

## Creating Effective Website Content

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Law firm websites are here to stay. Long gone are the days when just having a site was enough to show you were in the game. Firm websites have become increasingly sophisticated tools for differentiating the experience and skills of attorneys. How do you separate the best from the rest? Quality content. Google analytics proves that traffic spikes occur when meaningful content is added. The analytics tool allows you to uncover the types of information driving desirable visitor behavior. Once you understand what motivates your visitors to return, you may build more content into the site, making it a reliable resource that showcases your legal and business prowess. A content-improvement effort builds credibility among clients, prospective clients and referral sources over the long run.

So, what should a lawyer think about when creating website content? Consider these points:

- People read web content 25% more slowly than they read print materials. Studies have proven that reading from a computer screen tires eyes more easily than printed materials, decreasing stamina on websites. Keeping this in mind, use shorter sentences within well-constructed paragraphs that cover only one idea. This doesn't mean 'dumbing it down', it simply means skipping the legal-speak and citations. Write using real words for real people. Transforming a piece from print to the web? Consider streamlining your print content by 50% before posting it onto a website.
- Readers on the web scan text, they do not read it. According to a study completed by usability expert Jacob Nielsen, 79% of readers on the Web tend to scan or skim text rather than read word for word. How to compensate for this trend? Use an inverted pyramid concept when creating your content. Place the most important information you want to get across at the beginning of your material. Use tricks such as pull-quotes, highlighted text and bulleted lists to help scanners get the most pertinent material quickly.
- Readers on the web want what they want, and quickly! Studies show that we must grab someone's attention in as little as 10 seconds. If we succeed in grabbing a reader in those 10 seconds, then we earn up to 45 seconds more to sell them on our firm. Deliver information quickly, or they will move onto the multitude of alternative websites to find the information they desire. Where to get started? Use meaningful headlines and avoid clever titles that force the reader to take time to figure out what you are talking about. Tell them what they want immediately.

- After obtaining client permission, publicize the work you do and who you do it for. Purchasers of legal services want to see company names they recognize from the industries they work in. Place brief, specific representative transactions and matters on your site. By showing that you have successfully completed the specific work that visitors seek, you will gain a competitive edge over others who do not share that information. If you can't get permission to use client names, a good option is to describe the type of business and the associated industry. Be sure to include rich key words that your desired audience uses in their web searches. To figure out what those key words are, check your Google analytics to see what is already bringing people to the site.
- Use more than words to grab your visitors' attention. Use videos, images, tasteful animation and podcasts. These are all viable methods for attracting people and urging them to look for more information. All the same rules apply, though. Keep these components concise and attractive. If visitors are asked to sit through extraneous material before they get to the point, you have lost them to the competition.
- Use social media to move visitors onto your website. Spark interest through social media status posts. Build a presence in social media outlets, such as Linked In, by being active participants in group discussions. Post status updates on recent articles, events and external press coverage. Provide a link directly to your website from your posting. You can see the traffic from Linked In through Google analytics, confirming what is working for you.

Understanding and optimizing the way you create website content is the first step in enhancing visitor experience. Additionally, strong content increases your website's visibility with search engines. Legitimate content drives better search results and increases the likelihood of people finding you. Of course there are many more considerations for making websites useful, helpful and successful tools for business development. However, by starting with these tips, law firms will be well on their way to differentiating themselves from an overly crowded cyberspace.

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