

ELECTRONIC MARKETING: HARNESSING THE WEB'S WHIZBANG, PART II

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In Part I of this article, we talked about how to design your website and optimize it for search engines. Now let's rummage through the Web's whizbang a little further. What else can you do to marketing electronically?

Start writing articles. If you can't get them published elsewhere, at least you can post them on your own website. And you might be pleasantly surprised to see how easy it is to get your articles published online – or how many bloggers might be happy to mention and link to a good and relevant article.

Become a lecturer. Lecture to your community or start teaching CLEs. It may easier to lecture to community groups in the beginning, but spread your wings. Then make sure all your speaking engagements are listed on your website. When you have enough, put a speaking calendar on your website, with a clear and easy way for folks to contact you to arrange a presentation. Remember that it is critical to teach, not sell, at these presentations. If you know your stuff, they'll remember you without the sales pitch. Once you have your feet wet as a lecturer, advertise yourself to bar groups, civic associations, etc. using your electronic contact list. We've even lectured on cruises – a great gig if you can get it!

Network online. Networking in the old days was a royal pain. You had to get in the car to drive somewhere you probably didn't want to be to shake hands with people, some of whom you quickly came to realize that you didn't want to know, in order to eat a rubber chicken lunch listening to someone you didn't want to hear talk about something you weren't in the least interested in. All this in the hope of making connections while burning away billable hours. In this brave new world of the web, networking is far easier. A few of the best ways:

1. **Join a listserve**, perhaps in your area of practice, or in your geographic area. Simply giving a helping hand here and there, or appearing competent your area of practice, will generate referrals.
2. **Work for your local or state bar association.** Almost all of this work is now done electronically or by telephone conference, with only the rare personal meeting. This is great way to form a network of colleagues.
3. **Join and work with one of the ABA sections and divisions.** This can also be useful, particularly if your area of practice extends beyond your own state. The authors have certainly developed some of their most cherished friendships through the Law Practice Management Section – and without question, the

networking afforded has been beneficial to business while at the same time providing an avenue of “giveback” to the legal profession.

4. **Use your content management system (Outlook for many of us) to the max.** Use it to send newsletters (electronic is cheaper of course), to remember birthdays and holidays, to offer congratulations, and to send news of interest. Remember, if you choose to send a notable news story to a group of clients, send the e-mail to yourself and bcc everyone else. People get testy when their e-mail addresses are broadcast to strangers.
5. **Create e-mail distribution lists** (search Help if you don’t know how to do this). This way, you can easily contact the members of any particular group, e.g. Bar Board of Directors, at any time without typing in individual addresses.
6. **Use the task list and its reminder function.** Solos and small firms sometimes use this feature as “poor man’s case management,” but it is an invaluable tool for reminding you to perform that marketing task that has somehow gone the way of good intentions. If you told someone that you’d get back to them about a subject of mutual interest and you don’t have time today, make sure it becomes a task that nags you digitally until it gets done.
7. **Doing good is marketing.** This was certainly one of the stranger discoveries the authors made. Having been active in many good causes for years, it came as a very pleasant surprise that the folks we working with to rescue dogs were quick to refer us. Likewise, potential clients who knew of our philanthropic work were astonishingly more likely to hire us. The wonderful truth here is that many clients will be drawn to someone they perceive as nice. Don’t puff yourself up, but don’t be shy either – put your community service on your website. That section of our website actually draws more hits than any page other than the home page. Who knew that being nice could have such collateral professional benefits?

Where should you put your advertising dollars?

For many attorneys, this is the \$64,000 question. There are so many grasping hands reaching for your modest marketing budget. Here is our best advice:

1. Cut back on any print or yellow page advertising.
2. Invest pretty heavily in your web site, the most likely source of return on investment.
3. Be wary of legal directories, which often promise more than they can deliver. Let’s face it, the salesman for legal directories have a product to sell. If they don’t quite lie, many of them certainly take liberties with the truth, particularly with the likely results of your placing an ad! They all have glossy brochures and lots of demographics, but the only thing that matters to you is whether potential clients

- are coming to you as a result of your ad. Make sure that the directory offers real statistics that show you the number of hits on your listing, the referring website (often Google or Yahoo), and then see if they ended up on your website (your own statistics would show this) or if they called you. Over-investment in legal directories is a common mistake. Even some of majors, Findlaw, Martindale, Lawyers.com, etc. may not provide much in the way of a return. Sign up for a year. If it did anything for you, you'll know. If not, stop the bleeding and get out.
4. Banner ads? No brainer. Don't do it. All of the experts agree that this is a fast way to burn money. Banner ads have a very low click through rate. You can do far better elsewhere.
 5. Another oft-heard question – should I invest in Google keywords? Our answer is a grimace and that old Texas two step shuffle: It just plain depends. We seem to be past the days when click through fraud (notably, your competitor clicking on your ad to drive up your expenses) was a huge problem. Google has done a good job of securing its advertising to contain, if not wholly prevent, fraud. However, the question remains, will those keywords convert to money? Once again, it has a lot to do with how narrow your area of practice is and how much the keywords cost. “Personal injury attorney” is going to cost a lot more than “aviation law attorney.” If you have a niche field, you might try it. Anecdotally, most lawyers we've spoken to are not fans of Google keywords and have had zero luck with Yahoo's similar system. The few lawyers that speak well of buying keywords have tended to have very specific targets “DWI Fairfax,” “Lemon Lawyer Virginia” and the like. Buying keywords is a gamble, and it can suck down money in a hurry, even though you cap the amount you want to spend. If you want to try it, decide how much money you want to spend each month, try several sets of keywords and measure the results!

Is TV and radio advertising beyond my reach?

You might be surprised. Forget radio during rush hour, when the prices are sky high. But think about the weekends, when we're all running to soccer fields, going to the grocery store, or just folding laundry with the radio on. You may be able to get 30 second ads for as little as \$40 on the weekend.

Network TV is out of sight, but not so cable TV. Once again, think weekends, when people are chilling out at home. A 30 second slot on the Golf channel may be only \$6 (no, we're not kidding) and the viewers are primarily men, affluent men, a good target for many lawyers. Channels like CNN may be more like \$25, but we're not talking a huge drain on your budget. Once again, study the demographics for the various channels.

Whether it is radio or TV, negotiate fiercely. We finally ended up with year-long TV and radio contracts, but we traded the length of the contract for amazing prices, that were about 60% off the original quoted price. Far more than other kinds of advertising, it is “Let's Make a Deal” all the time in these worlds.

Let us not forget production costs. We've been able to get radio stations to produce our ads for free with a year long contract. The production of our cable TV ad, complete with background music, cost us \$1000 – a blue-light bargain for TV spots that have run hundreds of times on four different stations.

Is it worthwhile to start a blog?

Possibly. A blog is basically a kind of personal journal on your website, often your reflections on what has been happening in your area of law. The top entry is the most current one. You can configure your blog so visitors can comment – or not. Blogs are easier than ever to set up, thanks to content managers like Wordpress, Blogger and Typepad. However, you need to keep up with a blog and to get entries made on a fairly periodic basis to keep the blog current. You also need to get the word out about your blog – often through other bloggers, and that can be a real effort. There are now, amazingly, more than 1200 legal blogs. Another great stat: Over 50% of reporters surveyed in May 2007 said that they had quoted at least one blog in the past week. Reporters research online too – if they find a current blog entry from you on the subject of interest, they just might call!

Is it worthwhile to start a podcast?

Once again, possibly. A podcast is basically a sound file (think digital radio broadcast) where you spend perhaps 20-30 minutes discussing a topic. You then post your podcast on your website – and you can post it for free at iTunes as well. Podcasts are more work than blogs, especially if you want to achieve good sound quality and edit the end result to get rid of the “ers” and “ums” and “you knows.” We suspect podcasts will remain in the hands of the geek lawyers for a while, until technology is simplified as much as blog technology has been simplified.

What the heck is anti-marketing?

Let's talk for a moment about anti-marketing online. There seem to be a host of ways in which lawyers represent themselves poorly.

1. Don't send out e-mails that look like a junior high student wrote them. Turn on spellchecker and grammar checker. For heaven's sake, proofread before you hit send!
2. Be careful of the auto-complete function – it is all too easy to send e-mails to folks other than the intended recipient. The potential ethical problems here should be painfully obvious.
3. Avoid the use of emoticons, with the exception of smiles where appropriate.

4. Avoid long, painful disclaimers, which make you sound pompous and overblown with legalese.
5. Forswear the use of your favorite quote as part of your signature. These quotes are ok for your personal e-mails, if you insist on them, but they have no place in a professional piece of correspondence.
6. Make sure you have a signature block in your e-mails with your name, firm name, address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address and website URL. This is Marketing 101. By doing this, you've given them many ways to reach you without actively selling, and you are unobtrusively branding yourself every time they read an e-mail from you.
7. Bad taste is not good marketing. Perhaps you recall the Chicago law firm who posted a naughty billboard in 2007? The text said "Life is Short: Get a Divorce" and this somewhat startling text was accompanied by a photo of a young man with an admirable set of pectoral muscles, and a young lady whose bra was clearly struggling to contain her heaving breasts. Needless to say, this does not belong on your website – or anywhere else in your marketing. Legal marketing can certainly use more creativity, but not of the sort that brings (further) dishonor to a profession that is already generally besmirched by the public.
8. Don't let client e-mail grow beards. It is fair to set reasonable client expectations about how fast you will answer your e-mail (don't forget to set "away" message when you're out of town) but then you must abide by those expectations. Commonly, attorneys will say that e-mails will be returned on the same day or the next business day. Failure to answer e-mails (just like failure to return phone calls or answer letters) is a fast way to lose clients. If it's a prospective client, you'll lose them for sure.
9. Don't spam. Ever. It may be tempting, but it is against the law. Even if you send out single, personalized messages in compliance with the law, it will be seen as spam. Almost every legal marketer has tried some form of unsolicited (not bulk) personalized e-mail. The response is dismal. Recipients see it as spam and react angrily.
10. Have an electronic version of your elevator speech, the speech in which you can summarize who you are and what you do in a compelling 15-20 seconds. Don't reinvent the wheel. Keep a fast template at hand which you can customize and send out as needed.
11. Get prospective clients off e-mail and onto the phone. Your chances of "landing the client" are much higher if they can speak to you – and it is far less time consuming. Once they are on the phone, remember the old tried and true principles of marketing: Smile when you talk because the smile will be in your voice – and listen, listen, listen. Prospective clients have a story to tell – and they

will like you better for sympathetically listening than for talking about why they should hire you.

12. Never write an e-mail to a client in anger. Walk away. Get a cold latte. Get a cold beer. Eat a doughnut. Just wait until enough time has passed that you can respond calmly before you lose the client. Even if you ultimately want to fire the client, don't write in anger because, sure as shooting, you'll say something dumb – or, worse yet, actionable!

How do you measure ROI?

Return on investment. Three words that bedevil the attorney trying to maximize the benefit of an insufficient number of marketing dollars. Make sure that every client who comes through the door fills out a client intake sheet which asks two pivotal questions:

- 1) How did you hear of us?
- 2) Have you visited our website?

The second question is critical, because website visitation is so often the validation used after someone has heard about you from a friend or seen your ad. Just because they didn't first hear of you from the website doesn't mean that your website isn't working well for you in a collateral fashion!

Make a simple chart to find out where your clients are coming from. Keep your dollars there for they are being soundly spent. If you are spending money somewhere and it is returning nothing, try putting those dollars somewhere else and see if you can do better. Far too many lawyers scatter their dollars hither and yon without a plan – and without ever figuring out what actually worked for them.

Yup, marketing takes work. But hey, it's not all about luck. Or as Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "I find that the harder I work, the luckier I get."

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