

"The 7 Sins of Legal Websites"

Over 90% of those looking for legal help on the Internet will become someone's client. Smart firms have optimized their websites to steal online visitors from their competitors. Unfortunately, just having a website presence has lulled many firms into a false sense of complacency. They fail to understand underlying reasons why their site isn't attracting new clients. Let's review the following sins that plague most legal websites to discover what your site is doing wrong.

The first sin is thinking it's all about you. Too many legal websites focus on tooting their own horn, ignoring the needs of their visitors. People come to your site with problems, anxieties and the need to feel appreciated. Talk too much about your firm and how great you are and your visitors will feel put off. Instead, make the visitor feel appreciated, safe and in control by providing them relevant information they find valuable without pushing too hard. Be open and honest and provide information they need in an easy to read format. Make information about your firm available, but don't force it upon visitors. Make your site about them!

Few legal websites give visitors a clear next step that compels them to take action. What do you want them to do? Call you? Fill in a form? Send you an email? Having no call to action is the second sin of most legal websites. Without a clear call to action, visitors get confused - and confused people don't act. Tell the visitor what to do with a clear and effective call to action, such as "Call Today!" with a phone number. Make the call to action stand out on each page and be consistent throughout the site.

The third sin is not having a unique selling proposition. Too many legal websites fail to make themselves stand out and get attention among competitive sites. Your USP describes what your firm does and for whom, what your unique value is and what the key differences between you and your competition are. Your USP should be concise and catchy and strategically placed on your website to position your firm and drive the visitor to act.

The fourth sin attorneys commit is having an unprofessional site. The professionalism of your website is critical to its success and its ability to generate prospects. Once visitors arrive at your site, they react emotionally to the design and layout, before they have even had a chance to read or digest any of the text. They make an immediate determination on the professionalism of the site based on color scheme, fonts, graphics, visual clutter and page layout. It is important to have a well organized site that revolves around the visitor's goals and your goal of making that visitor a client of your firm. You should have a site that is simple, uncluttered, uses high-quality graphics (not a mix of different styles) and colors used sparingly and conservatively.

The fifth sin of legal websites is that they do not elicit trust. People come to your website with anxieties and fears. They have a fear of contacting you, fear of getting overcharged, fear of selecting the wrong firm etc. The job of your website is to reduce fear and elicit trust. Build enough trust and they will be more likely to contact you and become your client. Part of building trust is having a clear privacy policy, client testimonials, certifications, guarantees and trust symbols that show your integrity. Avoid flashy advertisements and graphics that raise anxiety. Also consider awards, media coverage, case studies or partnerships that provide validation and credibility.

The sixth sin is having a website with poor navigation. A new visitor's commitment to your website is low. If they can't find what they're looking for quickly and easily, they are likely

to leave. Many legal websites have hard-to-use navigation systems that frustrate visitors. Review your navigation and make sure it is easy to understand, easily visible, relates to the needs of your clients, is clear, concise, consistent and easily allows users to return to a previous page or menu.

The last, but no less important sin, is having a website that isn't search engine friendly. Many legal websites show up poorly in search engine listings because they don't focus on making their site search friendly. While you must remember your website is about providing a quality experience to your visitor, you should also do what you can to make your site more likely to be found. First, make sure your site includes quality content - search engines love quality content this is written naturally, yet includes keywords that people are likely to use in order to find you. Next, make sure your site is crawlable by adding a set of links in the footer as a site map. Finally, use titles, tags and meta description tags on each page that reflect the contents of each page.

While building your website if you keep these 7 sins in mind you will have a competitive edge since your website will be user-friendly and accessible.