

BLF

BIGGER LAW FIRM

A magazine for attorneys

REPUTATION

PAGE QUALITY

MOBILE

E-A-T

MAIN CONTENT

MAINTENANCE

FUNCTIONAL DESIGN

GET SOCIAL

Jumping in to every social network just because everyone else is will not do

LAW + TECH

Protect your firm's data from encryption in the form of a ransomware attack

DISSECTING GOOGLE'S SEARCH QUALITY RATER GUIDELINES

MESSAGING

Write press releases that will get attention and raise awareness for your firm



PAGE QUALITY

Dissecting Google's Search Quality Rater Guidelines

In order to build the algorithms by which computers answer search queries, human engineers have to come up with objective, quantifiable measures for determining which pages are high quality and should rank higher on search results. The algorithms must then be tested to see whether they perform as expected.

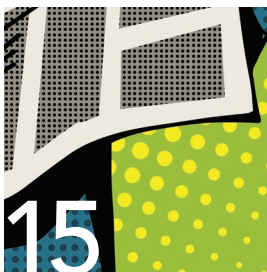
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GET SOCIAL

Find Your Mark on Social Media

The social media world is personal, and a clumsy approach can do more harm than good. Instead, your firm's marketing team needs to take a targeted approach to social media.



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Not Your Father's Press Release

Many legal professionals overlook the value of press releases in their marketing strategy. Press releases are useful for lawyers because they are a vehicle for drawing media attention to their firm, and thus attract potential clients and other legal professionals.

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Bigger Law Firm[™] was founded to introduce lawyers to new marketing and firm management ideas. Advancing technology is helping law firms cover more territory, expand with less overhead and advertise with smaller budgets. So many tools exist, but if attorneys are not aware of these resources, they cannot integrate them into their practice. The *Bigger Law Firm* magazine is written by experienced legal marketing professionals who work with lawyers every day. This publication is just one more way Custom Legal Marketing[™] is helping attorneys Build a Bigger Law Firm[™].

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MARKETING BY THE NUMBERS

What is happening in search? Here is the scoop on recent SEO, blogging and mobile statistics.

SEO



12 BILLION
SEARCHES

1. Search explosion
On average, users conduct 12 billion searches per month in the United States
- Comscore

2,000 WORDS/
PAGE

2. More is better
A web page that ranks in the top 10 results for any keyword on Google has at least 2,000 words
- QuickSprout



3. Get to the top
60% of all organic clicks go to the organic top 3 search results
- Business2Community



300%
MORE TRAFFIC

4. Search vs. social
Websites receive 300% more traffic from search engines than from social media
- Outbrain



5. Purchase decisions
50% of all mobile searchers are searching in an effort to find local results
- Search Engine Watch



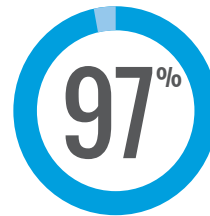
Blogging



6. Return on investment
Firms that prioritize blogging are 13x more likely to gain positive ROI
- Hubspot

13X
POSITIVE ROI

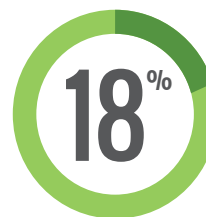
7. More links
Firms that blog receive 97% more backlinks to their websites
- Hubspot



Mobile & local



8. Keep it in browser
50% of mobile users prefer a mobile browser experience to a mobile app
- BrightLocal



9. Close more leads
18% of local mobile searches result in a sale within 24 hours of the original search
- Google

[LAWYER LOGOS AND]

social proof

Peer review logos like Super Lawyers and Martindale are just one piece of the marketing puzzle. While they are of some use as part of an overall marketing strategy, festooning a law firm website with awards can end up boring prospective clients instead of convincing them to call.

Many attorneys spend significant portions of their marketing budgets on acquiring peer review honors and memberships such as Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers, American Colleges and Martindale-Hubbell in the hopes of persuading potential clients to hire their firm.

Although they are popular features of attorney websites, the key question to ask is whether the average person cares about attorney ratings. A lawyer may view such logos as symbols of success achieved through hard work and dedication. However, when every attorney is bestowed various forms of the same superlatives like Best, Top, Leading or Super, they lose value and are rendered meaningless to prospective clients. As a result, peer review logos may do little to distinguish your law firm from competitors.

A healthy law firm marketing strategy is one that is driven by a focus on clients. By highlighting ratings, awards and logos on their website to promote their services, lawyers end up drawing attention to themselves rather than on how they prioritize clients' needs. When visiting a site, prospective clients want to know why they should hire you instead of a rival attorney in the same practice area and geographical location. Without finding anything of value to set you apart, they will quickly move on to the next law firm.

An effective way to use peer ratings is by treating them as trust symbols. Rating agency logos can serve as eye-catchers when it comes to the design of a law firm's website. However, those honors may be taking up valuable space, as the average person is unlikely to understand what they mean without context.

Instead, find a way to convert the logos into engaging messages that connect with potential clients. Explaining the meaning of each award and why clients should know about them can help maximize their effect. Perhaps the logos can link to a page that provides further information about where the reviews come from and how the awards translate into the law firm's daily practice. They can also be accompanied by positive testimonials from past clients to enhance their impact.

Peer review ratings are not the only measure of an attorney's ability and integrity. In a world where companies are constantly vying for fleeting consumer attention, the powerful concept of social proof plays a significant role in reaching new clients in a crowded space. When facing a decision, individuals tend to choose what others have already selected. Social proof refers to people assuming the actions of others reflect the correct behavior for a given situation. Countless examples of social proof can be observed in daily life, whether it is celebrity endorsements, referrals from friends or online reviews. When it comes to lawyer marketing, certain types of social proof can effectively generate leads when implemented correctly.

Law firms may find client testimonials to be a more useful form of social proof than peer review logos for persuading clients to call. In today's rank-obsessed society, consumers are accustomed to looking up reviews and reading testimonials before making decisions, whether they are choosing a restaurant

on Yelp or looking up hotels on TripAdvisor. Testimonials shift the focus away from attorneys and their peers promoting their achievements to clients sharing their actual experiences with the law firm. By posting testimonials from past clients on their website, law firms can use social proof to encourage new visitors to make the same choice that others previously made. Without some form of social proof on a website's landing page, a potential client may be hesitant about an attorney's ability to represent them successfully.

Besides a law firm's own website, people can read and write reviews on

Reviews promote transparency, which can help establish credibility and trust — two key traits that prospective clients desire in a lawyer. Posting client testimonials on your website allows you to highlight those that positively capture the essence of your practice.

general sites such as Google and Yelp, as well as lawyer-focused ones like Avvo. Such reviews can leave lasting impressions on prospective clients, as they were generated by their peers rather than the law firm itself.

In addition to a satisfying amount of quality content and high-level functionality, social proof is essential for improving Google ranking. The search engine has identified expertise, authority and trust as major factors used when evaluating websites.

Expertise: Google establishes a site as "expert" based on first-person experience in addition to formal education or training. For a law practice's website, the search engine

looks for content related to the firm's areas of expertise that provides useful information. Besides the main content, a wide variety of supplementary content is an integral part of a high-quality page.

Authority: Law firm websites that have high editorial standards for content earn points for authority. Google also considers user engagement and a large number of positive user reviews as strong evidence of a website's positive reputation. Prestigious awards or recommendations from expert sources, such as professional societies, are also included as basis for a very positive reputation. Many websites are keen to tell visitors how great they are. However, the search engine recommends being skeptical of claims that websites make about themselves and to instead seek external, independent reputation information about the website.

Trust: Online reviews are a key component of a site's trust level. Law firms must establish a reputation management system that promotes positive reviews. Google takes notice when established experts convey a positive reputation on your website. By consistently providing valuable content tailored to the target market, the website will eventually garner user engagement and trust. In addition to having quality, up-to-date content, websites must devote attention to optimizing the user experience with easy navigation and functional page design.

In order to help build expertise, authority and trust, law firms would benefit from encouraging online reviews and testimonials from clients. While peer review logos may be useful as trust symbols from external expert sources, client testimonials may serve as a more effective form of social proof that is in line with Google's standards for identifying high-ranking websites.

- *Dipal Parmar*



Find your mark on social media

The social media world is personal, and a clumsy approach can do more harm than good. Instead, your firm's marketing team needs to take a targeted approach to social media.



IN THE PAST DECADE

social media networks have exploded in popularity, with 65 percent of all American adults using at least one social network, compared to just seven percent in 2005. To be competitive in today's legal environment, law firms must have an online marketing strategy, and they ignore social media at their peril. However, jumping in to every social network available just because everyone else is doing it will not do.

Incorporating social media into your existing online marketing plan is not difficult. Assuming your firm's marketing team is already familiar with the demographics of your target audience and has measurable business goals in mind, then focusing your social media strategy involves two criteria.

For each social network your firm is considering using, ask the following two questions:

- 1 **Is this network used by your firm's target audience?**
- 2 **Can the firm participate in this network in a meaningful way?**

If a particular network does not meet these criteria, then it should not be a focus of your firm's social media strategy. Asking these questions helps

to concentrate marketing resources where they can be most effective. Let's look at these criteria in detail.

USE THE NETWORKS YOUR PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS USE

Naturally, your firm should focus its efforts on the social media that are used by the type of people you want to attract as clients. This involves taking a look at the data on social media use, both raw numbers and demographics. For both sets of data, the Pew Research Center is an invaluable source.

Looking at raw numbers first, it's clear that Facebook is king. The ubiquitous social network is used by 72 percent of all adults in the United States who are on the internet, which translates to 62 percent of the entire adult population.



The numbers for the other major social networks are all a step down from there. Pinterest is used by 31 percent of internet users, Instagram by 28 percent, LinkedIn by 25 percent and Twitter by 23 percent.

Frequency of use is another important data point in comparing social networks. Once again, Facebook is on top, with 70 percent of its users visiting the site every day. Daily users of Instagram make up 59 percent of the total users of that site. Twitter is at 38 percent, Pinterest at 27 percent and LinkedIn at 22 percent.

Beyond the raw numbers, it is important to examine the demographic data of the various social networks to see how they match up with what you know about your prospective clients.

With regard to gender, Pinterest stands out for its appeal to women: the network is used by 44 percent of online women and only 16 percent of online men. When it comes to age, nearly all social media are used more by younger people, but LinkedIn is an exception, with a higher percentage of users age 30-49 and 50-64 than age 18-29. For people age 65 and

older, Facebook is the big winner, used by 48 percent of internet users in that age group.

With regard to income and education, LinkedIn stands out again as the one major social network where use is directly proportional to both education and income. LinkedIn is used by 41 percent of internet users with an annual income of \$75,000 or more, and 46 percent of those with a college or post-graduate degree. As income and education decrease, the percentage of people on LinkedIn drops.

For certain legal fields, it is also worth looking at smaller social networks with more specialized audiences. For instance, while Google+ has never come anywhere near matching Facebook's numbers, it has a certain popularity within the high-tech online world.

Once you have determined which social media platforms make sense as a place for your firm to connect with prospective clients, then you still must tailor your message for the forum and participate meaningfully with other users. Each network is ideal for different types of posts.

BY THE NUMBERS

Nearly all social media are used more by younger people, with two notable exceptions.

LinkedIn has a higher percentage of users between the ages of 30 and 39 and between 50 and 64 than it does users between the ages of 18 and 29.

Facebook is used by 48 percent of internet users age 65 and up.

LinkedIn also stands out with regard to income and education.

LinkedIn is used by 41 percent of internet users with an annual income of \$75,000 or more, and 46 percent of those with a college or post-graduate degree.

PARTICIPATE MEANINGFULLY

Your firm's participation in social media is where the distinction between marketing and advertising is paramount. If the plan is to simply run advertisements, then the information on numbers and demographics of users — along with a well-designed ad campaign — would be all you need to move forward. But social networks are not that simple.

Because of the highly personal nature of social networks, advertisements and hard-sell messages come across as even more annoying than they are in other contexts. Your firm may have advertisements that perform well with, for instance, Google's AdWords program, which is based on users' searches and displays ads on websites they visit. These same ads may perform poorly on social networks.

For users who want to socialize with family and friends, blatant marketing messages seem especially out of place. Instead, it's important to share content that is actually interesting or useful for people, and to participate in the community, without every message being only about your firm.

One mistake that law firms make when using social media is to treat every post or tweet as a free advertisement and expect the content to be liked and shared. Using social media for blatant advertising is in reality self-defeating. Users will not follow or "like" a law firm that clogs their social media feed with marketing messages, and with no follows or likes, no one will see the posts.

These networks are social spaces first and foremost. Just as you would not begin robotically handing out your business card at a cocktail party, your firm should not make every message a hard sell. Instead,



BECAUSE OF THE HIGHLY PERSONAL NATURE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS, ADVERTISEMENTS AND HARD-SELL MESSAGES COME ACROSS AS EVEN MORE ANNOYING THAN THEY ARE IN OTHER CONTEXTS, LIKE GOOGLE'S ADWORDS PROGRAM.

start a conversation, or better yet, participate in a conversation that is already happening.

On all social media, people respond more to individuals than they do to businesses, and to personal messages more than to official statements. If there are attorneys in your firm who enjoy using Twitter and Facebook, have them share a bit of their personality. Humanizing the firm goes a long way toward creating more interest on social media.

This goes for the content of posts and tweets as well. Instead of looking at social media from the point of view of the firm trying to gain business, approach it from the point of view of users. People want useful and interesting information from reliable sources. A law firm is automatically seen as authoritative, so well-crafted posts along the lines of "Know Your Rights" and "What To Do If..." will be read. This is the beauty of social media — quality content gets shared organically by real users who find it useful. When done correctly, the "free advertising" aspect is real. In addition, when you have genuine followers sharing your content, then your promoted tweets

and boosted posts will have much more impact.

MAKE THE MESSAGE MATCH THE MEDIUM

Finally, your firm's marketing team should take care to tailor your message to the medium. LinkedIn is a professional network, so business-oriented posts are appropriate there, whereas Facebook users may respond better to human-interest oriented posts. If you have decided to focus some of your resources on Pinterest or Instagram, you should be aware that they are visual media. Professionally designed infographics conveying legal knowledge will do well on Pinterest; human-centered images do well on Instagram. If your firm has noticed that there are few well-produced factual videos by attorneys in your field, you may want to fill the gap on YouTube, but make sure you produce compelling videos that look great. Above all, if you are going to enter a social media space, commit to doing it right. You will be most successful if you know the medium well and participate meaningfully on a regular basis.

- *Brendan Conley*

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DISSECTING GOOGLE'S SEARCH QUALITY RATER GUIDELINES

WEB DEVELOPERS HAVE KNOWN FOR SOME TIME THAT GOOGLE EMPLOYS PEOPLE WHOSE JOB LARGELY CONSISTS OF RATING THE QUALITY OF WEBSITES. NOW THEY KNOW WHAT ADVICE IS BEING GIVEN.

In order to build the algorithms by which computers answer search queries, human engineers have to come up with quantifiable measures for determining which pages are high quality and should rank higher on search results. The algorithms must then be tested to see whether they perform as expected — that is, whether they indeed favor websites that a human user, using a mix of objective and subjective criteria, would tend to find useful.

This testing process is where Google's "Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines," recently made public in the form of a 160-page PDF, come in. The Guidelines instruct Google's evaluators, or "raters" (who tend to work for a third-party contractor, not directly for the company), on how to rate the quality of public websites. Portions of this document have been leaked to the public over the years, but in November 2015, Google released the Guidelines to the public in their entirety. Web developers sat up and took notice.

Google has said these ratings do not directly affect how pages rank in search results. They are only used to evaluate the performance of the search engine's algorithms. This makes sense, as the labor of evaluating web pages must be largely automated. There are simply too many web pages to manually rate them all. However, Microsoft has said that its evaluation program does affect how sites rank on its Bing search engine. But regardless of whether manual ratings affect search results, Google's published Guidelines offer valuable insight into what the company feels constitutes a useful web page.



PAGE QUALITY

E-A-T

MOBILE

MAIN CONTENT

MAINTENANCE

REPUTATION

FUNCTIONAL DESIGN

THE GUIDELINES

The Guidelines come in three parts. The first is of great use to website owners and designers. It explains in detail how evaluators are to gauge a website's quality. This is a direct insight into Google's thoughts on what makes websites useful and, in turn, which factors its algorithms use to determine search result rankings. We will cover in detail the criteria evaluators use to determine page quality.

Parts 2 and 3 are focused on evaluating the performance of the search engine; that is, how well a page of search engine results answers a user's query. These parts are therefore less useful to third parties.

GOOGLE PLACES SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON PAGES CONCERNING TOPICS SUCH AS LAW, FINANCE AND HEALTH. IT CALLS THESE YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE, OR YMYL, PAGES. THE GUIDELINES SPECIFICALLY INSTRUCT EVALUATORS TO EXPECT HIGHER QUALITY FROM YMYL PAGES.

However, it's important to note they both have a heavy emphasis on mobile (i.e., smartphone) users. Mobile users represent an ever-increasing segment of search engine queries. They have different needs and expectations, and their devices have different capabilities compared to desktop/laptop users. In recognizing this, Google places a great deal of emphasis on evaluating how well third-party websites and its own products meet mobile users' needs.

Google's Guidelines are short on direct methods for evaluating how well third-party sites serve mobile users. This article will cover design principles to help you understand whether your website soars or suffers on smartphones.

DETERMINING PAGE QUALITY

A great deal of the Guidelines is devoted to teaching evaluators how to determine whether a given web page is high quality. No one factor is entirely objective or subjective. Evaluators are instructed to look for certain qualities in pages, but are often left to determine for themselves exactly how a page might exhibit those qualities.

Your Money or Your Life

Before getting into the specifics of page quality evaluation, it is important to understand that as a law firm, your website is held to higher standards than most. Google places special emphasis on pages

concerning topics such as law, finance and health. It calls these "Your Money or Your Life," or "YMYL," pages. The Guidelines specifically instruct evaluators to expect higher quality from YMYL pages because poor information on them can have significant negative impacts on users. Virtually any law firm's website will qualify as a YMYL page, especially if it goes beyond bare-bones contact information and includes a blog and FAQ section, as it should.

Main content

The first thing the Guidelines say that a high quality page should exhibit is "a satisfying amount of high quality main content." Here, the problems of trying to understand exactly

what evaluators are looking for immediately become apparent. The only objective term in that phrase is "main content" — it is that portion of the page that contributes directly toward its purposes, as distinguished from supplemental content and advertisements. Evaluators are largely left to determine for themselves what the terms "satisfying amount" and "high quality" mean.

Generally speaking, people know high quality when they see it. They also know what constitutes a "satisfying amount" of content. The first specific criterion in the Guidelines for determining a web page's quality is the evaluator's subjective impression upon reading and using it. The takeaway here is that web pages need to serve users, not search engines. If you favor verbosity over clarity, or if you favor the use of search keywords over making an impression on the reader, your site will suffer.

E-A-T

Google places significant emphasis on three distinct but related factors that make for high quality content: expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness, or E-A-T. Google seems to recognize that a thorough and objective determination of these qualities is likely beyond the reach of an evaluator who is spending only a short time on any given site. The Guidelines are short on specifics of how evaluators are to determine E-A-T; again, significant leeway is granted to the evaluator's subjective interpretation.

One caveat in the Guidelines is a reminder to the evaluator that YMYL topics such as law, finance and health require significant expertise. For you, as an attorney, this cuts both ways. You are assumed to have a certain level of E-A-T simply by virtue of being a licensed, practicing

attorney; you are obviously not a layman pretending to be an expert. On the other hand, an extra-high level of E-A-T is demanded of legal professionals, so simply being an attorney is not enough.

All the content on your website should attempt to strike a tone that conveys these three qualities. This goes double for brief, bold headlines, which grab the reader's eye and make a greater impression than paragraphs. "Legal Experts You Can Trust" wins hands-down over "We Care About Our Clients," at least as far as the Guidelines are concerned.

Reputation

Google tells its evaluators that reputation is very important in determining page quality. It asks them to do their own research into a site or organization's reputation, but gives a number of tips. The first thing the Guidelines mention is reviews.

Do you see reviews of your firm on sites like Google Maps, Bing Maps and Yelp? Many firms lack reviews entirely, either because attorneys are reluctant to ask for them, or because it does not occur to clients to write them (unless, perhaps, their experience is very negative). Firms with multiple positive reviews really stand out — not just in terms of reputation, but in search results. If you want to improve your perceived reputation, you may have to start asking clients to review your services.

Google recommends news articles as another important source of reputation information. Press releases are an easy way to create a news presence for your firm. The company also steers evaluators toward the Better Business Bureau, Wikipedia and professional associations when



FIRMS WITH MULTIPLE POSITIVE REVIEWS REALLY STAND OUT — NOT JUST IN TERMS OF REPUTATION, BUT IN SEARCH RESULTS. IF YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR PERCEIVED REPUTATION, YOU MAY HAVE TO START ASKING CLIENTS TO REVIEW YOUR SERVICES.

researching reputation. Not all of these apply to all law firms, but in cases where they do, linking to these sources from your site is a good idea.

Maintenance

Website evaluators are also looking for signs of good website maintenance. At a minimum, all links should work and all images should load. But content should also be "added and updated over time." Keep a blog and an FAQ section on your firm's site, and add to each at least once per month. Date your blog entries. Consider adding "last updated" text at the bottom of regularly updated sections, like FAQs. The content on your main landing pages is fine to leave alone for periods of time, but should be refreshed occasionally. Main pages with links to recent blog and FAQ entries make it clear that secondary pages have been updated recently.

OTHER FACTORS

Design

"Functional page design" is another major factor in determining page quality. Functionality is largely a matter of how the main content is presented. The main content should be "front and center," immediately visible upon opening the page, and easily differentiated from supplemental content (e.g., links to other pages on the site).

A high quality website should have a "satisfying amount of website information." Again, what constitutes a "satisfying amount" is left to the evaluator to determine, but at least "website information" is an objectively defined term. It includes information about the organization the page belongs to, information on how to contact the organization or receive customer service, and information about who is responsible for content and website maintenance.

SERVING MOBILE USERS

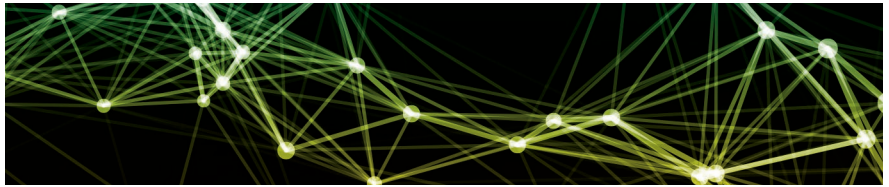
A good deal of the Guidelines document is focused on meeting the needs of mobile users. Smartphone use is growing across all demographic groups, and younger internet users skew heavily toward mobile computing. Among millennials, it is not uncommon to wonder whether owning a full-fledged computer is even necessary.

Clearly, in order to be regarded as a technologically savvy law firm, your website must be responsive and designed to meet the needs of mobile users.

Unfortunately for content designers, the Guidelines offer little in the way of specific criteria for judging a website's mobile-friendliness. Google's focus within this evaluation program is making sure its own search products are effectively answering mobile users' queries. This makes sense, as technology in the mobile space moves even faster than in the desktop space, and one of Google's greatest fears is a loss of search engine market share to a shiny new upstart.

However, a few tips in the Guidelines combined with a bit of testing and common sense can ensure your firm's website meets mobile users' basic usability expectations.

View your website on both an iPhone and Android phone and make sure it provides a good user experience. The page should load quickly if you have a good internet connection. Links should not be so small that they require zooming in several times to tap. Opening and selecting from navigation menus should not be a clumsy affair. No page should load in such a way as to require left-to-right scrolling or zooming out in order to view fully.



CLEARLY, IN ORDER TO BE REGARDED AS A TECHNOLOGICALLY SAVVY LAW FIRM, YOUR WEBSITE MUST BE RESPONSIVE AND WELL-DESIGNED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MOBILE USERS.

Some sites, but not all, load a separate version of the site optimized for mobile phones upon detecting a smartphone browser. Not long ago, the capabilities of mobile phones and cellular data rates were such that loading a typical website was almost always a very slow affair, which necessitated a separate mobile version. While smartphones and cellular data signals are a great deal better than they were just a few years ago, it is still a useful practice to have a mobile-optimized version of your website. The tradeoff, of course, is that this requires designing and maintaining two separate versions of your site.

If you choose to go this route, you should expect your mobile site to load very quickly, especially with a modern phone and a fast connection. Text, images and menus should all be easily viewable and usable at default zoom levels, and content should be trimmed down to the essentials, with supplemental content accessible from navigation menus.

A fairly conspicuous link to the full desktop version of the site should be available for those who prefer that user experience. If you choose not to have a separate mobile version of your site, you should make doubly sure that each page of your site loads quickly and is not unnecessarily long

or graphics-laden. See how long your site takes to load over your cellular network, which is probably slower than your Wi-Fi. Perhaps even test it when you have a marginal signal.

NO SURPRISES

While Google's public release of its Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines is a big deal to web developers and has a lot of useful information, it is important to note that nothing in them comes as a surprise. Google favors pages that are created with skill and effort; which exhibit expertise, authority and trustworthiness; and that are regularly maintained.

The Guidelines place significant emphasis on website owners' reputation, and hold sites that affect users' money and livelihood to higher standards. And mobile users' ability to quickly load and easily navigate sites is increasingly important.

Be sure you demonstrate the same commitment to quality with your firm's website as you would with your most important client's legal briefs. With some proactive attention to quality, you will reap the dividends of high search engine rankings and broad client outreach for a long time to come.

- Ryan Conley



Not your father's press release

Press releases are a viable part of an online marketing strategy — when they are done well. And press releases that are likely to be read, distributed and picked up by journalists share some common characteristics. Working these features into your firm's releases will help make your message available to a wider audience.

Many legal professionals overlook the value of press releases in their marketing strategy. Press releases are useful for lawyers because they are a vehicle for drawing media attention to their firm, and thus attract potential clients and other legal professionals. They also highlight a lawyer's expertise, provide content for their website and help build inbound links if they are distributed online through a newswire service.

PRESS RELEASE BEST PRACTICES

Press releases don't have to be boring. Instead, make them work for your firm by incorporating some of these tips.

PICK YOUR TOPIC WISELY

The objective of a press release is to obtain media coverage and raise awareness about your firm. To accomplish this, your topics must be timely and novel.

DETERMINE YOUR TARGET MARKETS

Not all of your potential clients will be interested in the same topics. Try to group your prospects by demographic, being careful to include factors like location, education and income levels.

WRITE GREAT HEADLINES

Journalists can see hundreds of headlines a day when skimming the wire for newsworthy stories. And readers suffer from the same information overload when determining which stories to read and which to skip. A press release headline should clearly delineate the subject of the release. It should always contain a noun and a verb, never be passive and always make a declarative statement.

MAKE YOUR FIRST SENTENCE COUNT

The first sentence of any press release is the most important. It should be well-written, concise and clearly cover all of the main points of the story to come.

Any law firm would appreciate having journalists write stories about their cases in order to inform readers about their practice areas and the ways in which they have helped their clients. It's one of the best kinds of free publicity since it comes from an unbiased third party.

Law firms can write press releases about news events or cases related to their practice area in which they are not involved — this is beneficial to a firm because these types of releases can demonstrate expertise and authority, which can be further augmented by providing legal perspective through the use of direct quotes. The particulars of a story or case may resonate with those who read the story, and as a result, they may be encouraged to contact the attorney about a similar case. In this way, the press release can have an impact on its audience.

There are a number of steps solo attorneys and large law firms alike can take in order to increase the chances that a press release will be noticed by readers and picked up by journalists.

Determine the best types of stories to feature

A press release should be about a newsworthy event; as such, there should be something new, unusual or surprising about the story, and the news should interest other people, especially potential clients and other legal professionals. Try to put yourself in others' shoes to determine what they may deem to be useful, since your firm has a natural bias toward thinking most things it does are interesting.

The objective of a press release is to obtain media coverage and increase awareness of legal issues related to the lawyer's practice areas among their target audience. Journalists are

looking for stories that provide useful information, have an effect on people or have a human-interest angle.

Press releases for law firms are appropriate tools to draw attention to relevant stories such as:

- Notable verdicts and settlements
- Cases involving notable businesses, corporations or people
- Lawsuits that cause important implications within public policy
- Upcoming seminars available to the public and legal professionals
- Events already reported that relate to the law firm's practice area(s)
- The hiring of new lawyers
- Legal honors or awards given to members of the law firm

Determine your target market

It is seldom effective for law firms to attempt to attract all of their potential clients with the same press release, because they all have different needs. By grouping clients together based on their similar requirements, lawyers will be better able to market their services to each group.

Begin to recognize the different traits among current clients by seeking to attract groups of people within similar demographics. For example, clients can often be segmented by age, gender or income. Lawyers with more than one main practice area might also divide their clientele between the practice areas relevant to their cases. But one thing that all potential clients have in common is their geographic location — law firms should always strive to attract those who live within the location(s) they serve.

Additionally, it may be helpful to perform a SWOT analysis, in which the firm evaluates their own strengths and weaknesses, and identifies any potential opportunities and threats within the industry. The results of this analysis can assist the law firm in tailoring the message within a press release to potential clients.

Any law firm would appreciate having journalists write stories about their cases or other developments at the firm. It's one of the best kinds of free publicity since it comes from an unbiased third party.

Write an effective headline

It is essential to write headlines that catch the attention of journalists, who often skim through many press releases daily in search of newsworthy stories. The best way of doing this is by writing a headline that very clearly covers the subject matter of the press release. Instead of attempting to be clever, write a headline that simply states what the story is about. If journalists do not understand the subject matter of the article right away, they will move on to the next item on the newswire or their email inbox. Additionally, ensure that the headline includes a noun and a verb — if the headline is not making a declarative statement, it will have a weaker impact on readers.

Include a top line and nut graph

The first line of the press release should be the “top line,” or most important part of the story. It should be a short statement (approximately 15 to 20 words) about the main points of the story, and should read like the beginning of a news story.

Pretend that the story is going to be featured on a television or radio program. Usually, the person presenting

the story has only five to six seconds to announce each news item. If the story were going to be given special attention on the radio or on a television show, how would the announcer present it? If you read your first sentence out loud, does it flow well? The answer to this question will be beneficial in creating the top line of the story.

The first paragraph of a press release is referred to as the nut graph. Here, writers should concisely address the value of the story and include its conclusion. There should be no surprises or contrary information later in the release. A reader should know all the main points of the story after reading this short paragraph. Much like newspaper stories, press releases should include as many of the “five Ws,” or who, what, where, why and when, as appropriate in their nut graphs.

Be brief

The optimal length of a press release is approximately 300 to 400 words, which is about the length of a brief news item. That is about three to four brief paragraphs, and should include one or two quotes. If the press release exceeds this length, there may be extraneous material that doesn't contribute to the story. It is also unnecessary to incorporate background information regarding the law firm in the initial paragraph. Such details can be contained in a section at the end of the story called “notes to editors.” In order to facilitate comprehension of certain types of information, especially if they include data or statistics, it can be useful to include sub-headings and bullet points.

PRESS RELEASE BEST PRACTICES

BE BRIEF

Unlike many forms on online content, brevity is an asset for press releases. Keep your press releases between 300 and 400 hundred words and avoid writing long sentences or long paragraphs that take too much energy to follow.

INCLUDE QUOTATIONS

Quotations from attorneys at your firm add interest and authority to your press release. Quotes should express an opinion or add analysis and context, not provide factual information, which is reserved for the rest of the release.

USE PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE, NOT JARGON

Your press release is speaking on behalf of your firm. It should also be devoid of colloquialisms, such as “in a nutshell,” “believe it or not,” “for the most part,” “rock and a hard place” and “takes the cake.” Colloquialisms are casual in nature, and are generally too familiar and unprofessional for use in a press release.

USE CITATIONS CORRECTLY

If you are writing about a specific case, you must include a properly formatted citation. If this information is unavailable, then the writer must cite the source. If the source is unavailable, then the case should not be a topic for the press release.

Use quotations

Quotes should express the opinion of a lawyer within the law firm. They should be used not to provide facts and information, which can be summarized in the general text of the press release, but rather to provide the insight of a professional. The comments should sound as though they were stated by an actual person, and should not consist of colloquialisms, technical jargon or mechanical language.

Refrain from using colloquialisms and profane language

The general content of the press release should also be devoid of colloquialisms, particularly those that need their own dependent clause or prepositional phrase, such as “in a nutshell,” “believe it or not,” “for the most part,” “rock and a hard place” and “takes the cake.” Colloquialisms are casual in nature, and are generally too familiar and unprofessional for use in a press release.

The use of profanity is not encouraged in press releases, for it is deemed unprofessional, and may be considered offensive by some readers. However, in press releases that are relevant to court cases, some legal publishing sources for press releases will not delete or modify the content of a quote if it includes obscene language.

Use case citations and political commentary correctly

If a certain case is the subject of the press release, the writer should mention the name of the case and the court in which it is filed. If this information is unavailable, then the writer must cite the source. If the source is unavailable, then the case should not be a topic for the press release as it may not be accurate.



Prior to sending the press release to various media channels, thoroughly research press and media companies. You may wish to send press releases to journalists who specialize in the publication of legal articles and analyses.

In addition, political commentary is permitted in press releases on some newswire sources. However, comments are required to be ascribed to an individual or statement from the company through a quote, and should not be included in the content of the general news release. Furthermore, conspiracy theories, ridiculous beliefs or any comments that could be construed as subversive or inflammatory political rhetoric are not appropriate in press releases.

Moreover, the writer should refrain from making subjective statements about culture or norms in a press release. Instead, cite the source, which could be a person or organization in a position of authority, and include data or statistics to support the comment.

Send press releases to journalists

Prior to sending the press release to various media channels, it is important to thoroughly research press and media companies. Lawyers may wish to send their press releases to journalists who specialize in the publication of legal articles

and analyses. Law firm news and announcements should usually be sent to journalists of local media outlets and legal publications, as well as alumni magazines. Also consider reaching out to websites or blogs that cover the topics of the news stories.

In an effort to increase the likelihood of receiving press coverage, you may have to adjust the ideas presented in the press release for various broadcasting companies or programs. When sending the press release, the lawyer should also consider submitting a brief outline of the topic in one paragraph or less, and suggest where the story could fit in the newspaper or magazine to which it is being sent.

Law practitioners should be persistent when trying to obtain press coverage for their firm. Because the majority of journalists are bombarded with press releases, law practitioners may have to send the press release a few times prior to receiving a response. However, there is likely to be success as a result of much determination, persistence and perseverance.

- Roxanne Minott

SEO OBITER DICTA

Hosting isn't enough. Your website may be in danger.

Since the inception of the internet, web hosting has been the backbone of the free-to-publish web. Conceptually, web hosting is simple. A web host is simply a server that allows the public to access files; it is not so different from your office's local network. Over the decades, server requirements have expanded and now store more than just plain text and html files. Today, those files are content management systems (CMS), applications and a slew of programs that the modern business community can't function without. Websites and online environments have become more powerful than ever, but the old hosting model hasn't kept up.

If you are only paying for hosting and running a content management system, your website is not safe.

The normal model of grouping a lot of websites together on a server (shared hosting) and paying a company \$10 to \$20/month to make sure the lights stay on has no place in any business, especially a law firm. Even as cloud computing becomes the standard, there are still millions of non-tech savvy business owners trusting their uptime and security to ill-equipped companies.

Why CMS Hosting is Different

Any law firm succeeding online needs to be expanding and improving its website regularly. The best way to simplify this process is by using a CMS, like WordPress. With WordPress, content is stored in a central database that is accessible by users who have various sets of privileges. A law firm can hire a blogger and only give him or her access to blog post and page management while protecting the code and administrative tools. In this sense, WordPress offers more security.

WordPress is also expandable, with thousands of plugins, many of which are free. Chances are, if your site needs a feature, you can find a plugin to make it happen. But here is where your hosting company will let you down.

Hosting companies look at services running on the server. If your http (most web connections), POP/SMTP (mail), FTP (manual file transfers) or mySQL/Postgre (databases) function incorrectly, the host will detect the problem and fix it. If a WordPress plugin needs to be updated, the host is clueless. Even worse, if your WordPress theme or a plugin has a vulnerability and malicious code is injected into your site, your web host is unlikely to discover it.

If your hosting company does discover malicious code, the standard practice is to disable the infected script: your website.



Now your website is infected and offline, and your hosting provider will tell you, "we don't support third party software."

Monitors and Mechanics

Popular CMS options like WordPress, Drupal and Joomla have all experienced security vulnerabilities. As open source applications, most of these vulnerabilities are discovered by volunteer coders and fixed (requiring an upgrade). Since version 3.7, WordPress does automatic updates for major releases, which has helped prevent widespread vulnerabilities from being exploited. But plugins are different, and a WordPress core upgrade can cause conflicts between the three components that make up your website: WordPress Core, Third Party Plugins and your Theme.

Scary as this may sound, you are still better off with a CMS than static html pages. You just need proactive monitoring and someone who can step in if something goes wrong.

The free WordFence plugin will help monitor your code, offer protection from brute force attacks and password guessers, and notify you if it detects changes in code (which could be an indicator that a hacker has injected malicious code into your site). IThemes Security is another alternative that offers similar protections. Premium versions of WordFence and iThemes Security are also available.

Even if all the right tools are running, the best solution is to trade in your hosting company for full site management. These services are \$100 to \$500/month and include server monitoring, WordPress monitoring, enhanced security, WordPress updates, Plugin updates and theme updates. Also, developers are available who can fix problems as soon as they're discovered. Most providers also include a set number of hours for basic content updates and cloud backups and may also offer a CDN (content delivery network) to serve heavy media assets from a cloud platform to improve performance.

Website security and performance are too important to trust a standard hosting company. Full site management is a must for every law firm.

- Jason Bland

A man in a dark suit and yellow tie stands in the center, holding a dark umbrella. The background is a dark, stormy sky with falling rain. Overlaid on the scene are vertical columns of binary code (0s and 1s) in a light green color, creating a digital rain effect. The overall mood is one of protection and defense in a high-tech environment.

Shield your firm from a RANSOMWARE STORM

Gone are the days when a regular backup will cover your firm's files and protect sensitive data and clients' privacy.

As technology advances, hackers become more savvy to match, and it is becoming dangerous not to have the latest in security protection for your firm's hardware. In the year 2016, using 1999 backup protection does not suffice.

Many law firms do not regularly monitor backups, leaving the responsibility wholly to a sole IT professional or staff member. Partners and attorneys do not understand what the process involves, nor do they know what to do if files suddenly become encrypted and locked, as is the case in a ransomware attack.

Data encryption, while a positive security step, can be a law firm's nightmare if it comes in the form of a ransomware breach. Ransomware locks a law firm's network, encrypting files and preventing access unless a ransom is paid to the hackers. The ethical dilemma of whether to pay the individuals holding your firm's data for ransom is a situation no attorney ever wants to contemplate. And, even if the ransom is paid, there are no guarantees any of the data will be released by the key provided.

Ransomware is a genuine threat, and to prevent your firm from becoming a victim of a ransomware attack, you need to take preventative steps. Once your system has been infiltrated and your firm is locked out, there are very few options available to help salvage data or your reputation if word of the breach reaches clients. It is an attorney's duty to protect all information provided to them by clients. Prevention is the best policy when anticipating the possibility of a ransomware attack.

WHAT FORMS OF RANSOMWARE EXIST?

Multitudinous ransomware programs, which are also known as families, much like organized crime, exist and originate from all over the world. While this kind of computer hijacking mostly occurred in European countries in its infancy, it is rapidly spreading to the rest of world.

There are over 35 different kinds of ransomware making the rounds online at this time. Each family of the highjack tool has its own individual differences that make it unique from other programs. Although some refer to ransomware as a virus, it is not per se, which means the usual antivirus software does not catch it. Malwarebytes or SpyHunter may stop attacks, and there are also other solutions, like Bitdefender, that purport to stop ransomware before it can infect a computer. But due to the particularly sneaky nature of some ransomware, making regular back-ups is still the best preventative measure your firm can take.

The most fearsome family of malware is the Cryptowall family. It is particularly insidious because it appears to be innocent until someone clicks on it and it deploys.

This type of ransomware sends attachments that appear to be legitimate files. Someone may open an attachment they believe is an invoice, business document or file from another law firm, which lets Cryptowall out of the bag. Once the ransomware has been deployed, it encrypts your law firm's data, including data on all mapped drives.

Ransomware can also spread through Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) ports that have been left open and allow the malware to access the internet and obtain a unique key.

Take steps to prevent your firm from becoming a victim of a ransomware attack. Once your system has been infiltrated, there are very few options available to help salvage data or your reputation if word of the breach reaches clients.

Cryptowall and other malware programs take no prisoners. If your firm has mirrored drives or backup drives on the network via a server or USB port, the files on these devices will also be affected. This is one moment when having an IT expert may or may not help. The latest iteration of Cryptowall is even able to scramble the file names of all encrypted files, leaving you to wonder where to even start the cleanup.

Anti-virus software is not a defense in case of infection. The latest Cryptowall is not easily detected, and it finds and erases restore points. Going back to a time prior to being locked out is no longer a viable option.

The Cryptowall family is designed to work on all versions of Windows, including Windows 7 and 8, Vista and XP by using RSA2048 encryption. Once unleashed in a computer, the damage is done and users receive a message similar to the following:

*"Decrypt service
Your files are encrypted.*

To get the key to decrypt files pay 500 USD/EUR. If payments is not made before [date] the cost of decrypting files will increase 2 times and will be 1000 USD/EUR prior to increasing the amount left: [count down timer]"

A modern law firm needs full backups of all data stored in secure cloud storage or on serial disconnected drives on the network that are rotated off-site. How often should your firm backup the files? For some, it might be a weekly duty. For others, it may need to be done daily. Keep this question in mind when figuring out how often data needs to be backed up: How hard would it be to re-create locked, lost information?

HOW DOES RANSOMWARE SPREAD?

Cryptowall and other members of similar malware families are spread in the most innocuous ways possible, via very cleverly crafted spoof emails and by malicious websites (not always caught by a malware program). In other words, it is spread by the very things that we all expect to receive from friends and possibly clients.

The malware email is typically worded in such a way that the person to whom it was sent does not think to question its authenticity. The email usually appears to be sent by someone known to the victim of the attack, saying they are sending something they asked for.

A ZIP file will be attached, which does not appear to be a threat. When the attachment is opened, the program begins its business, and all data becomes encrypted and inaccessible. In an office, not just one computer will be affected — it will spread through the whole office network (cable or Wi-Fi) right back to its servers and the data on them.

More concerning is the other mode of delivery for ransomware: via fake updates for applications such as Adobe Reader, Flash Player or the Java Runtime Environment. These updates may show up in pop-up windows on an unsafe website, or if a Potentially Unwanted Program (PUM) is installed on your computer.

Spoof websites are also a source of ransomware infection. A spoof website can be a bank website, joke website, quote of the day website or free music or picture download site. Admittedly, attorneys working in an office may not be surfing the web for such sites, but a friend may send them a link to such a site and once clicked on, the damage is done.

HOW DO CRYPTOWALL AND OTHER SUCH MALWARE PROGRAMS WORK?

There is a sort of beauty to the simplicity of the methods these programs use to lock a computer. The ability to encrypt data is resident on virtually any device. Normally, you may encrypt your own documents safely with your own key, and may access them later.

These malware programs take over, perform the encryption and keep the key. There is no way to open them without the key. What is even worse is that these programs can also encrypt backups because most backups are attached to the system. Ransomware does not just encrypt

data, it also provides gifts for the computer system it has infected by adding several files in directories where it is holding the encrypted data. Those files may look like:

```
DECRYPT_INSTRUCTION.txt
DECRYPT_INSTRUCTION.html
DECRYPT_INSTRUCTION.url
```

Another form of ransomware can lock the screen only. It displays an image or notification that says users/victims may no longer use their system, and provides instructions on how to pay the ransom.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOUR LAW FIRM IS INFECTED?

The instant you see the demand for payment, turn the computer off and remove the network cable. Then call an IT professional immediately. In



HOW CAN YOUR FIRM PROTECT ITSELF FROM RANSOMWARE THREATS?

The best protection from ransomware or any other type of malicious software is a practice of regular backups, which must be stored in a safe location. To prevent ransomware, there are some additional steps your firm can take:

- 1. Show hidden file extensions.** Many ransomware programs rely on the Windows default hidden extensions to help camouflage suspicious files.
- 2. Keep software updated.** Malware programs generally rely on outdated programs that do not yet have security patches to spread.
- 3. Disable Remote Desktop in Windows.**
- 4. Never download an executable (.exe) attachment from an email.**

If you suspect you have compromised the system, disconnect from the network immediately. Disable all Wi-Fi and literally pull the plug. Preventing the software from reaching out and accessing an encryption key can help mitigate the damage.

most instances, the prognosis is grim: the whole office's network and servers may have to be rebuilt or replaced.

According to some malware hunters, such as SpyHunter by Enigma Software, ransomware can be detected and removed. In SpyHunter's case, the tool to check is free, but if ransomware is detected, you have to buy SpyHunter's removal tool and recover all files from an external backup.

Ransomware is a very real threat to law firms. Do not assume you are not going to be hit. Be proactive and avoid the experience. It is not worth playing Russian roulette when your whole computer system and reputation is at stake.

- Kerrie Spencer

HOW TO: 5 WEBSITE MISTAKES TO AVOID

Website design generally, and attorney website design specifically, has advanced significantly over the past five years. Design is now focused primarily on creating a good user experience that prompts visitors to take a series of desired actions.

Technology will continue to advance, allowing designers to create feature-rich, easy-to-use websites that offer real value to visitors. However, new innovations always have the potential to be used both positively or negatively. Component-rich websites can become heavy and cumbersome. Website features should always have a purpose. If a new feature does not enhance the user's experience, it should not be used — no matter how cool it might be. Here are five things to avoid in your website design.

1. Large images at the expense of speed

Designers have taken advantage of modern browsers, large monitors and fast connections, and are incorporating larger and larger images — some weighing in at over a megabyte — into web pages. Large images can help create a memorable impression, and when optimized correctly are beneficial additions to an attorney website. However, like all other page elements, images should be used judiciously. Google considers speed to be one aspect of user-friendliness, and pages that load faster tend to perform better in search results. Speed should always be a consideration when building pages.

2. Loading screens

Users do not have the patience for loading screens. Your amazing design components will do no good if they stay hidden behind a loading screen wall. People looking for an attorney have particularly little patience for obstacles. They need to be able to access your site quickly, immediately determine how you can help them and find contact information. Everything else is superfluous.

3. Templates and [widely-used] stock

If professional photography does not fit into your law firm's budget, stock photos can be a

Attorney websites are evolving. Finally, the values and needs of the visitor are taking priority over the predilections of both designer and lawyer.

valuable resource. However, when using stock, first do some research to see what's already out there and what other firms are using. Then steer clear of those images and themes.

Templates present similar difficulties. Most template providers sell layouts in categories by industry. Therefore, all companies in the same industry are looking at the same templates, making it likely you will choose a template that a competitor is already using. These templates rely on generic legal-themed imagery, and the design cannot be licensed exclusively to you without incurring significant cost.

4. Sound or video that plays on load or that cannot be disabled

The reasons one needs to find a lawyer can be very sensitive. Depending on an individual's situation, he or she may not be at liberty to do research at home and will need to access your site on a public computer. Or, they may attempt to access a website at home, privately. If your site immediately begins speaking to them, it can be disruptive, embarrassing and in some cases potentially dangerous.

If you have videos or podcasts, they should be posted and linked to prominently. But always give the visitor control. Users must have the option to choose whether to watch or listen.

5. Too-clever navigation

For better or for worse, people are used to seeing navigation along the top of the page, in a sidebar or both. Do not try to reinvent this system. "Clever" navigation can be difficult to find and difficult to use. If people cannot figure out how to navigate your site, then you have lost potential clients.

At their core, attorney websites are conversion vehicles. The page design must be built to support this goal. Supplemental features that do not support this goal should be reconsidered.



GOOD DESIGN STILL MATTERS

Your website should evolve through a process of collaboration, testing and planning. The message should be customized to appeal to clients. Your website should address your users' specific needs and answer their questions. This cannot be accomplished if you are trying to force your content into a layout designed by someone who does not have an understanding of your audience.

Functional design is an integral part of Google's calculations of page quality.

- Kristen Friend



NOBODY LIKES TO BE LEFT IN THE DARK

While many law firm marketing companies put up walls between you and your statistics, we decided to install a window. Follow trends, view your link portfolio, track rankings, follow competitors and more in the newly redesigned CLM Lounge.

CUSTOM
LEGAL MARKETING