

Which Law Firm Owns the Most Digital Real Estate?

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Image: Digital Vision

"The two most important requirements for major success are: first, being in the right place at the right time, and second, doing something about it."

-- Ray Kroc, builder of McDonald's, the most successful fast food operation in the world.

Why are the firms of Big Law so successful?

They have powerful relationships with old and very large institutional clients, they have name recognition and good will that has been built up over more than a century and they have impressive real estate, with offices in prime locations in the major cities of the world.

Smaller firms aren't likely to steal the institutional clients or spend the money to gain the same type of name recognition. They certainly can't afford the real estate prices of New York City or Tokyo. But there is one type of real estate that smaller firms are gobbling up at an impressive rate, with most of the larger firms lagging behind.

I call this "digital real estate." Not to be confused with intellectual property, digital real estate refers instead to online positioning and the online presence or digital footprint of law firms. Let me give you an example.

Run [a Google search for "class action defense"](#) and you will notice that most of the top results are law blogs. The number one result is not an Am Law 200 firm; in fact it is a blog produced by the law firm of Jeffer Mangels Butler & Mitchell. It is a comparatively small firm, with three offices and 138 attorneys, according to its website. Yet here it is dominating the Google search results and owning the best digital real estate for its practice area with [its blog](#).

You can try the same exercise for numerous search topics, and you will see a trend -- the top 50 law firms in America rarely show up at the top of Google rankings. So you are probably asking two questions right now: (1) Why aren't they showing up in the results? and (2) Does it matter that they aren't showing up?

The biggest firms in America aren't showing up in the search results in large part because they don't blog -- or, more specifically, they don't create anywhere near the quantity of articles and posts that blogging attorneys do. There are more than 23,000 lawyers in the top 10 firms of the Am Law 100, and how many blogs in total would you guess are being created by these 23,000-plus lawyers?

The answer is two. That's right -- one, two. The top 10 firms just aren't blogging. Blogs are such an effective way to get high search rankings because Google loves fresh content. In the time it takes an

Am Law 100 firms to hire a PR firm, draft copy, have it approved, send it to the web people to publish on the site, the more agile law firms have created five new blog articles on relevant topics that are generating substantial traffic from both the search engines and peer sharing through social networks. (An example of peer sharing would be when I share an article on Twitter, and my friend and GC of Leprino Foods, Richard Russeth, forwards or "retweets" my article to [his network on Twitter](#) or shares it as an update on LinkedIn.)

When it comes to digital real estate, the firms of the Am Law 100, especially the top 10, are being left in the dust. Consider the fact that in the entire Am Law 100 there are more than 84,000 lawyers and only 130 law blogs. ([Click here to see the full list of Am Law 100 blogs.](#)) More than 50% of these blogs come from just six firms. (Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton; Reed Smith; Hunton & Williams; Alston & Bird; Littler Mendelson; and Dorsey & Whitney).

In a recent survey of the Am Law 101-200, we uncovered that these firms have fewer than 30,000 total attorneys creating 182 Law blogs. ([Click here to see the full list of Am Law 101-200 blogs.](#)) To put this in perspective, take a firm like Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice that has 40 attorneys blogging and 15 law blogs. Forty attorneys blogging represents approximately 9% of the firm's total number of attorneys. If 9% of the attorneys at Baker & McKenzie had their own law blogs, that firm would have more law blogs than the entire Am Law 200 put together.

So why is it that Am Law 101-200 firms are investing time and resources so heavily in law blogs? Because blogging generally is ignored by the biggest firms, and it's a great way to get attention. Marketing 101 -- go where your competitors aren't.

Now for the second question: Does it matter that the biggest firms aren't ranking in Google searches? [Studies have shown](#) that more than 56% of people running a Google search click on the very first result, 13% on the second, and down from there. If you aren't on the first page, you might as well not exist online.

But what about in-house counsel? Do they follow the same behavior as average consumers, or do they act differently? In March, [Greentarget and ALM completed a survey](#) that revealed that 35% of in-house counsel had visited a law blog within the past 24 hours. Forty-three percent of in-house counsel cited law blogs among their top "go-to" sources for news and information. I can't imagine too many in-house counsel are reading the blogs of the top 10 firms, however -- after all, they don't have much of a selection with only two blogs to choose from.

The white shoe firms of Big Law will continue to have an advantage over the smaller firms because of their relationships, name recognition, and high-priced physical real estate. But the overlooked digital real estate provides an opportunity for the truly entrepreneurial firms to get exposure that might not have been possible even 10 years ago. Blogs provide firms with a chance to be in the right place at the right time online; now they just need to follow the advice of Ray Kroc and do something about it.

If your firm is in the Am Law 200 and has blogs that aren't listed, please e-mail the names and links from the blogs to info@adriandayton.com.

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