

Creating a Web Strategy that Works

Greg Siskind literally wrote the book on Internet marketing for law firms when he published *A Lawyers Guide to Marketing on the Internet*. The book shared his insights about how law firms can build a Web presence and create an effective and ethical Internet marketing plan. The book is now in its second edition and is a collaboration between Siskind and well-known legal marketing and technology authorities Deborah McMurray and Rick Klau.

According to Siskind, when he started the firm there were few funds for traditional advertising. He soon realized that for around \$50 per month the firm could reach a large audience through the Internet.

Siskind Susser's website, Visalaw.com, was one of the first law firm websites and has consistently used innovative marketing strategies. It does not take long to discover that the site is filled with information on various immigration topics. The site uses a combination of traditional web elements combined with new technologies. Site visitors can simply read through the information available or participate in a free live chat session. If you are interested in staying current on immigration news, then the Visalaw Blog is one way to get content.

The site has received national and international attention for the marketing strategy that Siskind has developed. As recognition of this effort the site received

the 2003 Platinum Internet Marketing Attorney Award.

The IMA award stated that "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." 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."

In addition to being a pioneer in developing a law firm website, Siskind is also breaking ground through the use of an electronic newsletter distributed through an e-mail listserv. Among the recipients are more than 300 media outlets. The public relations opportunities from the newsletter, website, and book have been extremely valuable.

"At first reporters contacted me for stories related to the use of technology," explains Siskind. "As our name recognition

increased we became known as the technology-saavy immigration law firm. Now I get calls from the media about technology and immigration stories."

What advice does Siskind offer to firms seeking to create and implement a successful but ethical Internet marketing strategy? He and Deborah McMurray offer several tips for integrating your Internet strategy with your marketing and business development plans that can be found at <http://www.bookblogs.com/lawmarketing/>.

At the firm level

Siskind and McMurray suggest that you start by simply asking a few basic questions. Ask yourself if the site accurately reflects the firm's differentiating position and style of business. If you are not sure about your position do the research and find out. Then design/structure your website and content to reflect this.

Secondly, ask yourself if the site is designed intuitively. McMurray suggests the following test:

- Does your website enable visitors to do a global keyword search on the home page (and every interior page)?
- Tom Jones is a lawyer in your firm. How many clicks away from the home page is his bio?
- How many clicks away is your litigation practice description—and

how many more clicks to find your products liability experience?

- d. What industries do you serve and how many clicks until I can find out?

If your answer is more than two clicks (preferably one), your website is working against you. Visitors simply won't waste their time trying to find what they want. They'll visit once, but they won't come back.

At the practice group level.

Your website should address the three major concerns of clients: What have you done, for whom have you done it and what can you do for them. If your website doesn't address these questions early in their visit, you are missing an opportunity.

Practice and industries.

Corporate counsel and business executives often use a firm's website differently. In-house lawyers typically search capabilities by practice area, and CEOs and CFOs first search by industry. If your Web practices are merely stating the administrative groups in your firm, you aren't reaching your visitor. And, if you are only listing capabilities by practice (corporate, tax, litigation) and not including industry expertise (timber, food/beverage, hospitality), a huge segment of visitors are leaving your site dissatisfied.

Finally, be specific. Answer the who (assuming your state bar association permits this), what, how much, when, where questions. Your work is what distinguishes your lawyers and the firm.

Talk about it.

At the individual level.

Lawyer bios are an important part of the site and should be as specific and relevant as possible. Do your lawyer bios link to their email addresses so a visitor can easily reach them? Do they link to the practices and industries that they have listed as specialty areas? Does your content management system enable a lawyer to have three or four different bios, each with a different focus (securities, agribusiness, technology, IP)? And can a visitor access the agribusiness bio from that industry page and the IP bio from the IP practice page in one click? Can a visitor link to articles a lawyer has written from his or her bio? Can a visitor

link from a publication in your online library to the author's bio?

The lesson is to give your visitor access to relevant information in one or two clicks, but also invite them to dig deeper into a topic or subject area—in as few clicks as possible.

Websites should be interactive and dynamic. You can control a visitor's perception about you and your firm—and you can even control the experience they have with your site. They just won't realize it. That's when you know your website is working for you.

For more information on creating an Internet strategy visit <http://www.bookblogs.com/lawmarketing/> or purchase *A Lawyer's Guide to Marketing on the Internet, Second Edition* from the ABA website.

Visalaw.com was one of the first law firm websites in the nation. Siskind Susser is viewed by many as experts in the effective integration of technology into the overall marketing strategy.