

Case study: Visalaw.com – The Immigration Law Portal

So how does Greg Siskind's web site bear up under close scrutiny?

In the 2003 Internet Marketing Awards ('IMA'), www.internetmarketingattorney.com, five law firm web sites were given a platinum rating. Out of a potential score of 50 each web site scored 45; as near to perfection as one can get in these awards.

Micah Buchdahl, President of HTMLawyers and the founder of the IMA's, rates Siskind, Susser, Haas & Devine's Immigration Law Portal, www.visalaw.com, as one of the world's top five law firm web sites. Here is Buchdahl's analysis.

"For many involved in law firm web site development, this is where it all started; with Greg Siskind and Visalaw.com. You

would be hard-pressed to find anyone on the planet involved in either the practice of immigration law or law firm web sites that have not been to this site at some point in time. This is where immigration lawyers go to learn what immigration lawyers should know. This is the site that people point to as the best example of how a small firm used the Internet to become a "player". And this year, Visalaw finally succumbed to retiring the weakest component—a really drab design—and now has a site with look and functionality to compliment some of the most content-rich information available in a field of practice. This level of success does not come without a tremendous



amount of time and energy (more than money), but they do not buy content from others or spend money getting the web site promoted - they succeed using their own credentials and person-power - a lesson for firms of all sizes and practices. Visalaw does not pay sites to post articles. People come here as the destination for information."

Google yourself

Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky

You know that a technology term has become part of the common parlance when it appears in a headline in *The New York Times*. "The verb 'to Google' is now a familiar neologism," wrote columnist Randy Cohen in the *Sunday Magazine* (a 'neologism' is a new word or phrase).

In an ethics column entitled *Is Googling O.K.?* he described a woman who went on a date with a professional, and then looked him up on the Internet search engine Google.com. She discovered that he had been the target of many professional negligence actions and it lowered her opinion of this man. "Her Googling, however, was akin to asking her friends about this fellow – offhand, sociable and benign," the *Times* article said. So Googling is okay.

But here's the point: if people are Googling their dates, they are Googling their lawyers too. You are being Googled by your colleagues, employees and

your competitors. More importantly, your clients and prospective clients are Googling you to confirm their decision to retain you. They will certainly Google you before they call or ask for your brochure.

Google is the No. 1 search engine on the Web, according to *Search Engine Watch*. In Australia 50% of searches are done on Google. Yahoo! and Ninemsn account for most of the other 50% (according to research presented to the *Search Engine Strategies 2003 Conference*). More clients are going online to find law firms. According to *FindLaw* research in the United States (and we have no reason to believe it is any different in Australia):

- over 50% of in-house lawyers visit Internet portals at least once a day;
- over 35% of in-house lawyers use free Internet sites as their first legal research destinations; and
- in-house counsel spend over half their time during the week working at a computer.

So you have to ask - what will clients find when they Google you? Let's analyse this step by step.

Google yourself

Type your own name in the search box at Google Australia – www.google.com.au. The worst thing that can happen is that you turn up nothing. This means you are invisible on the Web. Nowadays, many people use the Web to look up phone numbers and addresses instead of the phone book, so to be missing on the Web is a truly notable absence.

The best thing you can hope for is that Google turns up substantive articles you've written for other Web sites. With good luck there will be a link leading to one of your public appearances or an announcement of a seminar where you are a panellist. Ideally the top link will lead to your biography, listing your extensive legal experience, examples of matters