

LexisNexis® Tips Series

Web Site Basics: From Design to Content

Having a Web site for your law firm should be a fundamental building block of your business development efforts, regardless of the size of your firm. You need a professionally designed web site that is built properly so the search engines can find you. Fresh content is a must for establishing an effective Web presence and to help you get noticed by prospective clients and the search engines. **Debra Regan, vice president at LexisNexis**, offers these 10 tips for creating and maintaining a strong Web site that work for your firm.

1. **Don't think small just because your firm is.** A professionally designed Web site will give your practice a leg up on the competition. According to a 2008 Harris Interactive study, 32 percent of solo attorneys and 20 percent of firms with two-to-five attorneys did not even have a Web site, let alone one that exemplifies the quality and user-friendliness of a professionally developed site. This is your opportunity to separate yourself from the little guys!+
2. **Research Web designers' work.** It's so simple to visit sites by a potential designer. Check navigation, layout, content flow and first impression. Ask what percentage of the site was designed by the client and how much control the designer had in developing the end product. A designer's length of time in business suggests a proven track record, which may come with a higher price tag.
3. **Make your site search-engine friendly.** Besides people, the search engine crawlers will also visit your site and spider the pages to add them to their indexes. Make it easy for the crawlers to understand your site structure by including a site map XML file. Be sure you have described each page using title tags and keyword/description meta tags. This is a simple way to let the search engines know what each page is about.
4. **Content is king!** Nowhere is this statement more critical than when writing for the Web. A poorly written Web site equals few leads and little ROI. Hire a good writer with a sense for Web copy who can also communicate what you'd like said about your firm. Online content is the most widely used form of media during the legal research process, according to a 2009 survey by the Consumer Attorneys of California (CAOC)
5. **Speak to your audience.** Remember, potential clients did not attend law school, so don't confuse them with legal jargon. Posting content in plain language and using keywords related to your area of practice will make a Web site more memorable and help increase search engine rankings.



6. **Showcase legal expertise.** Highlight partners' expertise including Martindale-Hubbell Peer Review ratings, certifications, credentials and degrees. Always communicate the fact you are familiar with local court procedures. Showcase specific areas of practice. Where possible, add online testimonials from happy clients that focus on their positive assessments of your ability to listen, to communicate, and to guide them through difficult times.
7. **Online video offers a glimpse into your personality.** A sure-fire way to generate more leads is to add a video "welcome" to your Web site. When people can actually listen to lawyers speaking about their passion for the practice of law, it helps form a lasting impression. Lawyers' Web sites have a 60 percent higher click-thru rate from directories when they contain an online video, according to recent LexisNexis analysis.
8. **Keep it easy for people to reach you.** Your phone number, and preferably a toll-free phone number, should be prominent on the home page and above the fold so viewers don't have to scroll down to find contact information. You should also include a simple email form for prospective clients to fill out in case it is not convenient to make a phone call.
9. **Encourage interaction.** Consider adding links to published articles or invitations to attend a community event and meet law firm partners. Ask people to sign your guest book or register for your newsletter. This way you collect names to build a database which can be used in future lead generation. When you give people a reason to return to your site, you engage them.



10. **Keep it fresh!** Just because your site is off and running doesn't mean your work is done. Search engines look for sites with frequently updated content, so keep the articles and news updates coming. Posting online press releases is a great way to maximize brand presence on both search engines and in major news outlets, such as Google News. While weekly updates are ideal, monthly updates are sufficient to keep your site search-engine relevant.

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