

Best Practices in Web Marketing

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Larry Bodine

1. Let visitors sign up to get an e-newsletter on your Web site. If you only follow one tip in this article, let it be this one. It's the most effective tip of them all. Some sophisticated sites, like that of Jones Day at <http://www.jonesday.com/newsknowledge/PublicationSignup.aspx>, allow readers to pick from more than 40 newsletters with the ease of checking a box in the sign-up form.

I started my own e-newsletter, the LawMarketing Newsletter (sign up at <http://cecollect.com/vf/7530r9491Y7168Cn88C>), 10 ago and have built up the recipient list to 2,000 readers. On alternate Tuesdays, I email out my newsletter to readers all over the world and use it to highlight new articles on the LawMarketing Portal web site (www.LawMarketing.com), Webinars that I present and my sales training practice. It's a one-to-one, personal communication with each reader.

Email newsletters are a tactic that many law firms have adopted. For starters, many law firms have print newsletters, and it's easy to re-purpose them for electronic distribution. The beauty of e-mail newsletters is that they do not entail any printing or postage costs; email newsletters are cheap to create and distribute. Be sure to note in the newsletter that readers may "freely redistribute it in whole," which will widen your audience.

They also allow you to collect information about who is visiting your Web site. I recommend that law firm Web sites put a link to their newsletter sign-up page right on the home page. The link should lead to a sign-up form, which requests the reader's name, title, company, address, email and phone number. Ideally, this information will be saved into a database, which can be used to distribute the newsletter.

(see next page)

Mailing List Subscribe - Add

Please enter your information below.

* Email	* Full Name
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
* Company	Title
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address Line 1	Address Line 2
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address Line 3	City
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
State/Province	Postal Code
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
* Country	Primary Industry
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Type of Entity	Client Number (if applicable)
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

2. Send the e-newsletter in HMTL format. HTML newsletters are like sending a reader a Web site – all the firm’s graphics, color and branding are preserved in the newsletter. Sophisticated firms like Benesch in Cleveland make sure the newsletter looks exactly like the firm’s Web site and includes links back to the site.

The hidden beauty of the HTML newsletters is that they are trackable. Whenever a reader opens the email or clicks on one of the links in the newsletter, it sends an electronic signal which can be counted. This way you know exactly how many people actually read the newsletter and which items they preferred.

HTML newsletters are for small as well as large law firms. Wimberly Lawson, a 25-lawyer labor and employment law firm in Knoxville, Tennessee, sends out its newsletters and then archives them on its website at <http://www.wimberlylawson.com/CM/ContactUs/office-locations.asp>.

3. Create a Mobile version of your website. It’s a fact that people are buying more web-enabled computers and mini-notebooks with 9-inch screens designed mainly to view the Web – as opposed to giant computer towers or laptop computers. However, most law firm websites are very difficult to read and navigate on a mobile devices, such as an iPhone or Android. Google News and other media organizations like CNN and MSNBC were the first to create mobile versions of their websites, and law firms can do the same. The photos are miniaturized and the text is stripped down so that it can be viewed on a 1 ¾ by 3 inch handheld screen. I’ve created a parallel version of the LawMarketing Portal at mobile.lawmarketing.com. Mobile sites are easy to create, because a website can tell which kind of browser is visiting it – whether

it's Firefox or Windows Explorer. Similarly, smartphone also identify themselves, and the website can be designed to refer mobile users to a special mobile site just for them.

4. Start writing a blog. Blawgsearch.com estimates that there are 5,363 law-related blogs in 72 subcategories. It's never too late to start a blog of your own for your particular clients. America became familiar with blogs, which is short for "Weblogs," during the first Gulf war, when readers would go online to follow the experiences recorded in blogs of participants at the front. A blog is an online diary, which displays the writer's entries in chronological order.

Blogs are the perfect platform for lawyers who always wanted to be a newspaper columnist, or who would like to publish short capsules of thought without needing to write a full-blown article. You simply jot down your thoughts or observations and publish them instantly to the Web. The beauty of blogging software is that it requires no knowledge of HTML – you just type text in an online box and click "publish." You can check out my blog at <http://blog.LarryBodine.com>.

What's more, blogging be free. Software options include Wordpress (<http://wordpress.org/>), TextPattern (<http://www.textpattern.com/>) Moveable Type (<http://www.movabletype.org/>) and Serendipity (<http://www.s9y.org/>).

Your readers can find your blog by searching for you in Google. Popular legal blogs include Instapundit.com, [How Appealing](http://HowAppealing.com), [Above the Law](http://AboveTheLaw.com) and [JURIST - Paper Chase](http://JURIST-PaperChase.com).

5. Optimize your Web site for Search Engines. It's no good having a Web site if no one can find it. You need to tune up your site with elements that Google, Yahoo! and other search vehicles look for.

Nothing beats hot, fresh content. Frequently-updated information is the primary thing that search engines look for. Web sites are supposed to be showcases for new information (not archives of past newsletters and old events), so you should update your site often. Take a look at your Web traffic statistics to see how many referrals you're getting from search engines now; if Google and Yahoo are not the top two referral sources, you need to put some new content online.

Also take note in your traffic logs of the **terms that people are using to find your site**. Take the most frequently used terms and make sure they appear in the material you put online. You should also add this information in your invisible code on the home page, and importantly, in the <title> tags. The information in these tags is not displayed to visitors, but they are directly sought out by search engines.

Several things can deflect search engines and send their roving "spiders" away, so you'll want to eliminate these offensive items from your Web site. Topping the list are Flash animation, JavaScript and frames; they provide nothing for search engines to index, and they'll lower your

search engine rankings. Instead, put lots of text on your Web site, this is fodder that the hungry search engine spiders want.

“Link popularity” helps raise you in the rankings too. This refers to the number of other sites that have links back to your site; search engines consider them as votes for your site’s popularity. The more links, the better. The way to boost your link popularity is by putting your content on other people’s Web sites. Do this by writing articles for other Web sites, freely granting reprints, and getting involved with newspaper Web sites.

6. Follow directional norms on the Web. This means that your web site should use a layout that visitors expect to see. Many law firms experiment with cluttered, busy or unconventional layouts. They succeed in looking different, but make the Web site difficult to use.

According to Web site usability principles, the Web site should mimic the layouts of popular corporate sites that viewers visit frequently. This way they will be accustomed to the layout of your site from the moment they arrive.

The optimal layout for a Web site is to:

- **Put your logo or firm name in the top left corner.** This is where people start reading a book or newspaper, and where they start reading on your Web site.
- **Offer a set of navigation choices down the left side or across the top of the page.** These choices should be “persistent,” that is, they should also appear in the same place on all succeeding pages of the site.
- **The rest of the home page – the lower-right part -- should be full of content.** This is where you should put news items, newsletter stories and client successes.

For more on this topic, call:

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