

EXPERTS' CORNER

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Is Your Web Site Sending the Right Signals?

Five Ways to go from SOS to SEO

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Around the world, the Internet has become the tool of choice for quick research, shopping, collecting information and social networking. Law firms are investing tens of thousands of dollars each year to create and maintain Web sites that serve as portals for virtual visitors from across town or across international borders. But first, those visitors – and especially those who are clients or prospective clients – must find their way to the firm's site. For most, that journey begins with a simple Web search.

Why do some law firms experience great success through top rankings with search engines like Google, Yahoo! or MSN while others struggle to be found?

At Herrmann Advertising Design, our account team and Web experts constantly field questions concerning the latest search engine optimization (SEO) techniques and what steps should be taken to increase a Web site's visibility. Because of the nature of the Internet and the rapidly evolving protocol each search engine employs to rank Web pages, one trend is clear: what may be the best solution one year may be out of favor the next. New and more powerful algorithms are constantly being refined by search engines. For search engine companies, it is a never-ending quest to attract users by delivering accurate and relevant results and to win – and maintain – their loyalty.

In Web design and programming today, five top techniques stand out as SEO "best practices" for law firms and legal services providers:

- **Ensure content is rich in relevant, descriptive keywords and phrases.** In this context, content doesn't simply refer to the words on the page, but the words and coding used in the main areas of your Web site's structure. The words one would type into a search engine to find you should be included in a variety of places including your title tags (the words appearing at the top of your browser bar as each page is displayed); header tags (programming language that gives formatting prominence to headings and sub-headings on the page); in the body content that appears on each page; in each page's URL (the http address that directly opens a specific page); in image tags (programming language used to describe image files); and in meta tags (the brief description appearing under your site's title when it is displayed on search engine results).

- **Enhance traffic to your site by encouraging inbound links.** Inbound links are generated when other Web sites, bloggers and online sources include a link to your site from theirs. Quality and quantity reign when it comes to the value of inbound links. Some search engine algorithms treat every link as a “vote” for a particular Web page, thus giving the target page a boost in search rankings. However, when developing a strategy to increase the number of links coming into your site, remember that quality is important as well. An inbound link from a reputable site – especially one with content similar to yours and which itself is highly ranked or considered an “industry source” – is much more valuable than a one coming from a low-quality site or a worthless directory. Using a monitoring service or investing in software to track inbound links will not only identify the source of links to coming to your site, but also the origin of links coming into your competitors’ sites.
- **Purchase Google AdWords.** Ever wonder what determines which Web sites are included on the right hand side of the page when Google search results are returned? These “sponsored links” are created by bidding on words and phrases you feel would likely be used by those looking for you or the types of services you provide. While you might bid on hundreds or even thousands of keywords or phrases, you only pay when someone clicks on your link. The higher the price you’re willing to pay if one clicks on your site determines how high up you appear in the listing.
- **Know who’s coming to visit.** It is unlikely your firm would sponsor a seminar, hold an open house or invest in a long-term business development project without having a way to track the contacts you’ve made. You should treat your Web site with the same – if not more – respect for its potential. After all, it’s likely the first stop someone will make before ever setting foot in your offices or picking up the phone to talk to an attorney. Monitoring software allows you to determine not just how many visitors are coming to your home page, but who they are, how they found you (via a search engine or by typing in your URL), which pages they visit, and how long they stayed. The reports generated can fuel an endless number of valuable business development strategies as well as help you pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of your site’s structure and content.
- **Determine how your site stacks up ... develop a digital marketing strategy that is always “on.”** You won’t know what you’re doing right or what requires immediate repair without taking the time to evaluate your site and determine how you look in comparison to the competition. Whether you launched your site a decade ago or just last year, you should invest in a professional audit. Once you have the results and determine your course of action, don’t turn off your radar. Your digital marketing strategy should encompass tools that keep your site’s “front end” and its “back end” up to date as well as tactics that allow you to capture and convert prospects while retaining loyal clientele.

Ready to take the first step toward a more robust Web site, with the functionality and visibility your firm requires in today’s market?

Find out what you can do to put your web site on track by calling Paul Herrmann at 410.267.6522 and by visiting the Herrmann Advertising Design/Communications Web site at www.herrmann.com.