

Will clients find you on the Web?

Be savvy to the many ways of increasing your Web presence to generate phone calls

By Tracy Hickman, Esq.

In today's technological environment, most people are accustomed to using the Internet when they are searching for any information, including information that will help them choose an attorney. Plaintiff attorneys stay in business by continually obtaining new cases and new clients. To be successful, consumer attorneys need to use all possible online tools to insure that they can be found and will be contacted by prospective clients.

In short, it's a numbers game and every plaintiff attorney has to maintain a pipeline to new clients. While established trial lawyers may be hired through referrals based on their proven performance – getting well-publicized big verdicts or by their reputation within their professional associations – most plaintiff attorneys need to be only a few clicks away from today's Internet searchers.

Here are three of the most basic tools that will enhance your chance of being found on the Web.

• ***It starts with your Web site***

Your Web site must be professional – have the look and feel of a modern, updated site that catches the eye and gives prospective clients the information necessary to choose to contact your firm. Your Web site must communicate to the prospective client specific "calls to action" (defined as: words which urge the user to take immediate action, such as "click here" or "call me now"). The ultimate goal of your site is to have the prospective client contact you – not necessarily hire you. It all begins with getting the call.

Having good Web site aesthetics is essential to getting that phone call. Think about your Internet surfing. If you see a Web site that doesn't look professional, is difficult to navigate or is full of boring content, what do you do? You leave.

Your Web site must be more than an online brochure. It must tell people enough about you – your education, cases you've handled, your successes, honors and awards – that they're comfortable in making that phone call. Including a page about what you like to do away from the office, especially your role in community organizations, can help people relate to you.

Use high-quality photographs, including your personal portrait. Invest the money to have professional photos taken and include your staff and office surroundings. Prospects will look at your images and decide on your professionalism and whether they can trust you based on these first impressions.

Keep your site updated. For example, if you are beginning to prosecute Toyota recall cases, don't tell the reader that you handle "automobile product-liability cases." Tell them that you are representing owners of defective Toyotas, because that's what they're looking for! Lawyers have their own lexicon and often make the mistake of thinking that prospective clients use the same words lawyers use in practice.

• ***Blogging***

The second tool is to create a blog, either on your Web site or on its own Web platform, to enhance your chances of being seen by search engines and thus prospective clients. Your blog is a type of journal/diary of either current events with a legal component, details of a recent case you tried or settled, or your opinion on some aspect of the law that would interest prospective clients. Again, this tool keeps you relevant and relatable.

Once you start blogging, you must make a commitment to do it on a continual basis. Writing one or two entries and then stopping will not suffice, because it is the recurrent, consistent content that boosts your Web ranking. Remember, the idea here is to be picked up by search engines. It's called Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and it's what Web-based marketing is all about.

• ***Be media savvy***

Many lawyers do not see the benefit of beginning a relationship with the media, but it works to give you credibility as well as to provide content for your Web site if you are mentioned in a publication. You can become a legal source for reporters in your area, or you may have an interesting story that a reporter will want to tell to readers in the future. Introduce yourself to the local media or take a reporter to lunch and create a beneficial business relationship; it is not a difficult endeavor. When you are mentioned in the press or electronic media that press clipping should go on your Web site (with permission, of course) and you should link to the media Web site.

In conclusion, spend the time and money to enhance your Web presence and thereby increase your visibility to prospective clients. You must be seen before you can be retained.


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