together.

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