

A Lawyer's Guide to Online Marketing

**It's easier than you think
and simpler than it looks.**

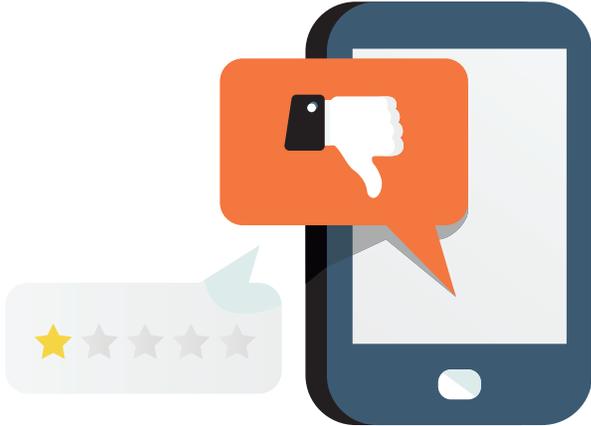


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Marketing your firm is a different beast today than it was 20, 10, or even five years ago. Whereas previously firms were jostling for prime Yellow Pages placement (“AAAA Divorce Attorneys,” anyone?), the Internet has revolutionized how clients are finding and choosing a law firm, with dramatic results: 38% of clients are now finding legal representation via the Internet, with a huge benefit. While previous word-of-mouth advertising was dependent on clients, the information clients are discovering about your firm on the Internet is completely within your control.

Digital marketing can seem daunting to a newcomer; so many channels, so little time. Should you post on LinkedIn? Twitter? Pinterest? What about blogging? What is “SEO” and why should you care?

We’ve assembled some of the leading minds in digital legal marketing to help you navigate the new terrain of marketing your firm and best practices for getting clients in the door using existing digital mediums. Our focus? The four cornerstones of digital: reputation management; SEO; social media; and blogging.



Every attorney—even the best, most attentive, empathetic, and outstanding in our ranks—will receive a negative review one day.

Reputation Management

As word of mouth moves online, lawyers occupy the same place today that hotels were in a decade ago: just starting to face the prospect of widespread use of online user reviews, and concerned that such reviews will crater their business. Hotels—like restaurants and consumer products before them—have learned to live with, and quite often leverage, the phenomenon of online reviews. While no system of reviews is perfect, the now ubiquitous “reputation ecosystem” has created a resource that helps consumers and clients crowd-source opinions, ratings, and judgements. This allows them to make informed decisions on what to buy, and in this case, who to trust with their legal needs.

Lawyers would be wise to recognize the inevitability of this trend toward professional services. Often, they are hyperfocused on the potential for negative and phony reviews. This can cause paralysis and failure to adapt to this massive change in how clients are researching lawyers.

And make no mistake this change IS happening. According to the latest Nielsen survey data, consumer reviews posted online are now the second most trusted source of marketing information for consumers. Trailing only personal referrals, online reviews now rank ahead of brand websites and editorial content—far ahead of traditional “bought” advertising.

There are three primary tactics that attorneys and law firms can use to get ahead of this trend and effectively manage their online reputations.

But before we get to them, it's important to recognize this fact: every attorney—even the best, most attentive, empathetic and outstanding in our ranks—will receive a negative review one day.

The law is an uncertain business, dealing with stressful matters where success often means achieving the best possible bad outcome. And clients, being human, are sometimes saddled with unreasonable expectations. Over time, and given a sufficient volume of reviews, the overall tenor of the reviews for a practice should paint an accurate picture. But any given review may widely miss the mark. Accepting this reality is the first step in managing your online reputation.

So how can lawyers actively manage and influence their online reputations?



Make it a Habit to Ask for Reviews

Smart businesses realize that the surest way to inoculate themselves from a negative review (and to maximize the “free market research” aspect of online reviews) is to ensure that they get a wealth of regular feedback from clients. They actively make it a habit to regularly ask for reviews. From postpurchase emails, to survey instructions on the bottom of receipts, to cards handed out in a medical clinic waiting room, sellers of goods and services in virtually all industries are proactively seeking out reviews. While it may feel strange to ask, it’s worth making it part of your file closing procedure to actively ask for feedback.

Avvo and other sites have tools to make it easy to do so. And lest you think that only the cranks want to vent their spleen in online reviews, it’s actually the opposite that is true: happy customers are more likely to leave feedback. This is particularly true where the services are high-cost or high-stress like legal services.

The only caveat is that most states have rules against offering anything of value in exchange for a good review. Be sure to read up on your state’s advertising rules to make sure your request is compliant.

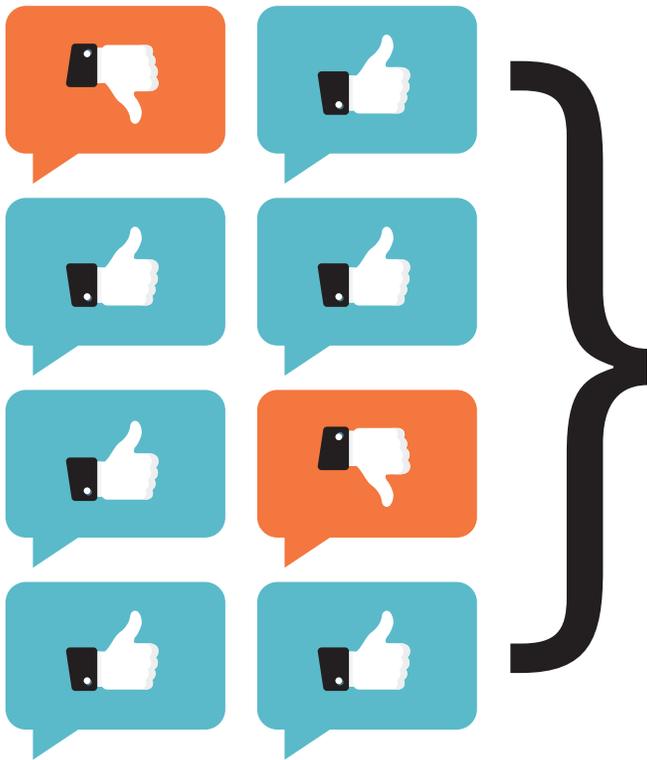
Build a Wall of Content

There is an old advertising adage that when it comes to expensive purchases, “long copy sells.”

This concept originated in the “Mad Men” days, but it remains true today. A person who is prepared to spend serious money wants as much information as possible. Such purchasers are far less likely to respond to buzzwords or taglines. On top of this is the rapid growth of consumer reviews and increasing suspicion of products and services that have no reviews. Consider your own behavior when researching products on Amazon, hotels on TripAdvisor, or restaurants on Yelp.

What does an absence of reviews make you think?

Building a wall of content through regular soliciting of reviews, blog posts, articles, completion of online profiles, etc. ensures that any potential client researching your services will have that “long copy,” a wealth of information to rely upon in making their decision to retain you.



**Online feedback
is free research into
how your practice is
perceived by clients.**

Comment on Negative Reviews

It sounds counterintuitive, but a negative review can actually be a golden marketing opportunity.

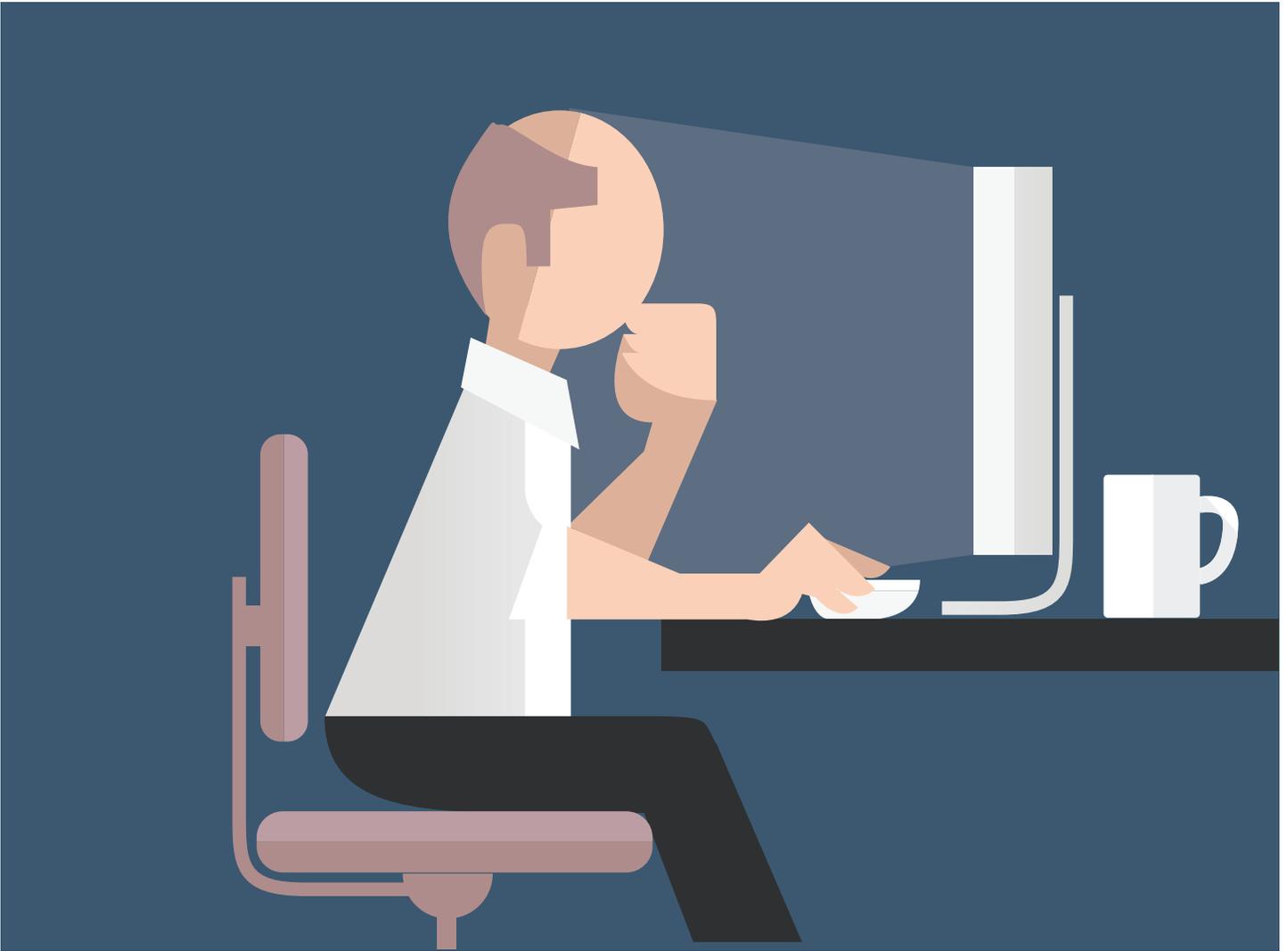
How?

Because you can post a comment in response to the review.

Done correctly, a response comment communicates responsiveness, attention to feedback, and strength of character. The trick is to ignore the lawyerly impulse to directly refute the substance of the review. A far more effective approach is to write the response with future readers—potential clients—in mind. Think of what they'd want to hear: that you care about feedback even after you've been paid, that you want to make things right for your customers, that you have compassion for their situations. Then invest adequate time and attention in crafting a message that takes the high road. A poorly-handled response to a negative review is much worse than no response at all.

It makes you look thin-skinned and defensive. Worse, if you argue and reveal client confidences (or even potentially harmful nonconfidences), you may be subject to discipline.

By actively using the first two tactics, you will be well on your way to managing your online reputation and inoculating yourself from that inevitable negative review. But keep in mind as well that client reviews can actually be much more than simply a "necessary evil" to be managed. Online feedback is free research into how your practice is perceived by clients. It can validate the things you're doing right, and expose blind spots in your approach to delivering client service. In the past, this opportunity to learn was nonexistent or incredibly expensive to undertake. Rather than just managing it, embrace the window into your practice that regular online feedback can give you.



Blogging

Lawyers get their best work via relationships and a strong word-of-mouth reputation. And as pervasive as the Internet and blogging are, for the most part, this has not changed.

One of blogging's biggest advantages is that it accelerates relationships and reputation; what may have previously taken a lawyer 15 years to achieve in professional and business development is now being accomplished in two or three via blogging.

Here are some tips to make your blogging experience worthwhile.



What are you **passionate** about?

Develop a Strategy

Remember that starting a blog is not a strategy; it's a tactic. The strategic part comes in the objectives you plan to achieve with the blog, what you include, how you go about it, and what you measure and do with those metrics.

- What are you passionate about? Really. Passion means everything in blogging. Decide what area you want to excel in and be known for. What type of clients do you want? Be aspirational, throw your heart over the bar, and let your body follow. If other lawyers are developing local and national reputations as a result of blogging, why not you?
- Go niche. Broadly focused blogs are challenging. Niches do not restrict your practice. They open doors. Niches lead to riches. Wisconsin Bad Faith Claims, California Child Custody, and Tennessee Microbrew and Distillery Law are doors unopened.
- Who's your audience? Clients? Prospective clients? Referral sources? How about the more important groups that influence them? Mainstream and trade media, other bloggers, association leaders, publishers, and conference coordinators are all potential readers—and advocates for you.
- Know how you'll measure success; it's not just traffic and search engine results. Am I growing my relationships network? Am I becoming a better lawyer? Am I establishing a reputation as a "go-to" lawyer in my niche and/or locale? Am I procuring not only clients, but also high-quality clients?

The Right Setup

Some lawyers like to tinker, some don't. If you're not the tinkering type, get a professional's help and ongoing support. Though WordPress is theoretically free, so is rewiring your house.

A blog belongs on a site independent of your website. A blog on your website will be viewed as a marketing effort no matter what. You will be limited in how you can use your blog for strategic engagement.

Blog posts on an independent site get cited by reporters and other bloggers, shared on social media, and are viewed as more credible than posts on a website. Also, think about having a guest post or interviewing a local business leader. You might get even more attention and traffic this way.

Many solo lawyers and small-firm lawyers with focused practices use a blog exclusively and forgo a website. Information about who they are, what they do, and how to get a hold of them is all laid out on separate pages as if on a website.

Design and develop for mobile first, desktop second. A mobile-optimized blog, preferably with a responsive design, is critical. People, especially influencers, are consuming and sharing content on tablets and smartphones.

A simple and professional design with an eye towards publishing is key.

Listen

Blogging involves authentic audience engagement that requires you to listen first, talk second.

Set up listening tools to follow influential bloggers, reporters, and news publications. In addition to these sources, follow subjects relevant to your niche. The listening tools of choice for lawyers are Feedly and Flipboard.

Reference and share what you have read while providing your own insight and commentary. Joining the conversation and demonstrating that you are tracking developments grows influence and a following—and that's much more effective than just covering legal updates.

Write to the Medium

This is a blog, not a legal alert or article. Write conversationally and with personality.

Write on general news and apply it to your niche. If a hurricane is hitting the East Coast, write about how HR professionals treat those missed workdays.

Avoid long block paragraphs. People scan on the web. Use short paragraphs (one to three sentences long) and use bullets where you can.

Block-quote sources. Use subheads to break up sections. Don't worry about exact word count, but a post as brief as 400 to 500 words can be sufficient.

Use images for every post. They show personality, and posts with larger images at the top are more likely to be shared on social networks like Facebook or LinkedIn.

Keep titles short (around 65 characters) but descriptive. Your titles determine how your posts get indexed on Google and how they are displayed in RSS readers. Short and professional titles get shared most on social media.

Be Proactive

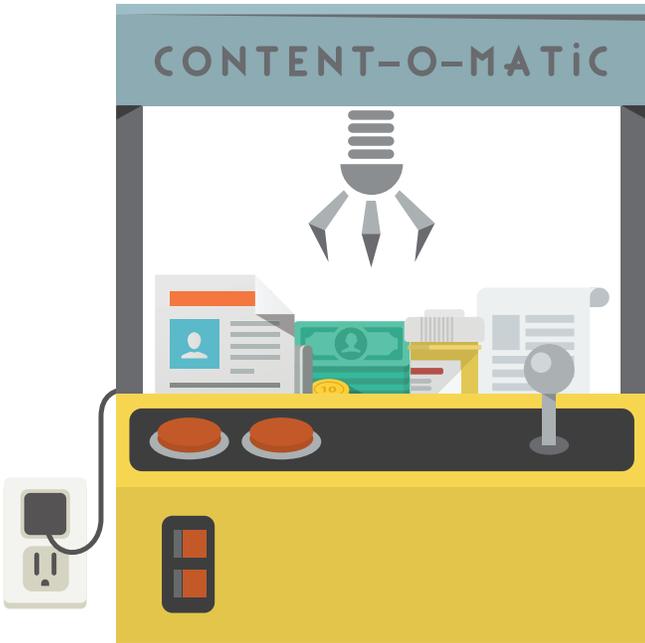
Reporting on litigation, legislation, regulations, and news stories won't cut it; you need to add value. Readers want to know what's inside your head.

- What's your take?
- What does it mean for them?
- What's coming?

Depending on your niche and firm, be an advocate. Immigration, food safety, cruise, medical malpractice, IP litigation, and divorce lawyers have developed large followings because they take stands. They champion the cause of the people they want to represent.

If you are not going to engage in any other way, at least answer questions from clients and prospective clients. For every person with that question, there are hundreds asking the same.

Answering questions shows that you're listening and you care. You'll build trust—and you'll get discovered on Google by people asking those questions in search.



What type of **content** is your audience looking for?

Think about your Audience

Effective posts are written with an audience in mind, even if it's an audience of one. Make up that one person in your mind when you start to blog. Talk with them as a late night talk radio host might.

Who do you want to know you exist? With whom do you want to build a relationship? What groups or industries do you want an in with? Start a conversation with them.

If you reach one person, who then shares your insight with others, you've reached a highly targeted (and potentially influential) audience.

Follow up with a soft touch to the influential bloggers and reporters you reference and cite. "As a courtesy to you, I wanted you to know I shared your post/story on ABC with my readers on the XYZ blog (sharing a link). Keep up the great work."

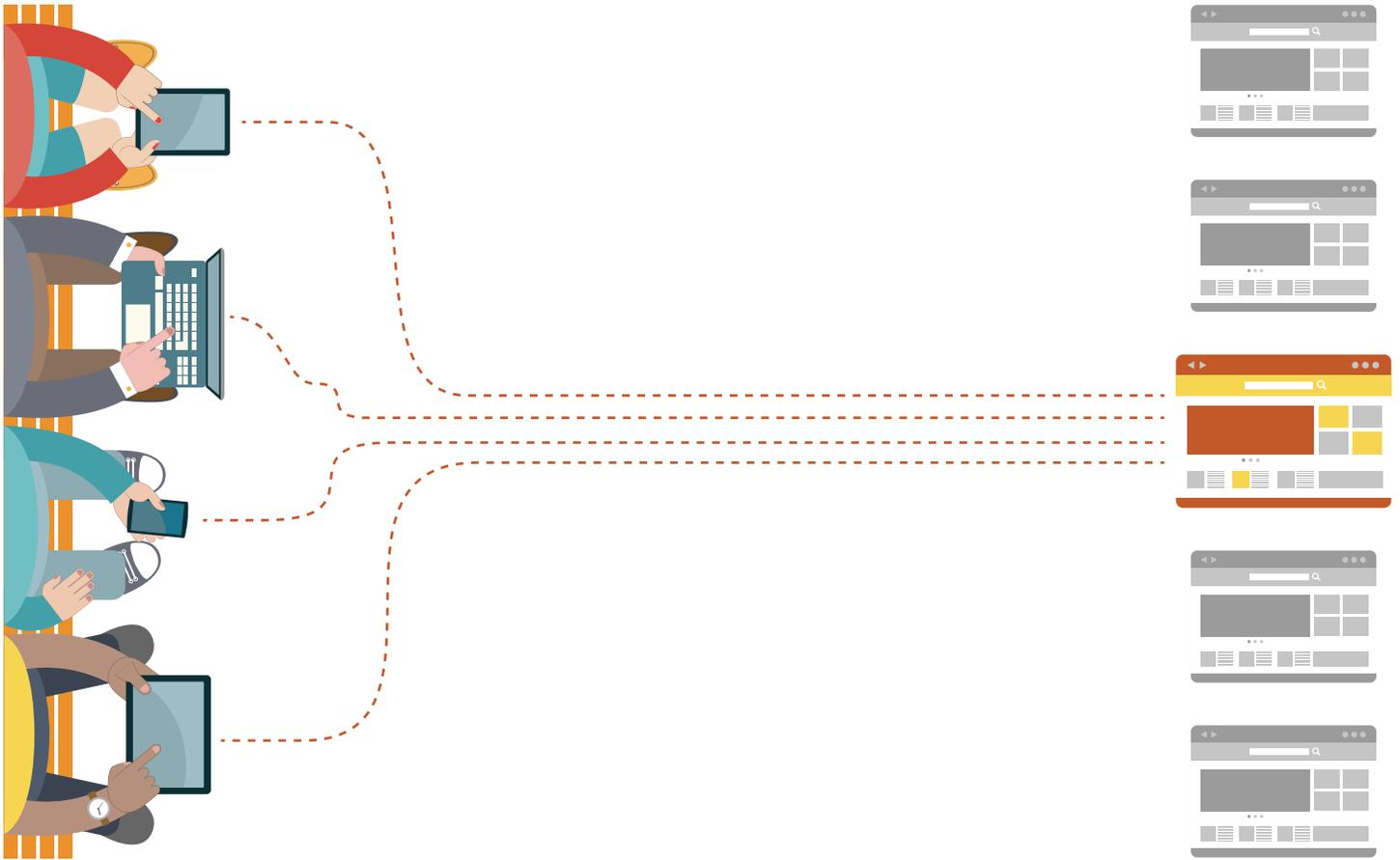
You'll get a "thank you." You'll get an opportunity to connect on LinkedIn. You'll get an opportunity to meet. How many of your competitors are meeting reporters of the local business journal for lunch?

Build Social Media Equity

As important as getting folks to your blog is having your blog socially published. Your blog needs to get published on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. And preferably, not by you.

Before you share blog posts socially, you need to share others' posts and stories. This demonstrates that you care and establishes trust. People will be receptive to your posts on social networks and will share your posts for you.

Blogging is the great equalizer for lawyers who have not had their day in the sun—yet. Do it right, and you'll get there.



Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

No matter how they find you, it's becoming increasingly likely that your potential clients will look you up online. And the majority of this research is likely to involve search engines.

Here are some of the ways that lawyers can optimize their presence in search results to earn meaningful attention and demonstrate their knowledge, skill, and experience to the people who are searching for them.

Lawyers who understand how people use search engines to research lawyers and find answers to their questions can earn meaningful attention and new clients.



How Search Engines Work

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of how to improve your visibility within search results, let's take a moment to discuss how search engines work.

One of the best places to learn about search engines is from the world's most popular search engine, Google.

Crawl

Search engines use software called “crawlers” to find web pages. These crawlers read pages and follow links to find new pages. They go from link to link and bring data about those webpages back to Google's servers.

Whether it be pages on your firm's website, a legal blog, or other online profiles, in order for your pages to appear in search engine results, they must get properly crawled.

Tip

Make sure you aren't preventing search engines from crawling your pages! Check your robots.txt file (more information here: <http://www.robotstxt.org/robotstxt.html>).

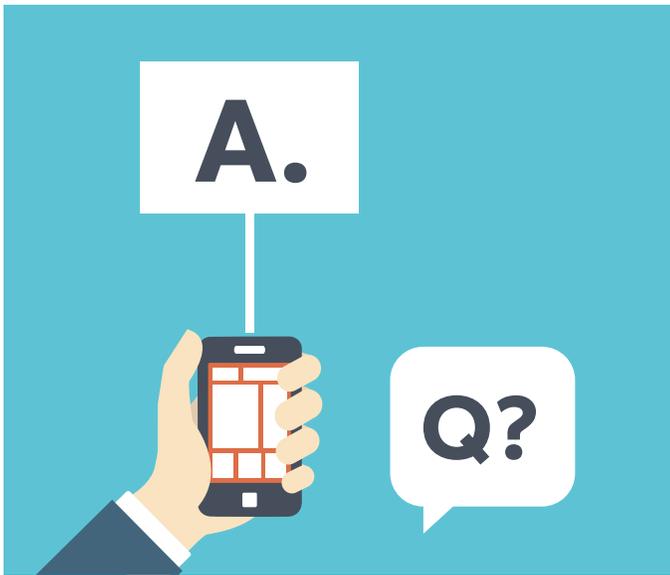
Index

From the pages that they crawl, search engines create an index. A search index is similar to a traditional index that you might find in a book. However, search engine indices are much more complex and contain a lot more information than traditional indices. It is from the index that a search engine organizes and delivers results.

If your pages aren't being properly indexed, they won't be properly served up in search result pages.

Tip

Make sure search engines can index your pages! Check your pages source code to make sure that your robots meta tags aren't preventing indexing https://developers.google.com/webmasters/controlcrawindex/docs/robots_meta_tag



1 On-Page Ranking Factors

The on-page factors include all the “stuff” you can do on your pages to help search engines understand what your pages are about.

Some of the most important on-page factors include:

- URLs and site architecture
- Title tags
- Body content
- Internal linking structure
- Page load speed

On-page optimizations are necessary, but not always sufficient, for appearing prominently in search engine results. This is especially true for more competitive search queries.

This is where off-page ranking factors come into play.

Results

If your pages have been properly crawled and indexed, they are now eligible to be served in results. But merely being eligible to appear in results and actually appearing in results are two very different things.

Search engines use many factors to decide which pages should be delivered to satisfy a searcher’s query. These factors can be divided into two general buckets:

- 1 **On-page factors:** Ranking signals that your pages send to search engines.
- 2 **Off-page factors:** Ranking signals that the rest of the web sends to search engines.

Here’s an example of a descriptive HTML title tag:

```
<!doctype html>
<html itemscope="itemscope"
itemtype=http://schema.org/Page >
<head>
<meta charset="UTF-8">
<title itemprop="name">
Legal Web Marketing: SEO, PPC, Web Design
For Attorneys
</title>
```

Notice that this page’s title includes keywords that describe what this page is about. Also notice that the page title isn’t repetitive or excessively long.

Tip

Make sure your page titles are unique, descriptive, and concise. A good rule of thumb for page title length is 65 characters.

2 Off-Page Ranking Factors

These factors include all of the “stuff” that search engines use to evaluate pages from “around the web.”

While there is a multitude of off-page factors used by the major search engines, links pointing to a page (backlinks) remain among the most significant.

Links to a page are like “votes” for that page in the eyes of search engines. But not all of these linkvotes are weighted equally.

Links from sites and pages that are topically relevant and authoritative carry significantly more weight than those that aren't. For example, a link from the news site cnn.com is a much stronger link-vote than a link from a recently created Blogger account.

There are seemingly limitless ways to acquire links to your pages. One of the most obvious (and the one you'll hear most often) is to simply create great content that people actually want to link to. Of course, this is often easier said than done.

However, it's also worth noting that even the “greatest content” can benefit from activities geared toward getting that content in front of people who are ready, willing, and able to link to, share or otherwise publicize it online. Here are some common ways to attract links to your pages:

- Include links from legal profiles to your pages.
- Sponsor a scholarship and publish the application details on your site so that schools can link back to it.
- Contribute articles or get interviewed by local journalists.
- Host relevant informational resources on your site that other webmasters would be interested in linking to (i.e. legal opinions, tools, forms, documents, etc).



Local Ranking Factors

The local ranking factors are those search signals that improve a business's visibility in local search and map results.

While there is some overlap between traditional organic ranking factors and local search ranking factors, there are also some important distinctions. One of the most important factors in appearing in local search results is to make sure your firm's Name, Address, and Phone (NAP) information is consistent on your site as well as around the web.

And by consistent, we mean strictly consistent. Even minor variations in business name and address can have disastrous consequences for your firm's visibility in local search results.



How lawyers can stand out in search engine results

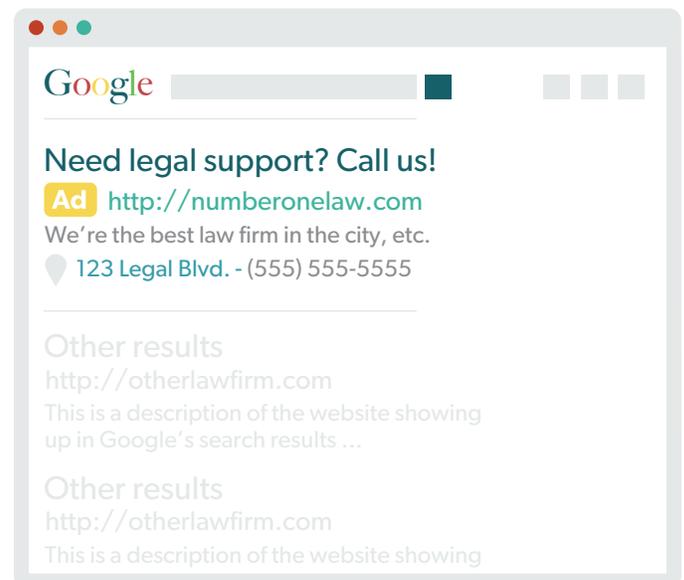
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Here are some of the ways that lawyers can optimize their presence in search results to earn meaningful attention and demonstrate their knowledge, skill, and experience to the people who are searching for them.

Here are some of the most effective:

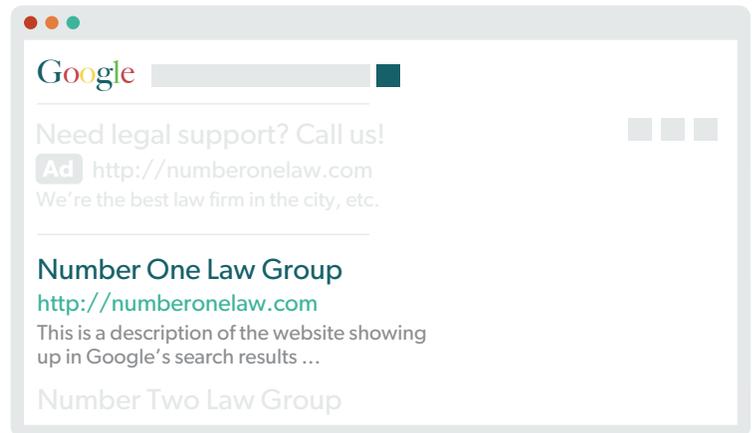
AdWords Paid Search (PPC) Ad (Not SEO)

While a completely separate topic from SEO, it's worth noting the distinction between organic search and paid search advertising. AdWords advertising isn't right for everyone. Unless you can dedicate serious resources (read time and money) to managing your account, you probably ought to get some assistance from someone who has experience managing direct response paid search campaigns for law firms.



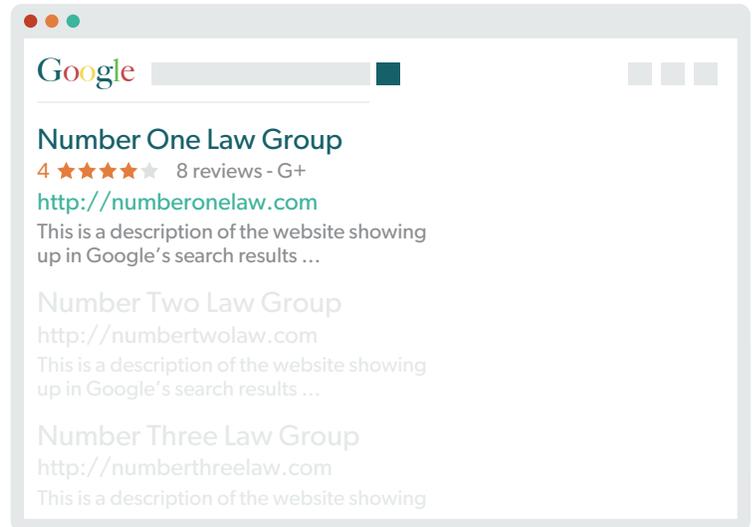
Traditional Organic Result with Authorship

These are the traditional organic search result enhanced by Google authorship. This listing is ordered based on Google's "black box" algorithm of over 200 ranking signals. To appear here, lawyers should focus on getting their HTML right and earning quality links to their pages from other relevant and popular sites.



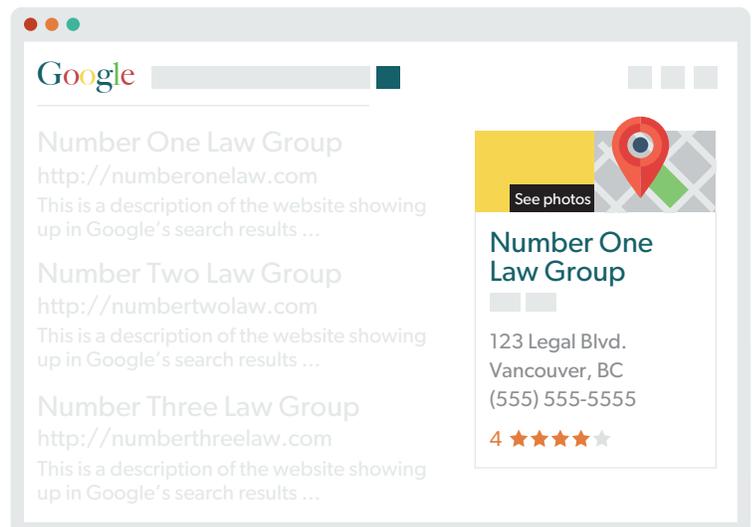
Review-Rich Snippet

This review-rich snippet feature is generated by structured data markup on the lawyer's site. There is a variety of structured data markup tags that lawyers should consider to enhance their appearance in organic results.



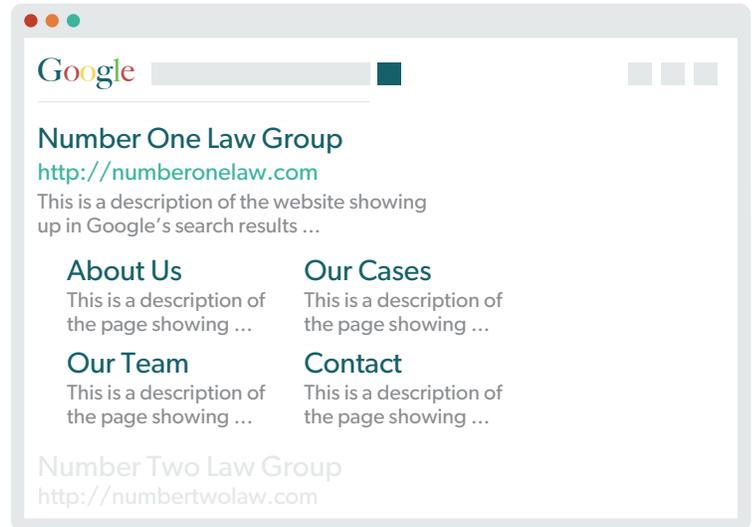
Google+ Local Pages

These review snippets are being pulled from the firm's Google+ local page. By interlinking your site with you firm's Google+ page (and adding the appropriate code) Google will list reviews of your firm as well as the local pin, address, and phone information.



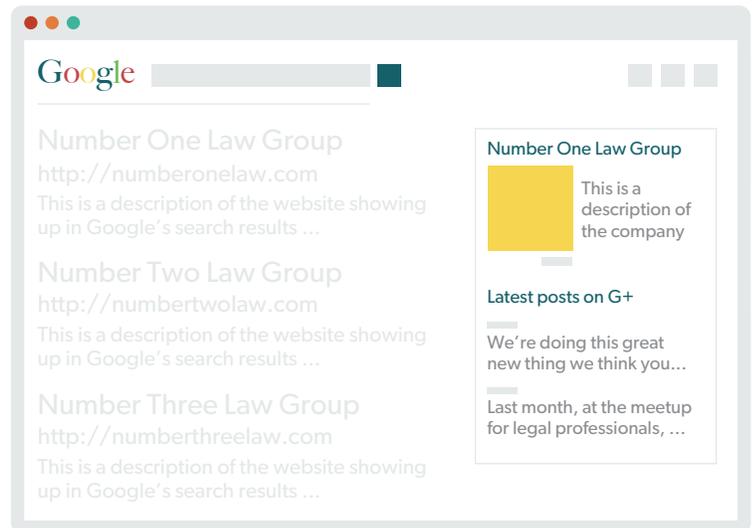
Sitelinks

Google generates sitelinks to help their users navigate your site, and it only shows sitelinks that its algorithm determines are useful to users.



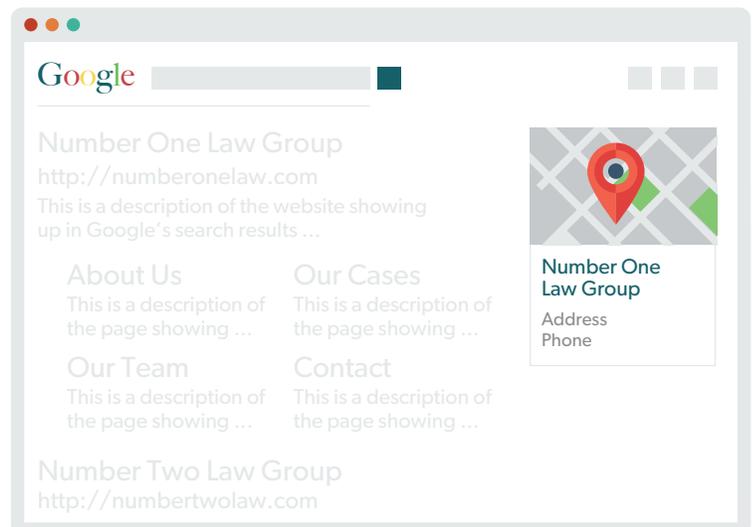
Knowledge Graph (Brand)

As you can see, knowledge graph results are given a lot of SERP real estate on Google. They also help users find contact information, reviews, and map information.



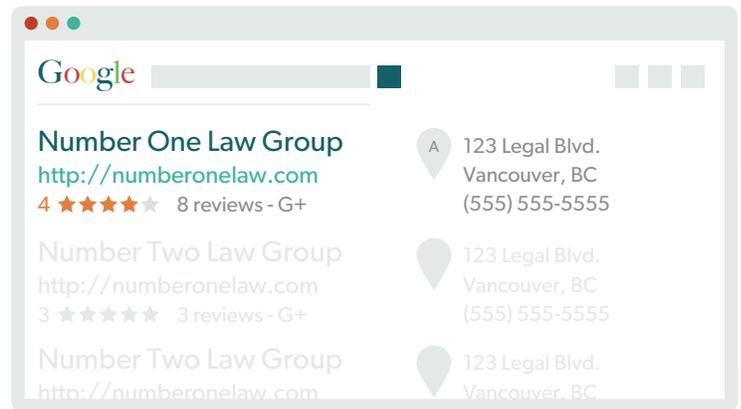
Map Result

Map results are generated when SERPs include pinned listings. These used to be tied to a firm's Google Places listings, but since Google is migrating, merging, and augmenting its local program, these results are somewhat in flux.



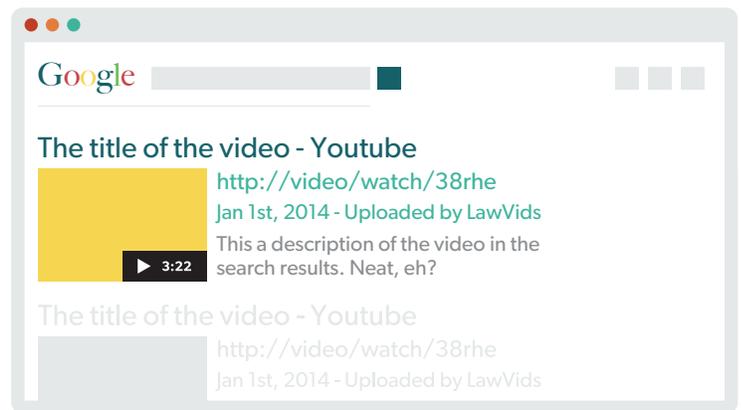
Places Listings

These are the more traditional “local pack” results. As previously mentioned, these listings are tied to creating Google+ local pages for office locations and lawyers at your firm.



Video Results

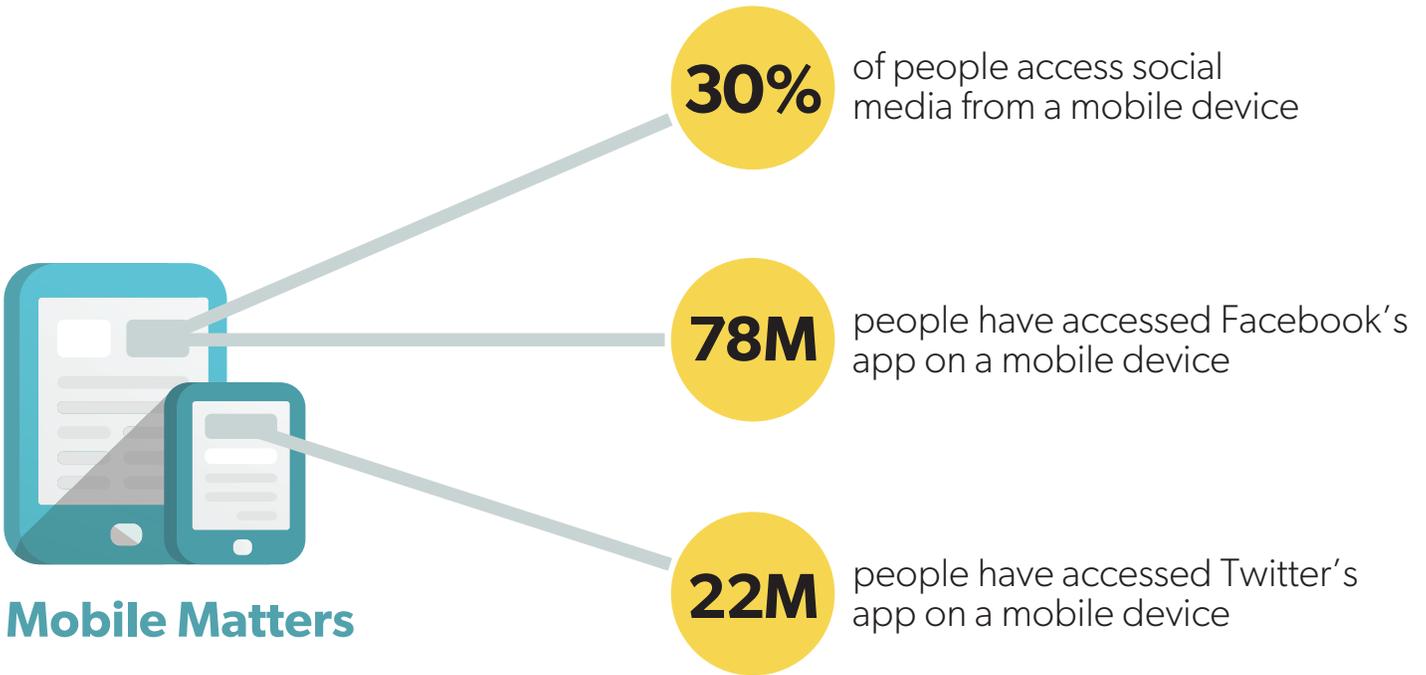
Video can be one of the most effective ways to marshal evidence of your reputation, knowledge, skill, and experience. If you do produce web videos, be sure to mark them up with structured data to produce these attention-grabbing video snippet results.



Measuring SEO

Ultimately, the effectiveness of your SEO campaigns should be measured in terms of earning more of the types of clients you are seeking. As a starting point, you should focus on measuring targeted organic search traffic in locations you practice.

If you use Google Analytics to measure your traffic (and you probably should), be sure to distinguish organic traffic from visitor traffic from other sources. Not all traffic has the same meaning to your bottom line. The sooner you realize this, the sooner you’ll be able to optimize your SEO campaigns.



Social Media

Electronic social media is defined as: "Internet-based electronic social networking sites that require an individual to affirmatively join and accept or reject connections with particular persons." (ABA definition—formal opinion 462) It can be used as an information source in both gaining and transmitting information, as a distribution source for disseminating your own information, and as a networking tool with the ability to connect with other professionals, interested parties, and even potential clients.

Where Social Media Lives

-  Facebook
-  Twitter
-  Google+
-  LinkedIn
-  SlideShare
-  Quora

Why use Social Media?

- It's fast.
- It's free.
- It works.

Get Friendly with Facebook

Facebook provides users with both personal and business pages. As a lawyer, you should be setting your personal profile to “private” with stringent privacy settings. Set up a separate account for your business page, which will be publicly searchable. List your firm information, work, and community involvement.

Pick a Goal and Go Where the Audience Resides

Social networks aren't Pokemon; while there's a pervasive attitude that businesses need to “collect them all” and maintain a presence on each to be successful, a little strategy goes a long way. Find where your audience is and where your messages will carry the most impact, and focus your efforts there. Your law firm probably doesn't need a Pinterest account, but Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, SlideShare, and Quora are all viable channels for a law firm to be part of, with vibrant legal communities. Pick a few, post, engage, and measure effectiveness, then limit your involvement to the ones that work best.

Avoid Bragging or Begging

In order to avoid the pitfalls that stem from the professional rules of advertising that govern lawyers, it's important to avoid bragging about previous case outcomes or actively soliciting business via social media channels.

Examples of Bad Messaging


Case finally over. Unanimous verdict! Celebrating tonight.”


Won a million dollar verdict. Tell your friends and check out my website.


Won another personal injury case. Call me for a free consultation.


Another great victory in court today! My client is delighted. Who wants to be next?

Examples of Good Messaging


Just published an article on wage and hour breaks. Let me know if you'd like a copy.


New small business tax regulations are coming into effect. Read more on our blog.


I'll be speaking at the chamber of commerce next week on human rights and labor law.


We're welcoming a new immigration lawyer to our firm. Find out more about our newest expert.

Discuss General Legal Content

This is where content marketing can be beneficial for your firm. By providing or curating content that is valuable to potential clients (much like we do here at Clio), you can create engagement and start building trust with people who will keep your name in mind the next time they require your services. A recent report shows that 58% of consumers trust curated or editorial content from business rather than direct marketing messaging. Wondering where you can find great legal content? Look no farther than our Twitter account (okay, maybe a little farther—but it's a good start).

Discuss Firm Activity Outside of Representation

Remember, you're bound by ethical obligations to not discuss the details of your representation, but you're free to discuss community involvement initiatives that you participate in. Whether you're giving a talk before the local chamber of commerce, sponsoring a softball team, or hosting a booth at the county fair, clients and fellow attorneys will appreciate a glimpse into your firm culture and community involvement. It's another great way to build trust and engagement without running afoul of advertising rules and ethical quandaries.

Show Personality

Don't be afraid to show your true personality online. With millions of users tweeting, Facebooking, blogging, Instagramming, and more, the only true way to stand out amongst the noise is to develop and use your own distinct voice. In the words of your parents, don't be afraid to be yourself!



Contributors

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