

DIGITAL MARKETING --- FOR LAWYERS

A GUIDE TO SUCCESS

EFFECTIVE WEBSITES,
CONTENT MARKETING,
SEARCH ENGINE
OPTIMIZATION,
GOOGLE ADS, FACEBOOK,
VIDEOS, ONLINE REVIEW
MANAGEMENT & MORE

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Digital Marketing for Lawyers
A Guide to Success

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I've been a lawyer since 1993 and I've been designing websites and engaging in marketing for law firms since 1995. As a practicing attorney, I know just how competitive the legal field is across the country. If your law firm does not market itself continuously and with originality and precision, you may soon find your firm trailing behind your competitors.

Effective legal marketing includes having a strong “digital” footprint. Establishing a digital footprint is highly technical, time-consuming, and costly. Moreover, the online competition is as fierce as it is in the “real world.” If done improperly, you will soon discover just how ineffective and expensive an uninformed marketing approach can be.

This guide is for: (1) “do-it-yourselfers” who want to increase their marketing skills, and (2) those lawyers who need to understand whether their marketer is doing a good job and whether they are truly getting a solid return on their investment. Overall, it is my hope that this guide will help you grow your law practice.

Best wishes,

Stephan Futeral, Esq.

Website

No matter how good your online marketing may be, a poorly designed website will discourage your site's visitors from converting into clients. Here is what you need to know to ensure your website is up to par.

Your Marketing Hub

As an online marketing specialist for lawyers, the first thing I focus on is the law firm's website. After all, your firm's website is the beating heart of all of your online marketing efforts including search engine optimization (SEO), local SEO, social media marketing, and paid digital advertising. Unfortunately, too often I find that a law firm's website is a disaster from the standpoints of improper HTML and other coding, slow site speed, lack of mobile friendliness, and impediments to usability.

Some attorneys try to compensate for their firm's poor website design by throwing money at paid digital advertising. Although this approach may drive traffic to the site (and cost thousands each month), site visitors may quickly bounce out of the site instead of being drawn in further or converting to clients.

In this section, I'll delve into the fundamental technical aspects of good website design. Whether you plan to do-it-yourself or hire a web designer, you'll find this section very useful to

determine whether your site is technically up-to-par. I'll also cover the essentials regarding designing an effective website.

Your Law Firm Deserves the Best Work from Your Web Designer

I never cease to be amazed at out how much "professionals" charge attorneys for their websites, yet these designers don't deliver a professional product. I suspect there are two primary reasons why these so-called web developers do inferior work:

1. **The designer is a novice.** Frankly, anyone with a little knowledge of graphics, HTML code, or WordPress can throw up a website and call themselves a professional website designer. I've interviewed designers with impressive looking resumes only to discover that while they know graphic design, they don't understand the fundamentals of how to optimize the site for search engines or vice versa.
2. **The designer is lazy.** The designer is skipping steps because the designer assumes that as attorneys we don't have enough knowledge to check behind their work. In fact, I've helped lawyers call out their designer on missing elements only to be told by the designer that optimizing the website will cost extra!

Before you invest good money into a website that will hurt, not help, your search engine optimization efforts, here's your checklist to ensure that you're getting the best website possible for your money.

Page Speed

We all know that folks like instant gratification. We don't like to wait for our food at a restaurant, we don't like to wait at the DMV for our license, and we sure don't like to wait for a slow website to load. If your site takes too long to load, then potential leads will bounce off to a competing law firm's website.

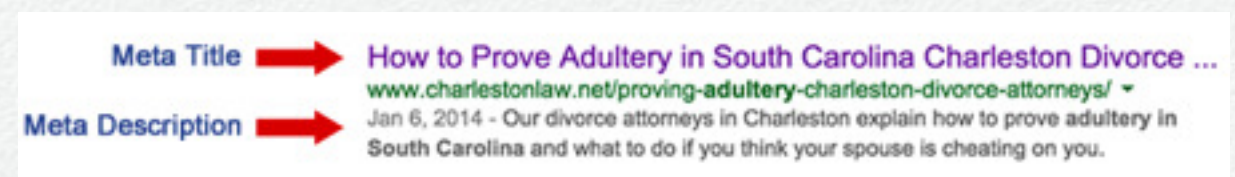
Google likes speed and it rewards quickly loading sites with higher search engine results. Because page speed is a ranking factor in Google's algorithm for both desktop and mobile sites, you need to make sure that you keep Google happy to improve your ranking and to gain more organic traffic. Before I explain how you can easily check your website through Google Page Speed Insights, here are two common problems that can slow down your site's speed:

1. Server Load Time – Not all website servers are created equal. There are many offerings out there from companies such as GoDaddy, Host Gator, and more. That being said, many of these offerings are cheap hosting packages that don't deliver good speeds.

2. Image File Size – The size of each of your pages can be slowed down by graphics that haven't been optimized for the web. Many web designers who haven't kept up with the times still create images that are 72 DPI (dots per inch). I will spare you all of the technical reasons why DPI doesn't matter to an image's file size. Instead, insist that your developer run all of your images through a lossless compression tool to reduce file sizes before uploading them to your website.

Check Your Law Firm Website's Meta Tags

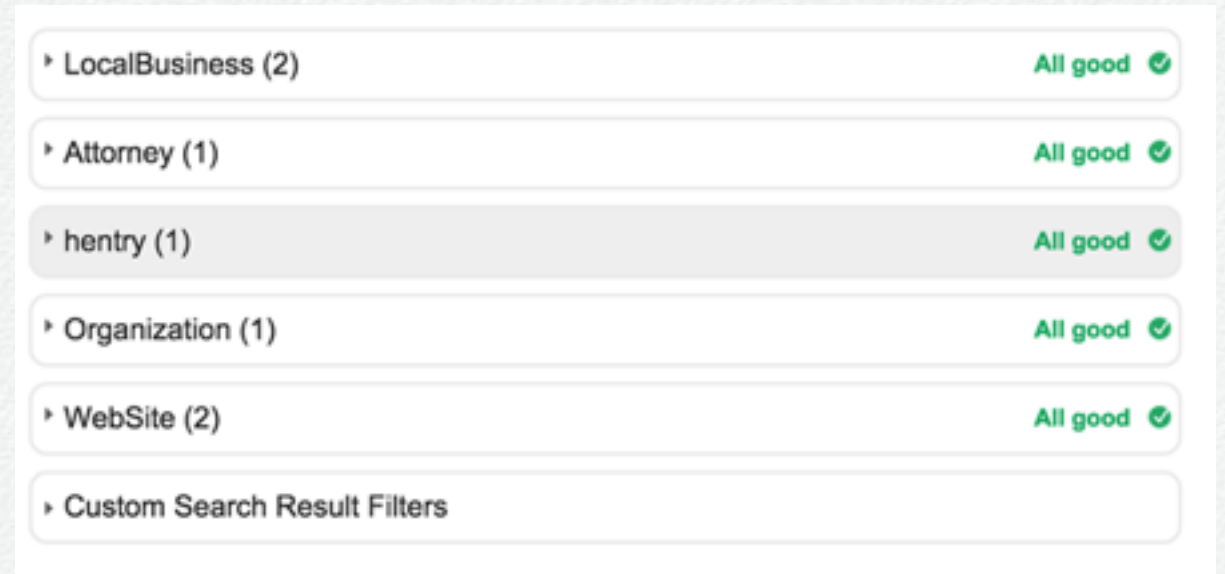
The <meta> tag provides information about each page on your website. You can't see metadata when you're viewing a web page, but Google and other search engines can. Two meta tags are important. The first is your meta "title." Meta title tags are the second most important on-page factor for SEO after content. Meta title is the text you'll see at the top of your browser tab, and search engines show this text as the title of your page. The second tag is your meta "description" which is extremely important to get users to click through from search engine results. These short paragraphs describe the content of your page to searchers and let them know if they've found what they are looking for as shown here:



Check Website's Schema Markup Language

Schema is a markup language developed and maintained by the big search engines such as Google. Like meta tags, it is hidden from view. Also like meta tags, schema code allows search engines to better understand your website's content. Data marked up using schema appears in the rich snippets of search results. For example, when you search for something and you see star ratings next to the results, that's due to schema markup. There are schemas for a variety of different things including books, movies, recipes, TV series, and events. Importantly, there is a schema for attorneys.

To check your site's schema, visit Google's Structured Data Testing Tool at <https://developers.google.com/structured-data/testing-tool/>. Your results will tell you whether you have any schema at all or if there are areas for improvement. If you see green checkmarks as shown in the next image, then your site is making good use of schema markup. If you see red indicators, then your code is improper. Lastly, if you do not see a section labeled "Attorney," then your website developer isn't making full use of your schema markup.



Check Your Site's Image Alt Tags

The purpose of the image alt attribute is to provide a description of the image. Image alt tags provide text for visitors who can't see images in their browsers such as visually impaired visitors, and those visitors who use screen readers. Additionally, the image alt attribute is significant for SEO because it serves users with enriched website usability and also returns images in relevant search results due to enhanced site SEO.

To check your site's alt image tags using the Chrome browser, right-click on an image and select "Inspect Element." Chrome will reveal code your webpage and highlight the image you selected. Then look for the line that reads **alt="Your Description Here."** If there is no description between the quotation marks, then you should ask your web developer to

add a relevant description to that image and others throughout your site.

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 Alt Tag

Page speed, meta tags, schema mark up language, and image alt tags are just a few examples of the many things a good web developer should address to build a site that is optimized for the best search engine optimization results. I encourage you to take a moment and check out your own site to see if your developer gave your firm its money's worth.

Usability & Esthetics

With so many potential clients choosing lawyers by researching online, you can't overlook the appearance of your website. Having said that, I know many great lawyers whose websites are, in a word – awful! Although these lawyers exemplify the meaning of the word “professional,” their websites look like they were designed in the 1990's by a high schooler.

Your firm's website shouldn't be a marketing afterthought. It is your digital calling card and, oftentimes, the very first impression that a potential client has of your firm. Therefore, you need to make sure that you're giving your visitors the very best impression and a user-friendly experience if you want to convert site visitors into clients.

Navigation – Make It Simple

Your website's navigation is CRITICAL and it has a big impact on your site's success or failure. Your main navigation can mean the difference between generating a lead or a quick

exit from your site. The main goal in your navigation should be user friendliness.

Recently, I visited a personal injury lawyer's website and I took the time to count how many clickable areas there were on the site's homepage. This particular site assaults its visitors with **112 NAVIGATION CHOICES** on the site's homepage with multiple calls to action, menus with submenus and sub-submenus, and an overwhelming number of navigation choices. The end result is that visitors' eyes are likely to scan past any important items because the site is overwhelming.

Limit your navigation, particularly your main menu. As for main menus, I recommend no greater than 7 top menu choices. Ultimately, with fewer menu and navigational items, your visitors' eyes are less likely to scan past important items. Also, place your navigational menus in areas that visitors expect to them find such as horizontal navigation across the top or vertical navigation down the side. In the end, better, simpler navigation means a lower bounce rate, more pages per visit, and higher conversions.

Color – Communicate With Your Palette

Color plays an important role in your law firm website's success. When used properly, color is a powerful form of communication that can sway thinking, change actions, and

cause reactions. Before you choose a color scheme for your website, consider the following overview of the “meaning” expressed by various colors.

Color	Positive Meaning	Negative Meaning
Red	Energetic, masculine, and exciting.	Defiant, aggressive, and urgent.
Blue	Secure, intelligent, and logical.	Cold, aloof, and unfriendly.
Green	Balanced, peaceful, and wealthy.	Boring, stagnate, and bland.
Yellow	Youthful, optimistic, and creative.	Irrational, fearful, and anxious.
Orange	Aggressive, passionate, and fun.	Frustrating, frivolous, and immature.
Pink	Warm, feminine, and sexual.	Inhibiting, emasculating, and weak.
Brown	Earthy, reliable, and supportive.	Humorless, heavy, unsophisticated.
Black	Sophisticated, efficient, and glamorous.	Oppressive, cold, and menacing.
Purple	Spiritual, luxurious, and quality.	Decadent, suppressive, and inferior.
White	Pure, sophisticated, and efficient.	Sterile, unfriendly, and elite.
Grey	Neutral, elegant, and formal.	Boring, drab, and depressing.

Typography – Emphasize Readability

Typography isn't just about choosing fonts or making things look pretty. Instead, typography is the art of displaying content. Typography guides your readers through your website, it makes your content look attractive, and it gives your site a consistent look. In other words, the selection of typefaces and the arrangement of them can be as important as the use of words, color, and graphics. At the very least, I recommend the following:

1. Don't Overuse Fonts – Keep your typeface consistent. The more you mash up different typefaces in your content, the less readable and the more incohesive your site becomes.

2. Keep Heading Size, Font, and Attributes Consistent
For example, if your headline on one post or page is Helvetica typeface, 18 points in size, blue, and bold, then keep it that way on every post and page where you use headings.

Good design is crucial to your website's usability, readability, and overall "atmosphere." To ensure your website's success, keep your navigation and content simple, choose colors that convey the right "psychological" message to your readers, and don't overlook the importance of proper typography to guide your readers in an attractive and consistent way through your site.

Your Site's Content

Now that we have covered some important concepts concerning the technical and the design aspects of your law firm's website, the next step to successful online marketing is to focus on your website's content. By now, you've probably read or heard that "content is king" when it comes to any law firm's online marketing strategy. I'm not going to preach to anyone about content except to say this: content is what draws traffic to your website, and quality content is what converts a site visitor into a firm lead. For example, the content on my law firm's website draws in approximately 50,000 visitors per month which, in turn, generates approximately 200 leads per month. However, pushing out content isn't enough; the content must be quality. Unfortunately, many law firm websites have the WORST content for two reasons:

1. Too Much Content – According to studies conducted by the Nielsen Norman Group, a leading user experience consulting group, 79% of people don't actually read content online. Instead, they scan and pick up words and phrases as

they go. Additionally, users will only read about 20% of the text on an average webpage. The bottom line is that you should format your content to make it easy for visitors to scan your site for the most valuable information. Here's how you do it:

- **Use engaging headlines and subheadings** – The majority of people will use headlines to scan your webpages and decide whether to read them. Make strong headlines work for you the same way they do in magazines.
- **Use bulleted or numbered lists** – Lists are easier for people to read and to comprehend than long blocks of text.
- **Be concise** – Make sure your content is both clear and brief.
- **Use graphics and videos** – Break up content visually (and give your readers a break) with relevant graphics and videos.

2. The Content is Written by a Lawyer – The surest way to make sure NO ONE reads your website's content is to use highbrow statements or legalese. Don't talk down to your audience and don't try to make your firm sound important by using lofty expressions. Your website's content should be simple and familiar. Technical words should be the exception, not the rule. Indeed, if you follow the next 3 tips, you will create quality content that converts site visitors into new clients.

Tip # 1. Don't Write Like A Lawyer

Writing like a lawyer completely defeats the purpose of content marketing to potential clients. Clients don't want a lawyer who talks over their heads or down to them. Clients don't want to learn the law; they want to understand how it impacts their situation. Consider the following blog excerpt concerning jurisdiction in South Carolina for a divorce:

Two areas of family law do not require personal jurisdiction over the Defendant but only require in rem jurisdiction. Those areas are divorce [S.C. Code Ann. § 20-3-30] and child custody [S.C. Code Ann. § 63-15-330]. For these matters, a Plaintiff can file the action in South Carolina even if there is no personal jurisdiction over the Defendant. The Plaintiff, and, in child custody cases, the child, still need to meet jurisdictional requirements that are often based on residency to pursue divorce or custody cases here. . . . In Kulko v. Superior Court of California, 436 U.S. 84, 91 (1978), the United States Supreme Court held that even though California had jurisdiction to establish child custody it lacked jurisdiction over a non-resident father to establish child support.

The passage above was written as though it were a legal brief. Most readers, unless they are lawyers, won't have a clue regarding terms such as "in rem" jurisdiction vs. "personal" jurisdiction. Now consider the passage below and ask yourself

whether this excerpt does a better job of helping a reader understand the issue of jurisdiction:

Under South Carolina law, if one spouse lives in another state, the other spouse must have lived in South Carolina for a year to file for a divorce here. Also, the family court has jurisdiction over custody and support issues when a child has lived in South Carolina for at least six months.

The second passage is concise, written in plain English, and will help any reader regardless of whether they are sophisticated enough to understand the issue of jurisdiction. Overall, the hallmark of any great blog post on the law is a post that makes complex concepts simple for the reader to understand.

Tip # 2. Provide Solutions To Problems

To provide solutions to potential clients' problems, your content must be a RESOURCE. There is a big difference between just using content on your law firm website and whether your law firm website's content is a resource. Here is what I mean by the difference between "content" and "resource":

Content	Resource
Provides information	Provides solutions to problems
Addresses any question or topic	Addresses a target audience's specific needs
May be superficial (such as blogging about a recent accident that was in the news)	Reasonably comprehensive (such as blogging about exactly what you should do if you're in an accident)
"I'm a lawyer, so listen to what I have to say about legal issues."	"We understand you have a legal problem; let us help you solve it."

The key thing to remember is to focus on solving problems instead of just saying things. By giving your readers value, you'll convert site visitors into actual leads.

Tip # 3. Avoid "Thin" Content

Thin content is content that is low value and unoriginal. Stated another way, thin content is "cookie cutter" pages and posts. Here is what Google has to say about thin content:

One of the most important steps in improving your site's ranking in Google search results is to ensure that it contains plenty of

rich information that includes relevant keywords, used appropriately, that indicate the subject matter of your content.

However, some webmasters attempt to improve their pages' ranking and attract visitors by creating pages with many words but little or no authentic content. Google will take action against domains that try to rank more highly by just showing scraped or other cookie-cutter pages that don't add substantial value to users.

As an example of thin content, many lawyers who relied on FindLaw to maintain their websites and to fill the sites with content saw their traffic levels drop in 2014 because FindLaw's content was thin. Essentially, the content was recycled, repackaged, and pushed out across numerous websites. The key here is to create original content that is valuable to your readers.

To recap, the three best things you can do to successfully market content for your law firm's website is to avoid writing like a lawyer, create content that solves your target audience's problems, and create original content. Learning how NOT to write like a lawyer can be more difficult than it sounds. My advice is to have someone who isn't a lawyer read over your content and tell you whether it sounds "lawyerly" and why.

As for creating content that is a "resource," start with a common legal issue, explain the issue, and then provide your insights on

how to avoid or solve the issue. For example, if you're a divorce lawyer, write an article on the 5 biggest mistakes you see your clients making and how to avoid them. Lastly, if you outsource your content marketing, check over examples of the vendor's work to make sure that you aren't getting "recycled" content that is being used on multiple websites.

Audience



SEO this, keyword ranking that, content marketing yada, yada, yada. Sound familiar? These are just some of the buzz words surrounding a law firm's online marketing efforts. While all of these concepts play an important role in your law firm's online marketing, there is one concept that matters the most – your target audience.

4 Steps to Define Your Audience

Without a clear definition of your target audience, you might as well be throwing all of your marketing efforts against a proverbial wall to see what sticks. Here are 4 steps for all you “do-it-yourselfers” to get you on the right track to define your law firm’s target audience.

Step 1. Create A Demographic Profile

This first step may sound like a “no-brainer,” but the reality is that some law firms either completely miss the mark in defining the demographics for their target audience or their website’s content isn’t tailored to their audience. Let’s start with the easy part, determining your audience’s age, gender, and location, by using a real-world example.

Not long ago, I worked with a solo practitioner who wanted to focus on criminal defense work for college students. In this scenario, the lawyer assumed that his demographic profile was:

Assumed Target Audience for Criminal Defense of College Students	
Age	18 to 21 years old
Gender	Male and Female
Location	The city where the college is located

This profile missed the mark for one major reason – college students didn’t hire him for criminal defense work because they couldn’t afford him! In reality, his target audience was the PARENTS of the college students. So, his best demographic profile was:

Best Target Audience for Criminal Defense of College Students	
Age	40-55
Gender	Female because the wife or mother made most of the hiring decisions
Location	A combination of the college’s city and several other key locations where the college attracted non-resident students as shown by enrollment statistics

Once you have defined the age, gender, and location of your target audience, you can further refine your demographic profile by considering other factors such as occupation, income level, educational level, hobbies and interests, and so on.

Step 2. Determine The Primary Issue Or Problem

Like defining your target demographic, determining your audience's primary issue or problem may seem easy. For example, if you are a drunk driving defense attorney, you might assume that your audience's primary issue is going to jail or losing their driving privileges. However, with a little more analysis, you might be surprised that you are missing out on opportunities within your market. For example, I helped a lawyer who faced stiff online competition from a large number of other DUI defense attorneys. By redefining his target audience's primary issue and tailoring his marketing message to that audience, he was able to successfully tap into a large number of potential clients that he had previously missed out on. Specifically, instead of targeting a broad range of issues that arise out of a DUI, we focused on commercial vehicle license holders and drivers (predominately male) whose primary problem was losing their livelihood by losing their license. In other words, by zeroing in on a very specific need of his target audience and refocusing his website's primary

message, the lawyer saw a significant increase in website traffic and leads to his firm.

Step 3. Relate the Benefit Of Your Services To Problem

Step 3 is about creating website content for your law firm that speaks directly to your target audience and encourages your site's visitors to contact you. Your content should: (1) draw in your target audience; (2) clearly and concisely demonstrate why they should hire your firm; and (3) give visitors an easy way to contact your firm. Overall, your website's content should motivate visitors to act by clarifying the benefits of retaining your firm for their specific legal issue and by giving visitors the sense that their problems will begin to be solved.

Step 4. Discover Where Your Target Audience Gets Their Information Online

If you don't plan to run any pay-per-click campaigns or targeted ads online, then you can probably skip Step 4 with the exception of considering the social media platforms where visitors may get their information. For example, approximately 28% of all online adults use Pinterest, and Pinterest is dominated by females. Thus, if you are a family lawyer who markets largely to wives going through a divorce, then you

should consider engaging on Pinterest to develop your “social proof” and to generate leads.

Content

3

Some of my law firm's best site traffic and referrals come from posts that I authored years ago. In essence, these posts are "evergreen" marketing content that continue to drive clients through the door year after year.

Content Overview

Over the years, I have written many thousands of words for my own law firm's website. I understand how difficult it can be to come up with topics for a law firm's blog and to create original content. In this section, I'll explain why it is critical that you avoiding plagiarism (scraping blog content) in your website's content and I'll offer some useful tips for researching topics and creating original content for your law firm's blog.

Although the end goal to writing my posts is to drive site traffic and to rank well within the search engines, I wrote these posts from the viewpoint of a prospective client's needs. In other words, I focused on writing quality content that gives value to the reader and establishes me as an authority on the legal subject that is the content of the post.

Poorly Written Blogs

Unfortunately, many lawyers blog with an eye only towards search engine optimization and digital marketing that tries to "game" Google's search engine. Even if these lawyers are

successful at driving traffic to their firm's website, their numbers mean nothing unless visitors convert into clients. When a visitor lands on a page that is a poorly written, spammy blog post, they simply bounce out of that site and they're on to the next one in their search results. With that being said, here are some common examples of why some law blogs (a.k.a. blawgs) really stink and how to fix them:

Fluff, Fluff & More Fluff

Problem – I get the impression that some lawyers' blogs are simply written for SEO purposes and nothing more. The articles are short, they have some key words or phrases thrown in, but they provide absolutely no useful information to the reader. Stated another way, the articles are nothing more than an obvious attempt to get the reader to "CALL NOW," "LIVE CHAT NOW," or "FILL OUT OUR CONTACT FORM NOW!"

Solution – Service-related pages on your website regarding your practice areas with calls-to-action are fine. However, if you are going to truly blog about something, take the time to write something of value to the reader whether it is an explanation of the law, a "how-to" piece, or something of interest.

Regurgitating News Articles

Problem – Many “blawgs” consist of rehashing news regarding criminal arrests, traffic accidents, and things of that nature. If visitors to your site want to catch up on the news, then they’ll go to a news feed. Like the fluff pieces I mentioned above, these articles seem to be nothing more than SEO-driven and transparent calls-to-action.

Solution – If you’re going to write about a news event, then consider tying it into something more informational to illustrate a point about the law or your practice. Otherwise, leave the news to the newscasters. Please trust me when I say that if you are wanting to drive traffic to your site and prompt calls to your office, there’s no substitute for well-written articles.

Writing Like A Lawyer

Problem – As I previously mentioned, writing like a lawyer is a major impediment to successful content marketing. Law school completely rewires students’ brains. Where once they could write like normal human beings, they learn to be wordy and to write in an archaic style. For example, instead of writing “before” we write “prior to.” Instead of writing “now” we write “contemporaneous with.” The list of these examples is LONG. The end result is boring, difficult to read, and stuffy.

Solution – Write like you speak. In a normal conversation, you wouldn’t say “heretofore,” “hereinafter,” or “in accordance with.” Write like an average, normal, real person and you can’t go wrong.

Blogging Outside Of Your Wheelhouse

Problem – Another way I would describe this is “blogging just for blogging’s sake.” For me, I have two other skills besides being a lawyer. Before law school, I studied marketing and for years I have developed websites and worked on SEO, etc. So, I feel comfortable touching on these subjects. Although I manage my law practice, I don’t profess to be an authority on law practice management and so I don’t blog about it. The point is, stick with what you know otherwise you’ll undermine your credibility. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.”

Solution – When you’re writing, stick to what you know best. To come up with ideas for your law blog, start with the basics. Think of the most frequently asked questions you get from your clients and expand on your answer. As time goes on, think of more in-depth challenges clients face and write about the solutions to these problems. In the end, you’ll convert more readers into clients by writing quality posts on the subjects you’re most familiar with.

Google May Penalize Your Law Firm's Website for Duplicate (Plagiarized) Content

If you are trying to come up with content for your law firm's blog, chances are you will eventually experience writer's block. According to comedian Steve Martin, overcoming writer's block is an easy process:

Go to an already published novel and find a sentence that you absolutely adore. Copy it down in your manuscript. Usually, that sentence will lead you to another sentence, and pretty soon your own ideas will start to flow. If they don't, copy down the next sentence in the novel. You can safely use up to three sentences of someone else's work — unless you're friends, then two. The odds of being found out are very slim, and even if you are there's usually no jail time.

Although Steve Martin gives some solid advice on overcoming writer's block, the chances of being exposed for copying another writer's content on the Internet are high (not to mention that plagiarism is unethical and potentially illegal). In fact, if you duplicate another law firm's content for your own website, you may find that your website either does not rank well in search results or has been dropped completely from Google's index.

Duplicate content is content that appears on the Internet in more than one place. Multiple instances of identical content make it challenging for search engines such as Google to determine which version of the content is more relevant to a given search query. Stated another way, search engines will rarely show multiple duplicate instances of content and will choose which version is most likely to be the original or the best. In some instances, Google may actually penalize your website for duplicate content:

In the rare cases in which Google perceives that duplicate content may be shown with intent to manipulate our rankings and deceive our users, we'll also make appropriate adjustments in the indexing and ranking of the sites involved. As a result, the ranking of the site may suffer, or the site might be removed entirely from the Google index, in which case it will no longer appear in search results.

Tips for Researching and Writing Legal Articles

1. Choose Relevant Topics – In my experience, blog posts that provide instruction or explanations are very effective ways to connect with your readers. Posts should cover answers to issues that relate to your practice areas.

2. Research Your Topic on the Internet – I am not talking about legal research. Instead, I am talking about researching whether someone has already written about your topic.

If you steal from one author it's plagiarism; if you steal from many it's research. ~ Wilson Mizer

(a) Bookmark Other Blawgs – Coming up with topics can be challenging. If you stumble upon other legal blogs that regularly publish content that you believe your audience may find useful, bookmark those blogs in your browser for future reference to get ideas for new articles for your website.

(b) Use Google Alerts – Another way to keep blog topic ideas flowing is to set up Google Alerts to monitor the web for new content. Google Alerts will send you an email when it finds new results—such as webpages, newspaper articles, blogs, etc. — that match search terms that you set up. The goal here is not to copy other authors but to write a BETTER article. Here are just a few suggestions for improving on the content you've found:

- Expand the Topic – Change the scope of the topic by focusing on a particular issue or going further in depth into the subject.
- Write for a Different Audience – For example, you might be a plaintiff's lawyer who finds a personal injury article written

from a defense lawyer's perspective. Take a different angle toward the subject by writing for injury victims.

- Change the Format – For example, let's say you find a good blog article on Federal Sentencing Guidelines. Instead of writing about the subject, you may create an infographic that gives readers an easy-to-follow visual format to understand the subject.

SEO

4

SEO is made up of multiple different elements, and knowing what they are and how they work is key to understanding why SEO is so important to your law firm.

Understanding SEO

Because I work in web development and digital marketing, I deal with a lot of acronyms; SEO (search engine optimization), SEM (search engine marketing), SMM (social media marketing), CTR (click-through-rate), CPA (cost-per-acquisition), and SERP (search engine results page) to name a few. In my business, there is a lot of technical jargon we use such as crawling, indexing, user experience, rank, and retargeting. The point here is that if you are trying to follow a meaningful conversation with a digital marketer, the mixed up jargon terms are confusing. Regrettably, there are a lot of digital marketing companies that prey upon confusion, especially when it comes to SEO.

Essentially, companies that perform SEO for other businesses fall into one of two categories – reputable organizations or snake-oil salespersons. Reputable organizations follow best practices (white-hat techniques) that produce measurable results. Many others, however, make hollow promises and sometimes make a website's ranking on search engines even

worse. To know how to spot the difference between these two types of SEO companies, you first need to know what SEO is and how it works.

What is SEO?

All major search engines such as Google and Bing have primary search results, where web pages and other content such as videos or local listings are shown and ranked based on what the search engine considers most relevant to users. SEO is the practice of improving a website's rankings on popular search engine sites like Google and Bing. Generally speaking, the SEO process encompasses (1) making ongoing adjustments to the law firm's website and the site's content and (2) influencing whether other websites link to the law firm's website (backlinks). The skills required for SEO are very technical. These skills include website design, content writing, and coding. The goal of SEO is to increase the quality and the quantity of your website's traffic by improving your law firm website's organic (not paid ads) search engine results.

Unlike Search Engine Marketing (SEM), where you pay for an ad to be displayed at the top of search results, SEO causes your website to appear organically when someone searches for a keyword related to your practice.

The rankings of these search results are determined by the search engine's algorithms. The factors in Google's algorithm are divided into two categories:

On-Page SEO – What Happens On Your Website

The ranking of your law firm's website in search results is partially dependent upon on-page factors which are all those things you can control regarding your website. These factors include technical facets such as your site's speed and content-related facets such as your website's structure and the quality of the content on your website.

Off-Page SEO – What Happens Off Your Website

Off-Page SEO refers to all the activity that happens away from your website to raise your site's rankings. These factors include links from other websites, social media attention, and other marketing activities outside your own website. The most important of these off-page factors is the number and quality of links pointing towards your site. The more quality, relevant sites that link to your website, the higher your position in Google will be. These off-page SEO factors are difficult and time-consuming to influence.

Why SEO is Challenging

SEO is challenging for four reasons. First, Google constantly changes its search algorithms. Second, Google continually changes the way it displays search results. Third, Google shows different search results to different people in different locations. Fourth, SEO for lawyers is very competitive.

1. Google Is Constantly Changing Its Search Algorithms

The first thing to understand about lawyer SEO is that Google is **CONSTANTLY** changing its search results algorithms and, consequently, how your law firm website ranks on any given day. For example, in 2018, Google updated their search algorithm a whopping 3,234 times and ran thousands of experiments.

The point of illustrating all of the changes that Google regularly makes to its search algorithms is to show that SEO is a constant process and not a single event. Additionally, because of all the changes made by Google to their search results, SEO experts have to stay on top of their game. Specifically, techniques that work one month to rank a website highly may not work the next month or even cause a site to lose its ranking position.

2. Google Is Constantly Changing The Way It Displays Search Results

Since Google launched its search service to the public in 1998, the way it now displays search results has changed significantly. Over time, Google has pushed organic search results lower by showing 3 to 4 paid ads first, the local 3-Pack (sometimes 4 with a paid spot), and then organic search listings. For example, here is a search for “divorce lawyers in charleston sc” that shows the paid listings, the local 3-Pack, and then my law firm’s listing (charlestonlaw.net) as the #1 organic listing (at least as of today). The takeaway here is that it has become increasingly more important to rank at the top position organically because Google is first loading up search results with paid ads and other information.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "divorce lawyers in charleston sc". The search bar at the top indicates 396 time, CPC: \$18.92, and Competition: 0.71. Below the search bar, there are tabs for All, Maps, Shopping, News, Images, and More. The search results are divided into three main sections:

- Google Ads →** This section contains three paid advertisements. The first ad is for "www.thepeckfirm.com/Charleston/Divorce-Lawyer" with a phone number (843) 400-8232. The second ad is for "www.laurentaylorlaw.com/divorce-lawyer/call-now" with a phone number (843) 790-9009. The third ad is for "familyunbundlegalhelp.com/Charleston/Divorce" with a phone number (843) 800-2928.
- Local 3-Pack →** This section displays a map of Charleston, SC, with three law firms marked: The Peck Law Firm, Seibert Law Firm, LLC, and The Peck Law Firm. Below the map, there are three entries for these law firms, each with a rating, address, phone number, and links to their website and directions.
- Organic Results →** This section shows the organic search results. The first result is for "www.charlestonlaw.net" with the title "Divorce Lawyer | Charleston and Mt Pleasant SC". The second result is for "attorneys.superlawyers.com" with the title "Best Charleston, SC Divorce Attorneys | Super Lawyers".

3. Google Changes Search Engine Results For Different Users & Different Locations

Typically, the same search in Google run by two different people will produce two different results. Here's why – Google has been “personalizing” search engine results since 2009, regardless of whether you use a Google product such as Gmail. Essentially, Google continuously tracks where you are, what you search for, and what you click on. Over time, Google “learns” more about your online habits and interests and, in turn, gives you different results than other searchers such as your family members, your neighbor across the street, or a stranger searching online 500 miles away from you.

For example, let's say that you favor a particular news site such as CNN.com. Over time, Google will show you more results from CNN than from other news sites. Additionally, when you're using Google on a mobile device, Google learns where you go each day based on your GPS coordinates when you perform a search or use a Google app such as Gmail. Based on this information, if someone from Topeka, Kansas searches for the term “criminal lawyer” on their mobile device without including any geographic information, Google will show the user criminal attorneys from Topeka, Kansas.

For another example, if I search for “divorce lawyers near me” from my office in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, my law firm shows up in the local 3-pack as follows:

Google

divorce lawyers near me

Volume: 3,000/mo | CPC: \$21.34 | Competition: 0.64

[All](#)
[Maps](#)
[Shopping](#)
[News](#)
[Images](#)
[More](#)
[Settings](#)
[Tools](#)

About 60,300,000 results (0.78 seconds)

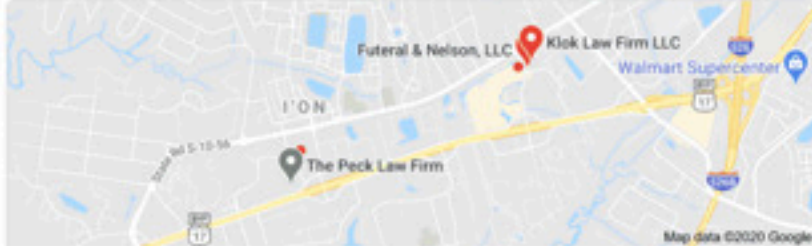
Ad - www.laurentaylorlaw.com/divorce-lawyer/call-now (843) 790-9009
Lauren Taylor Divorce Attorney | Experience You Can Count On
 Call Lauren Today For An Initial Consultation If You've Decided To Get A Divorce

Child Support Lawyer
Receive the Judgment You Deserve
Fights For You On Every Step

Charleston Divorce Lawyer
Move Ahead With Confidence
Know Your Rights and Options

Ad - www.thepeckfirm.com/Free-eBook/Divorce (843) 402-8232
Free Pandemic Divorce eBook | Best Mt Pleasant Divorce Firm
 South Carolina Divorce Courts Are Open & So Are We. Don't Wait To Get Divorced. Get Out...

Ad - www.seibertlawfirm.com/
Divorce Lawyer Near You | Free Initial Consultation
 Recommended Law Services. Avvo Client's Choice 2017. Contact Us Anonymously!



Rating ▾ Hours ▾

The Peck Law Firm

Ad - 4.6 ★★★★★ (64) - Family law attorney

622 Johnnie Dodds Blvd

Open - Closes 6PM - (843) 402-8232

[WEBSITE](#)
[DIRECTIONS](#)

Klok Law Firm LLC

4.9 ★★★★★ (18) - Divorce lawyer

1002 Anna Knapp Blvd #103

Closes soon - 5PM - (843) 216-8860

[WEBSITE](#)
[DIRECTIONS](#)

The Peck Law Firm

4.6 ★★★★★ (64) - Divorce lawyer

622 Johnnie Dodds Blvd

Open - Closes 6PM - (843) 800-2928

[WEBSITE](#)
[DIRECTIONS](#)

Futeral & Nelson, LLC

4.9 ★★★★★ (57) - Divorce lawyer

1004 Anna Knapp Blvd

Closes soon - 5PM - (843) 284-5500

ⓘ "They make sense of unfortunate situations and provide family-like ..."

[WEBSITE](#)
[DIRECTIONS](#)

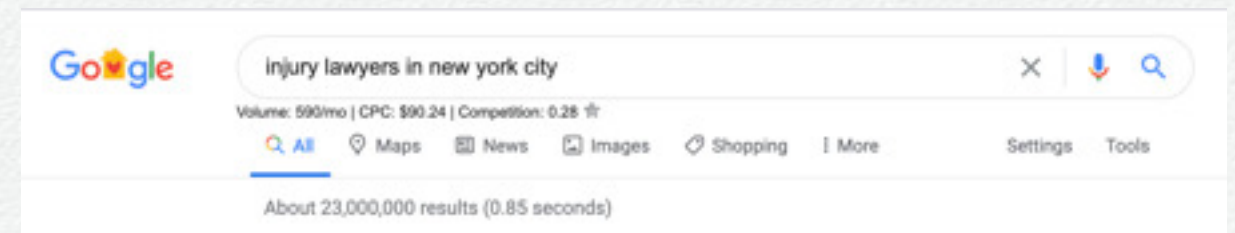
[More places](#)

My Law Firm →

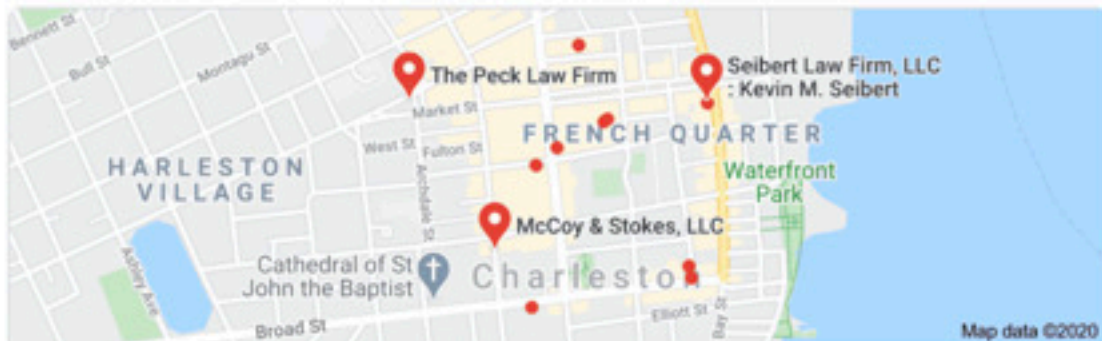
However, if I run the same search for “divorce lawyers near me” when I am in Charleston, SC instead of Mt. Pleasant, SC, I get different 3-pack results (although my law firm still shows as the first organic listing) as follows:

4. Lawyer SEO Is Remarkably Competitive

Over 90% of people looking for legal advice use a search engine, and over 70% of consumers visiting a law firm's website to take action. The majority of search engine users are more likely to click on one of the first five suggestions in the search engine results pages. With ten organic positions on the 1st page of Google's search results, law firms are financially investing heavily in appearing on the coveted top five spots of the first page of search results. Here is a specific example. When I search for "injury lawyers in new york city," Google returns over 23,000,000 possible results!



With 23,000,000 likely websites for Google to show for "injury lawyers in new york city, and with hundreds (if not thousands) of personal injury lawyers vying for the first page of search results, you can begin to understand why lawyer SEO is so costly and competitive.



Rating ▾ Hours ▾

The Peck Law Firm 4.8 ★★★★★ (55) · Divorce lawyer 49 Archdale St #1c Open · Closes 6PM · (843) 631-7117	WEBSITE DIRECTIONS
McCoy & Stokes, LLC 4.1 ★★★★★ (8) · Divorce lawyer 145 King St #407 Closes soon · 5:30PM · (843) 628-2855	WEBSITE DIRECTIONS
Seibert Law Firm, LLC : Kevin M. Seibert 4.4 ★★★★★ (14) · Divorce lawyer 215 E Bay St #203 Closed · Opens 8AM Fri · (843) 554-0782	WEBSITE DIRECTIONS

[More places](#)

www.charlestonlaw.net › charleston-family-lawyers ▾

Divorce Lawyer | Divorce Attorney | Charleston and Mt ...

We Are Divorce Lawyers Near Charleston With Over 35 Years Experience in Divorce, Child Custody & Legal Separation. Top-Rated Divorce Attorneys. Call Us!

When is a Divorce Uncontested in South Carolina? ▾

What About Do-It-Yourself Separation Agreements in South Carolina? ▾

Do You Need to Hire a Lawyer for an Uncontested Divorce in South Carolina? ▾

▾ Show more

Why SEO is Important

Law firm SEO is important because: (1) organic search is a primary source of a law firm's website, (2) SEO enhances the user's experience, and (3) SEO increases your website's "trust" factor.

1. Organic Search Is The #1 Source Of Traffic To Law Firms' Websites

As indicated above, the overwhelming majority of people looking for legal aid use search engines such as Google and Bing, and the vast majority of visitors to a law firm's website take action. Therefore, lawyer SEO is a priority for any law firm looking to increase their caseload.

2. SEO Enhances The User's Experience

Google interprets favorable or unfavorable user experiences on your website. Therefore, positive user experiences have become a crucial element of a law firm website's success. Consequently, professional lawyer SEO focuses on the user experience and the usability of a web site. Usability is about achieving objectives and task completion. So when SEO professionals measure the effectiveness of a website, they evaluate:

- Whether searchers can achieve their goals and complete specific tasks via a search engine and your website.
- Whether searchers easily find their desired information, destination, or activity on your website.
- Whether there are impediments to searchers' objectives and how those impediments can be eliminated.

3. Top Presence In Search Engine Results Increases Your Website's Trust Factor

Users trust search engines, especially Google, to give them the best and most relevant search results. Via ranking high on search engines and thereby having a presence in the top positions for the keywords the user is searching, your law firm business will build trust and credibility with potential clients.

How Long Does SEO Take to Work?

The question I get asked most often is, "How long will it take for you to get my website ranked #1 for my keywords?" This question is born out of the misconception that SEO is all about keyword rankings. When JustLegal begins the process of search engine optimization, we run keyword ranking reports. We run these reports as evidence of a "canary in the coal mine." Mainly, if we observe that the law firm's site isn't showing within the search engine results, we know that site is in trouble

and that it needs more TLC. Otherwise, the more meaningful metrics we use to measure SEO performance are: (1) the volume of site traffic and (2) whether visitors are engaging with the site by visiting other pages, filling out the site's contact form, clicking to call, etc. The better question to ask is "How long will it take for SEO to start generating leads?" Unfortunately, there is no "one-size-fits-all" answer to that question. Specifically, the answer to that question depends on numerous SEO factors, including:

- The design of the law firm's website
- How much content the website has
- How much SEO work has previously been done for the website
- How many backlinks there are to the website
- How much online competition there may be for your firm's services

In my experience, you should start to see results within four to six months. Moreover, the results you get will be more significant over time. For example, my law firm's website did not attract approximately 50,000 monthly visitors overnight. Indeed, it took several years to get to this high level of traffic. Here is an example of what happens during the first four months or so when JustLegal begins a new SEO strategy for a law firm:

- **1st Month** – Website audit, keyword research and strategy, and planning within the first few weeks. After that, technical work begins by making modifications to the website (assuming the site does not need a complete redesign) and by building backlinks to the site. This process continues month-after-month, year-after-year.
- **2nd Month** – Content creation, including blogging, firm information, and so on. You may see some improvements in rankings by the end of this month, but you may not see those rankings result in leads at this time.
- **3rd Month** – The same process as Month 2 by which time you could experience an increase in rankings, traffic, and lead generation.
- **4th Month** – With additional site content such as blogs, you now have something to share on social media. At this stage, you can include social media management to increase direct traffic to your website. You should see more organic traffic to your site, and your leads should increase. As traffic grows, your SEO expert now has more data from which to refine your website's conversion rate by making adjustments to calls-to-action, contact forms, and web page designs throughout your site.
- **Months 5 & Beyond** – As you are working to improve your law firm website's SEO, your competitors will take notice and

actions to increase their visibility above and beyond yours. Therefore, each month is a continuing process, as described in Month's 3 and 4 to maintain and improve your SEO indefinitely.

How Important is Keyword Ranking for SEO?

My law firm's website, <https://charlestonlaw.net>, ranks very high (in many cases #1) for various keywords and phrases. For example, as of the date of this post, the site ranks #1 for "James Island DUI attorneys." As impressive as that may seem, the content I have on my firm's website is equally relevant as the keywords and phrases.

Sure, there's a connection between having a high ranking for a high-volume keyword or phrase and having that keyword or phrase bring your site search engine traffic. However, keyword rankings aren't the "end-all-and-be-all" of search engine optimization, mainly for two reasons. First, search engine results are highly personalized and therefore vary for different users. Second, long-tail keywords and semantic search results mean that Google is returning results to users that are much more relevant than just a few keywords or phrases.

Keyword Rankings VS. Live Long-Tail Keywords & Semantic Search

The way people search online for lawyers and legal services is becoming more intricate each year for two primary reasons. First, search engine users are savvier than they were nearly two decades ago. Instead of searching for a "drunk driving attorney," they are using more complex words and phrases such as "I need a defense attorney for a drunk driving charge I got in Phoenix." The second reason why searches are more intricate is that devices, especially mobile phones, easily allow searchers to voice, instead of type, complex queries. I don't know about you, but I'd much rather talk to my smartphone to search than to type out my question. Because searches are more intricate, there are two fundamental digital marketing terms that you should become familiar with – long-tail keywords and semantic search:

1) Long-Tail Keywords: Long-tail keywords are used to target niche demographics rather than mass audiences. In other words, they're more specific and often less competitive than generic keyword terms.

Example: If you're a criminal lawyer in Atlanta, the chances are that your pages may never appear near the top of an organic search for "lawyer" or "criminal lawyer" because there's too

much nationwide competition online. Even if we narrow the organic search down to “criminal lawyer in Atlanta,” the competition is still daunting. When I ran that search (using “incognito mode in Chrome to avoid “personalized” results), Google gave me 15,500,00 results. At the top of that list were significant sites such as Avvo, FindLaw, and Justia. However, let’s say that you’re a criminal lawyer in Atlanta who focuses on defending juveniles. Long-tail keywords like “juvenile justice defense lawyer in Atlanta” may help potential clients reliably find what they’re looking for – your firm!

Importance: Long-tail keywords help to target niche demographics and quality traffic rather than focusing on more general, and often highly competitive, generic keyword terms.

2) Semantic Search: Semantics is the science of the meaning of language. Semantic search is an attempt by Google and other search engines to improve the accuracy of search results by “understanding” the searcher’s intent and the contextual meaning of terms used by the searcher.

Example: Suppose someone searches for the term “bark.” Standing alone, the term “bark” may mean the sound a dog makes, the covering of a tree, or a three-masted sailing ship. However, Google attempts to determine the intent and the context of the search by analyzing other terms in the search. For example, if you searched “does bark make good

kindling,” then Google associates the term kindling with “tree” bark and returns relevant results to match your search.

Importance: For purposes of SEO, semantic search means that although keywords and phrases still play a role in search results, the “context” and “intent” of the content of your law firm’s website is playing a much larger role with each passing year. Stated another way, creating quality, relevant content for your website is becoming much more important than just focusing on keywords.

SEO Focuses On Content, Not Just Keywords

Most law firm websites get found and clicked on in Google and other search engines for thousands of different keyword combinations and phrases. Although digital marketers may do their best to identify a limited number of the best keywords and phrases that will attract new clients, there is no realistic way to optimize a law firm website for the thousands of other phrases that may bring you targeted visitors to your site.

Search engine optimization isn’t just about tweaking a law firm’s website to target keyword phrases; it’s also about having quality content that responds to a potential client’s needs. First and foremost, potential clients need answers to their legal questions. Having numerous web site pages that describe your law firm’s legal services doesn’t fulfill a potential client’s needs.

However, if you create enough quality content on your website to give the best possible answers to these questions, then you will accomplish four crucial SEO goals. First, your site's pages will begin to surface to the top of the search engine results in response to law-related search queries. Second, as the pages of your site rise in search results, you will drive more quality traffic to your website. Third, your content will establish you as an "authority" on the subject over your law firm's competitors. Fourth, your online authority will convert your site's visitors into potential clients who call or message you about your legal services.

Final Thoughts on SEO for Lawyers

When a digital marketer tries to sell you on the importance of being #1 for keywords such as "[practice area] lawyer in [whatever location]," run, don't walk, out of that sales meeting. Although keyword ranking is an essential component of SEO for law firms, they don't tell the whole story behind which keywords people came into your site for and which ones matter. High keyword rankings may look great on paper, but they are only a piece of a much larger SEO puzzle of acquiring more relevant visitors to your law firm's website and converting them into clients.

Priming for SEO

Unfortunately for many law firms' websites, they aren't primed for a truly successful SEO campaign. Here are the two major reasons why:

1. SEO Without Content (Target Shooting Without Bullets)

I get calls from law firms that want to enhance their presence online through SEO, but their websites either lack content or their content is stale. When I impress upon these lawyers that they need content, many respond the same way – either they don't have the time to produce content or they don't want to incur the expense of a content writer. Google focuses more and more on content and less and less on keyword saturation. Your law firm's website should have custom content that uses relevant keywords and synonyms but focuses more on the quality of the content than the words themselves. Also, semantic search is very important. Search engines use intent, context, and meaning in a search query, instead of focusing on

keywords related to the practice of law and legal services. What this means to you is that your content should include “conversational-style” (or long-tail keyword) phrases.

2. A Website that Isn't Mobile Friendly (A Door Without A Handle)

Simply stated, you MUST have a mobile-friendly web site to succeed at SEO. In January 2015, mobile searches officially surpassed desktop searches and they continue to grow. That's why, back in April of 2015, Google officially announced that a mobile user experience is a very significant factor in Google's search engine ranking algorithm. Even if an antiquated law firm website does show up in search results, site visitors aren't inclined to stick around. Ask yourself whether you have recently visited a site that isn't mobile friendly where menus and text are ultra-small, you have to pinch and zoom to move about, and filling out a contact form is near impossible. If you're like the majority of mobile users, you'll quickly bounce out of an antiqued site and on to the next site in your search results.

Some of my clients think that they have a mobile friendly site, but they actually are running a different site than the law firm's desktop counterpart. You've probably seen examples of this

where the website address is “m.lawfirmsite.com” and has a link or button that reads “Visit Desktop Version.”

Google has stated that a responsive web design is the recommended mobile configuration and that responsive web design is the best industry practice. Responsive web design uses flexible layouts that detect the visitor’s screen size and screen orientation and change the layout accordingly. If you have a responsive website, it’s easier for Google to crawl, index, and organize your law firm website’s content. Also, Google prefers responsive web design because content that lives on one website and one URL is much easier for users to share, to interact with, and to link to than content that lives on a separate mobile site. Not only does Google prefer a responsive web design for purposes of SEO, a responsive website provides a better user-experience across many devices and screen sizes.

If you have separate desktop and mobile sites, then you’ve put yourself in the position of having separate SEO campaigns. Obviously, managing one site and one SEO campaign is far easier and cheaper than managing two sites and two SEO campaigns. This is another advantage a responsive website has over a separate mobile site.

Google Ads

5

If improperly managed, Google Ads can rapidly consume your marketing budget. If managed properly, Google Ads (formerly Google Adwords) can generate significant new leads for your law firm and a quick return on your investment.

Avoiding Common Mistakes

Many attorneys outsource their Google Ads campaigns to agencies. However, because Google Ads is such a mystery to most people, many lawyers simply have no clue as to whether their marketing agency is running the Ads campaign the right way. Not to worry! I'll explain two ways you can easily check to see whether your marketing agency is doing a poor job of managing your law firm's Google Ads campaigns.

Goals of a Law Firm Google Ads Campaign

If you're running Google Ads campaigns, you want searchers to take three specific actions, two of which occur online and one of which takes place on your end: (1) click on your ad to be taken to your law firm website; (2) take a desired action when they reach your site such as filling out a contact form or calling your office; and (3) convert into a new client. The first two actions sound simple, right? If a searcher clicks on your ad, then surely they will take the second action (contacting you) when they hit

your website. Well, things are not as simple as that. In fact, here are two mistakes I repeatedly see being made with Google Ads campaigns:

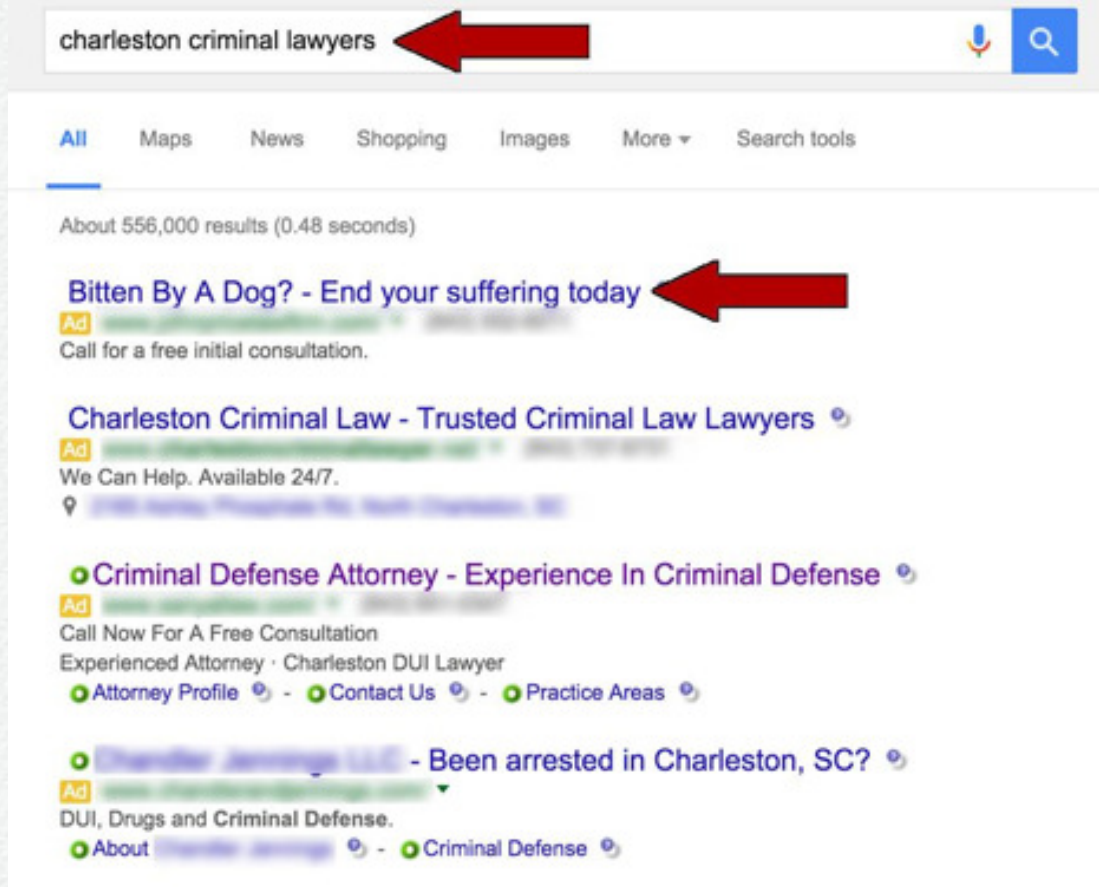
1st Common Mistake – Irrelevant Ads

With Google Ads, it is possible to target your ads with pinpoint precision through the use of geographic restrictions, keywords, and negative keywords (words and phrases that you want to exclude from triggering your ads such as "lawyer jokes"). The point is that if your law firm's ads aren't targeted, then you'll either get very few clicks or you will pay for clicks from searchers who aren't interested in your legal services.

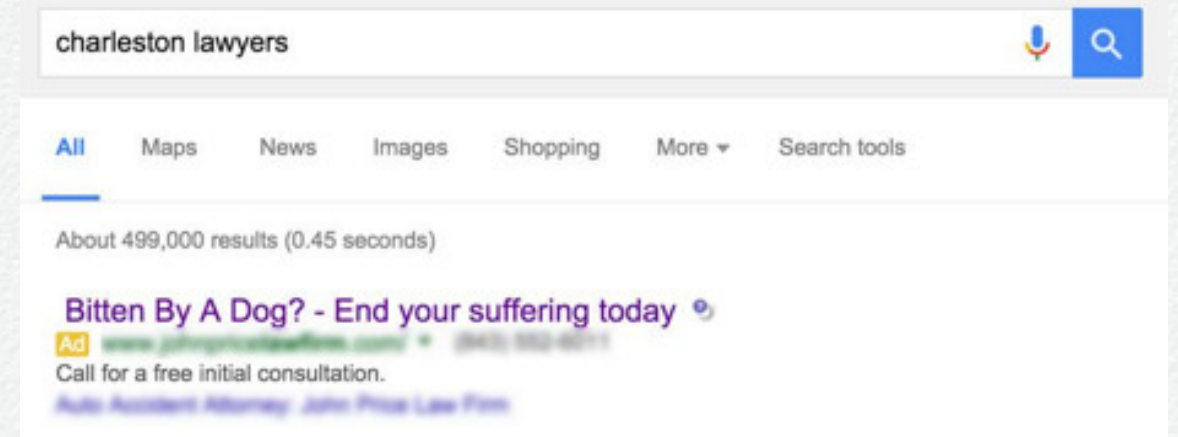
Here are two simple ways to check whether your marketing agency is dropping the ball on your Google Ads campaigns:

1. Does Your Ad Display For Irrelevant Search Terms?

All you need to do is run a search for your location and practice area and check to see what Google displays. In the screenshot below, I searched for “charleston criminal lawyers,” yet the first ad displayed is targeting dog bite injuries. In all likelihood, the agency set this campaign up to display ads when the user searches terms such as “lawyers” and “Charleston” regardless of the firm’s practice areas.



Sure enough, when I ran a second broad-based search for “charleston lawyers” the same ad appeared.

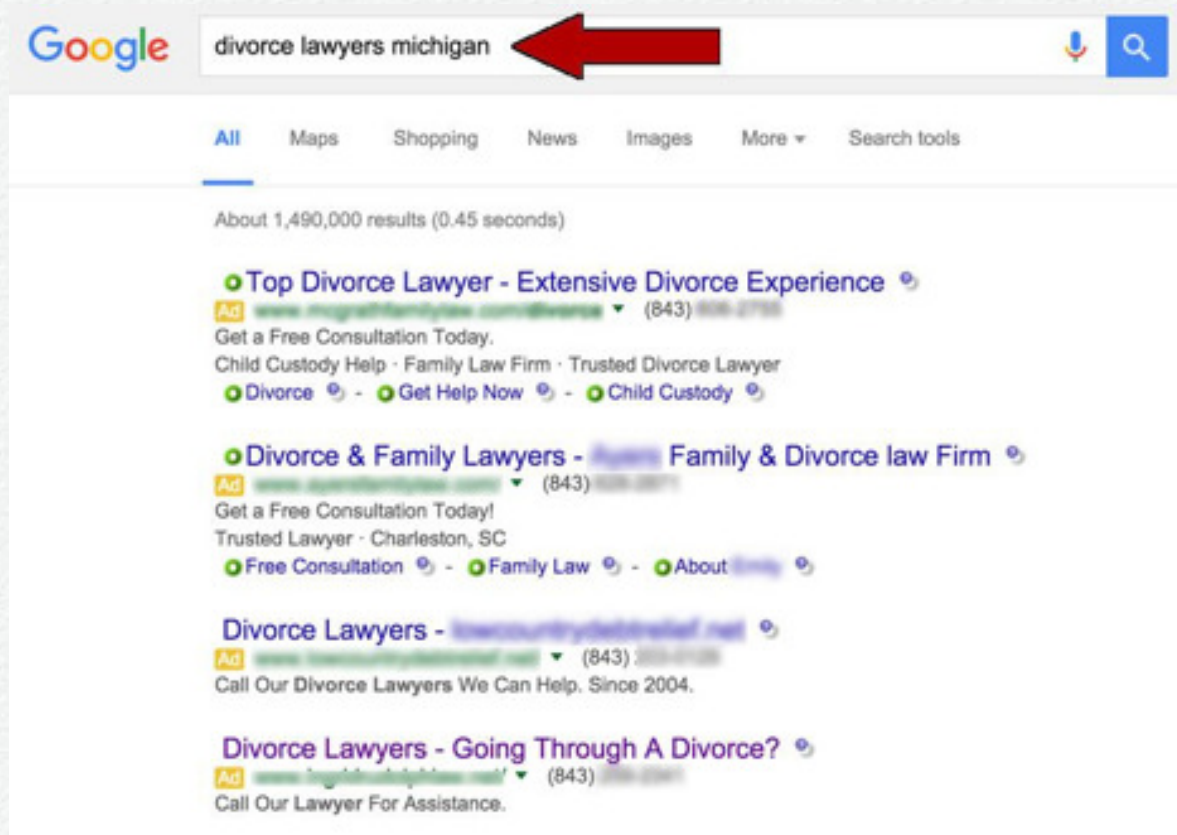


The takeaway here is that this campaign could easily be tailored for success by displaying it only for searches relevant to dog bite injuries or, on a broader basis, personal injury claims.

2. Does Your Ad Display For The Wrong Locations?

As I mentioned, Google Ads is highly sophisticated. For example, you can limit your ads to display in any geographic region in the U.S. based on factors such as radius of miles from your office or states, cities, and counties. Additionally, you can control the display of your ads to appear in other parts of the U.S. where a searcher may be looking for an attorney in your city or trigger your ad to display based on the location of the searcher when they run their search.

To find out whether your ads are displaying for the wrong location, simply search for your practice area such as “divorce lawyers” and a random geographic region other than yours. In the next example, I am physically located in Charleston, South Carolina (area code 843) and ran a search for “divorce lawyers michigan.” As you can see from the ad area codes, all four of the ads displayed are from divorce lawyers in Charleston!



Again, these ads could easily be tweaked to ensure that they display relevantly for searches that are tied into geographic locations.

2nd Common Mistake – Missing Optimized Landing Page

Trying to run a successful law firm Google Ads campaign without an optimized landing page is like trying to drive a car without a steering wheel. A landing page is the webpage where people end up after they click your ad. For each ad, there should be a specific final URL (webpage) where people are taken when they click your ad. Landing pages have the power to convert webpage visitors into active users if done well.

Landing page optimization (LPO), also known as conversion optimization or conversion rate optimization (CRO), is the process of designing specific landing pages with one single goal in mind – to improve the percentage of visitors to the website that become leads and clients. LPO is sophisticated and can involve A/B testing (testing two different versions of a landing page simultaneously, while making a change in one single element on one of the pages to compare results) and Multivariate testing (MVT) (changing multiple variables on the page such as body copy, page layout, calls to action, and button designs in different combinations to choose the design combination that best reaches your goals).

If you don't have an optimized landing page, then you may be paying for leads/clicks that never bother to contact your firm. What's worse is that MANY of the ads I see on the web don't

lead to an optimized landing page at all, which is a digital marketing “fail.”

Let’s make one thing clear—your home page is not a landing page. You’re going to have to do a bit better than that. That’s exactly why you should be using landing pages—for the simple reason that a home page doesn’t get the job done quite like a landing page does.

When a visitor skims over your homepage, the visitor probably sees lots of text, images, and links. It’s a lot to take in all at once, so how can we expect the visitor to know what to do next? Essentially, your visitor may be “wandering” around your site without any clear direction. By using landing pages, you give the visitor one clear, concise direction (“enter your email here” or “schedule your free consultation”). Of course, the visitor doesn’t have to sign up if he or she doesn’t want to, but the visitor won’t waste time searching around for what you have to offer. Overall, you only have a few seconds to prove your worth to your site’s visitors, so use a landing page to get your message across quickly and clearly.

Tips for Designing Your Landing Pages

Make your instructions clear. It’s best to focus on just one call to action per landing page.

Prove yourself. Whether through testimonials, certifications, or references to previously written content, show your visitor why he or she can trust you to provide the legal services or the information the visitor wants.

Be confident. You know what you’re talking about, so act like it. Don’t say things like “I think I can offer you some pretty good advice on this topic, so you might want to sign up for my newsletter.” Show them you’re confident and skilled enough to act as an authority on a certain topic.

Keep it simple. Be mindful of your use of color and images and keep the text short and value-dense.

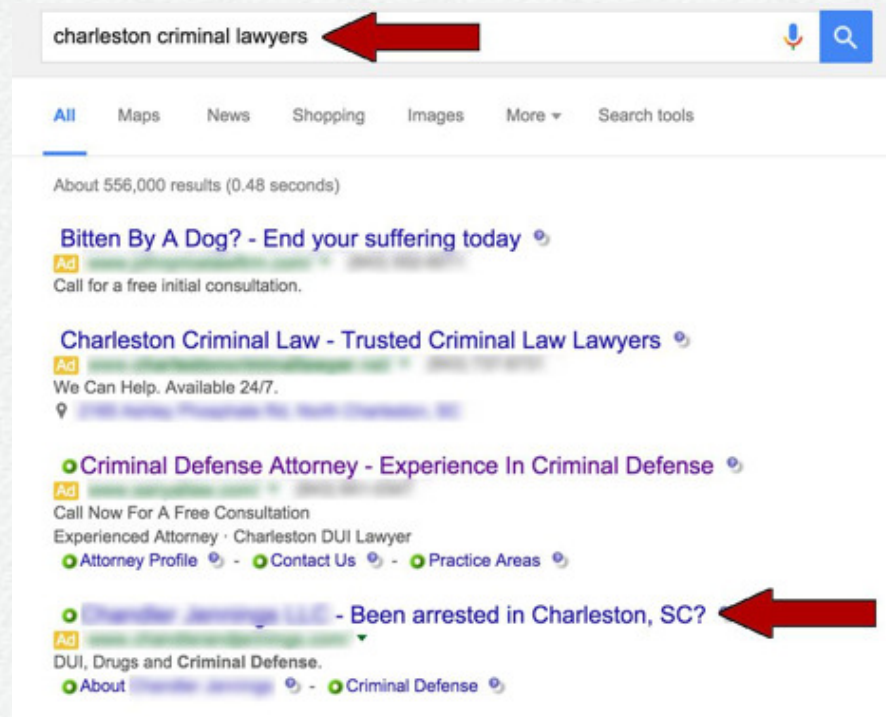
Keep these tips in mind and start building a landing page for each of your ads. Go the extra mile to give your visitors clear direction and you might find yourself surprised at the positive results.

Check for Landing Pages

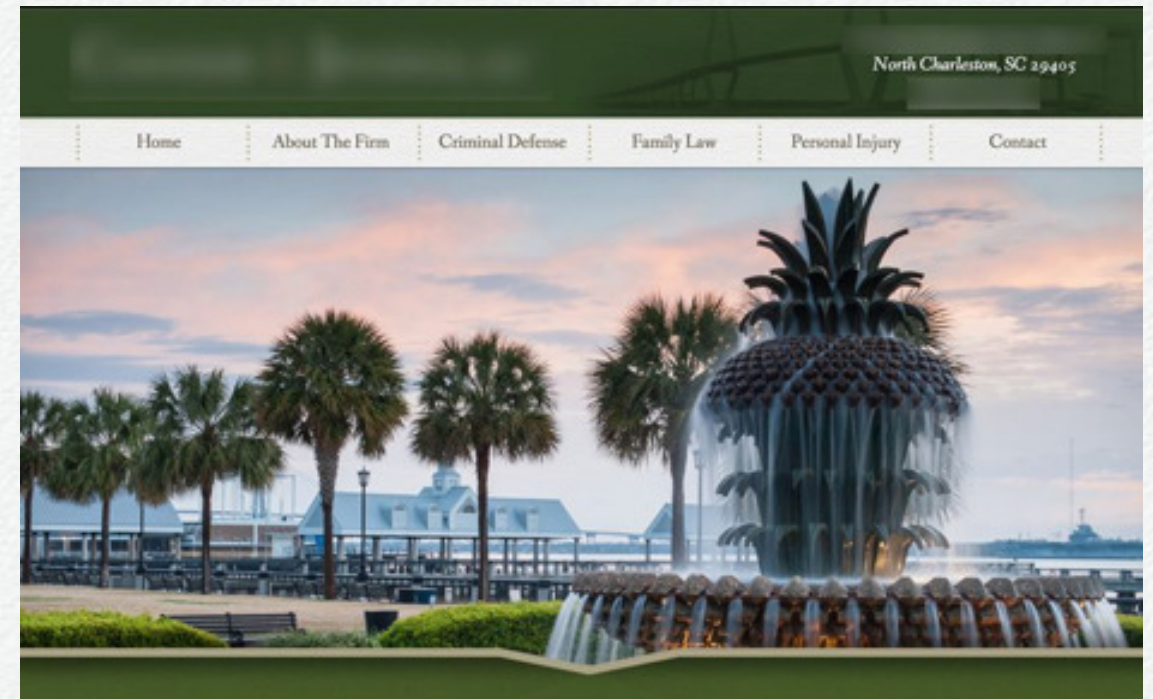
If your firm is running a Google Ads campaign, then you know it isn’t cheap between the cost of agency fees and your campaigns’ daily budget. At the very least, you should check behind your digital marketing agency’s work for irrelevant ad placements and optimized landing pages. Here is a simple way to check whether your marketing agency is dropping the ball on your landing pages.

Before you check for landing pages, remember that clicking on your own ads will cost you money unless your marketing agency has excluded your computer or network IP addresses from the campaign! To save yourself the cost, ask your agency to give you the specific URL of each landing page for each ad.

Here's an example of an ad that has no landing page but, instead, points to the law firm's homepage. Below is an image of the ads that are displayed when I search "charleston criminal lawyers." I clicked on the fourth ad:

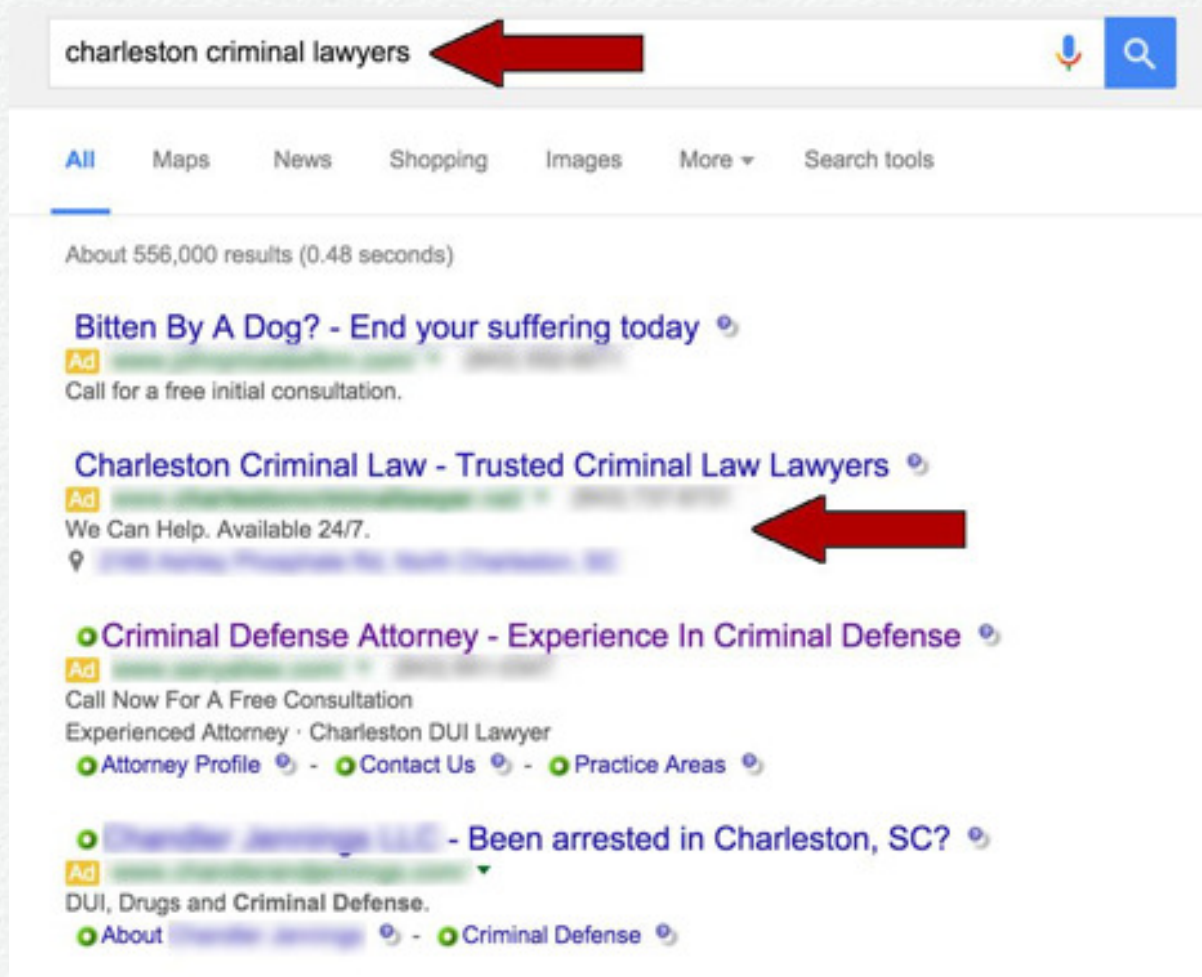


Clicking on the fourth ad took me to the law firm's homepage :

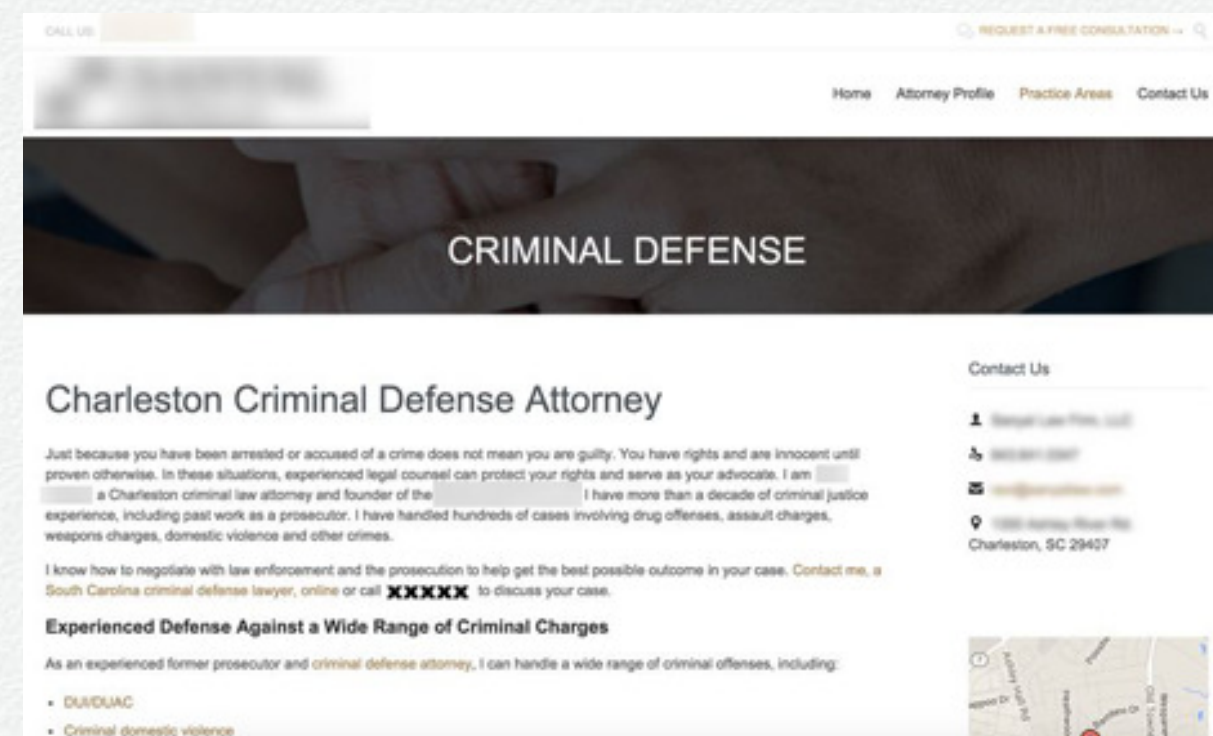


Because the ad directs the searcher to the home page, the site visitor sees no call to action, no prominent form to contact the firm, no clickable call button for mobile, and an assortment of menu options, many of which have nothing to do with my search for a criminal lawyer. In other words, the homepage isn't optimized to achieve the desired goal – capturing a new criminal client lead.

For a second example, I clicked on the second ad for my search for "charleston criminal lawyers."



Clicking on the ad took me to the law firm's criminal defense practice area page:



In this example, at least the ad was tied into the firm's criminal defense page. However, this "landing" page isn't optimized to convert a visitor into a lead. The page is missing prominent calls to action, there is no fillable form to send the firm a message, and there is no clickable button to call the firm on a mobile device.

Competitors' Names

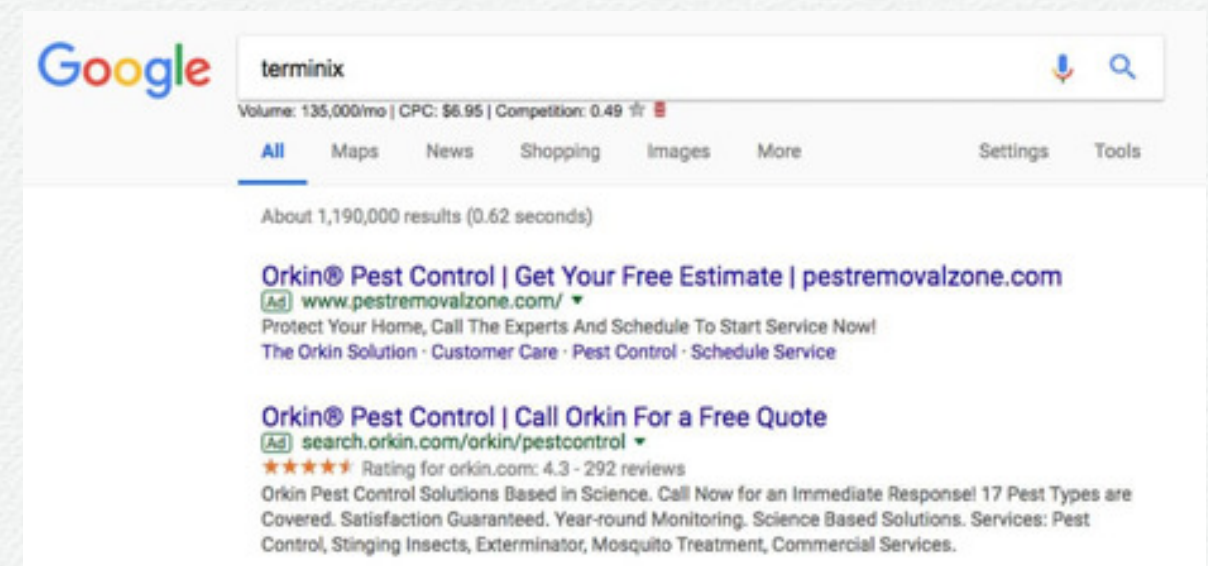
This section examines the practice of bidding on a competing lawyer's or law firm's name in Google Ads from three important perspectives: (1) a marketing perspective; (2) a legal liability perspective; and (3) a professional ethics perspective regarding lawyer advertising. I'll also explain why this is risky business for lawyers and law firms to market this way. First, here is a bit of background on the practice of bidding on another lawyer's or firm's name.

Recently, I was interviewed by the New Jersey Law Journal to get my opinion regarding a lawsuit by the New Jersey law firm of Helmer, Conley & Kasselman (Helmer) against a two-lawyer firm, Hark & Hark (Hark), for allegedly using Google Ads to hijack potential clients. Essentially, Helmer alleged that Hark "purchased Plaintiffs' names and numerous variants thereon as Google Ads in order to divert Plaintiffs' potential clients to Defendants." Specifically, Helmer alleged that Hark was bidding on keywords and phrases such as "helmer conley," "helmer," "helmer law office," "helmer kasselman," "helmer

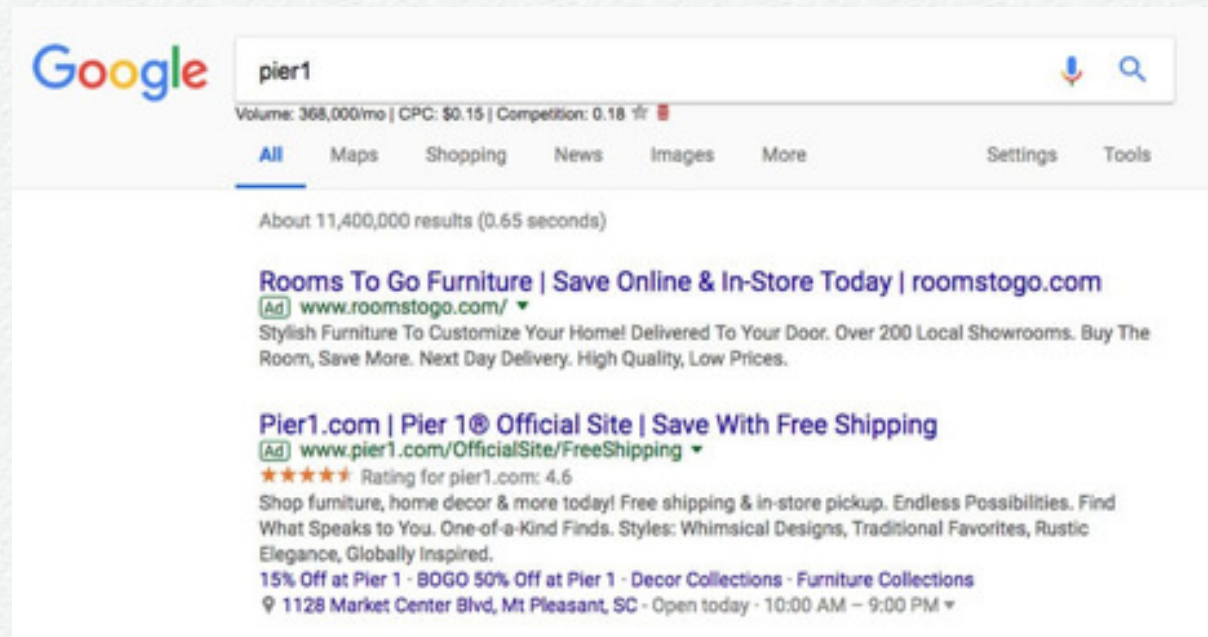
lawyer," "helmer defense," "conley law," and "helmer and associates" so that a search within Google for these terms displayed advertisements for Hark's law firm. As I will explain below, Hark allegedly went a step further than just bidding on keywords related to the Helmer Law Firm.

Using Another Lawyer's or Law Firm's Name to Trigger Your Google Ads

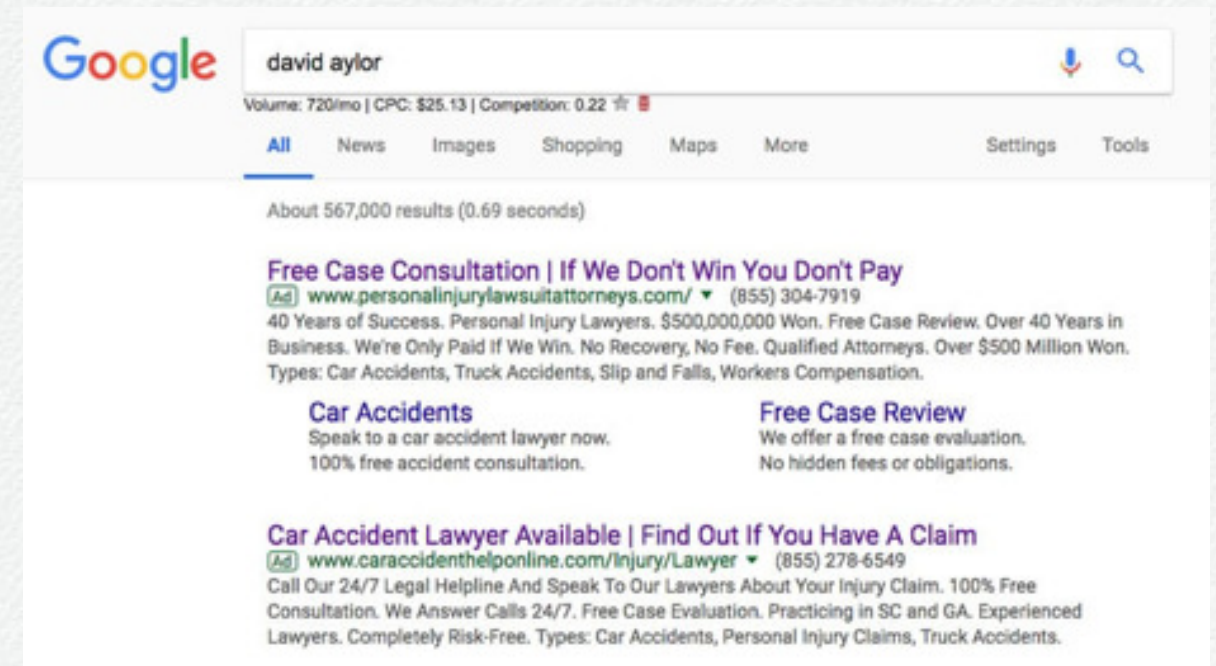
Using a competitor's name as a keyword to trigger Google Ads is a common practice among many businesses and industries including home services, furniture and bedding, and automotive. For example, if you search Google for "Terminix," you may see ads for Orkin and other competitors as follows:



As another example, if you search Google for “Pier 1,” you may see an ad for “Rooms to Go” as follows:



Like Orkin and Rooms to Go, lawyers also bid on other lawyers' names to trigger Google Ads. For example, I ran a search for a local lawyer's name that I am familiar with, and Google displayed the following ads:



Both of the websites listed in these two ads belong to another competing lawyer (two different ads and websites – same lawyer). In another example, I searched for the name of a prominent criminal defense attorney in Charleston, South Carolina, and Google displayed the ad of another prominent criminal attorney:

These lawyers' ads didn't display by accident. These ads displayed because the competing lawyer's name is being used as a key term in these Google Ads campaigns. Oftentimes, lawyers have no idea that the marketing agency working with their law firm is actively bidding on competing lawyers' names.

Google's Policy On Using Competitors' Names As Keywords In Ads

Now that we have established that bidding on a competitor's name is a common practice among Google Ads marketers, the next issue is whether Google allows marketers to bid on keywords this way. The answer is – yes.

From Google's perspective, there is little to no restriction on using your competitors' trademarks and names as keywords to trigger your Google Ads. Specifically, Google states: "Google will not investigate or restrict the use of trademark terms in keywords, even if a trademark complaint is received." However, Google is more strict about including a competitor's name or trademark in your ad text. If Google receives a complaint, Google may restrict the use of the trademark in your ad text or even stop your ad from running.

Is Bidding on Competitors' Names an Effective Google Ads Strategy?

Now that we know that Google Ads allows marketers to bid on competitors' names as keywords, the next question is whether this can be an effective marketing strategy. The short answer is – it depends. Let's take a quick look at some of the pros and cons of bidding on your competitors' names.

Pros Of Using A Competitor's Name

Lower Cost-Per-Click – The cost-per-click (CPC) tends to be cheaper due to lower competition on these keywords. For example, the CPC for the term "attorney" is MUCH HIGHER than the term for my law firm "Futeral and Nelson."

Brand Awareness – By displaying your ads for searches for your competitor's name or firm name, you are increasing your "brand awareness" with potential clients.

Cons Of Using A Competitor's Name

Low Click Through Rate (CTR) – When someone searches for a specific lawyer or law firm online, it is likely that they are most interested in connecting with that lawyer or firm. This means that not many people will click on your ads and thereby cause a low CTR. Although you aren't paying when they don't click on your ads, a low CTR will decrease your Quality Score which makes it more expensive for your ad to show.

High Bounce Rate – When someone does click your ad, they are expecting to see the other attorney's or law firm's website. Typically, many of your site's visitors simply click away when they don't see what they expected to see. The result for your campaign is that you end up paying for lots of clicks without results.

A Potential Bidding War – When you bid on a competing lawyer’s name, you may be enticing your competition to bid on your name and start poaching some of your potential leads. As you bid on their name, it will make it more expensive for them to bid on their own name, and vice versa.

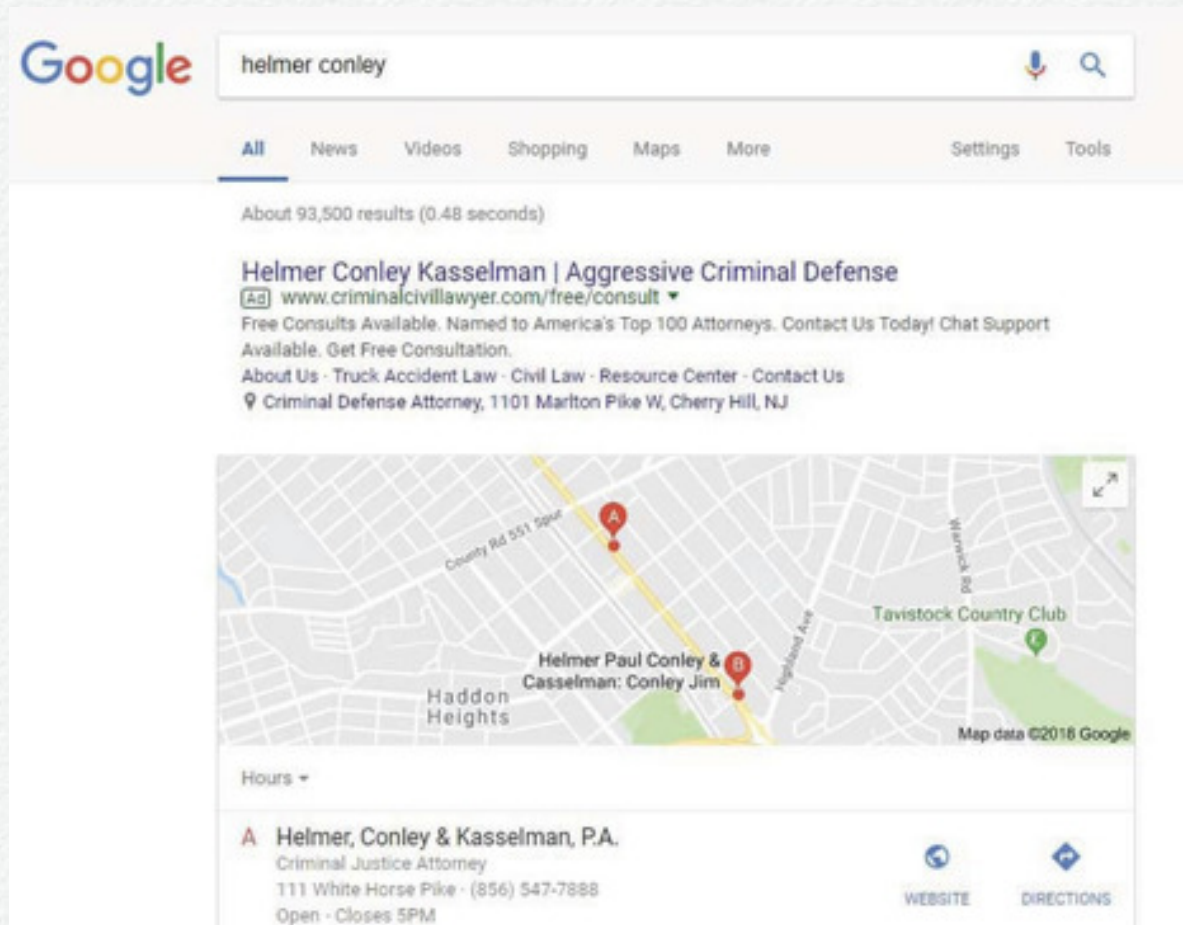
Can You Be Sued for Using a Competitor’s Name in Ads?

After spending considerable time conducting research on the subject of legal liability for bidding on a competitor’s name, there does not appear to be a clear trend towards establishing liability. For example, a Wisconsin law firm brought suit under that state’s privacy law that entitles anyone “whose privacy is unreasonably invaded” to equitable relief, compensatory damages, and reasonable attorney fees. Under that law, privacy includes “the use, for advertising purposes or for purposes of trade, of the name, portrait or picture of any living person, without having first obtained the written consent of the person” The Wisconsin Court of Appeals determined that the defendant’s keyword bidding on the competitor’s name was not an “unreasonable” invasion of privacy.

However, the court in the case of Rescuecom Corp. v. Google Inc. took a different view based upon trademark laws. Rescuecom sued Google for trademark infringement because Google recommended the “Rescuecom” trademark to

businesses, including Rescuecom’s competitors, that were buying keywords through Ads. Although Rescuecom ultimately dropped the case, the Second Circuit did hold that Google’s use of the “Rescuecom” trademark constituted a “use in commerce” under the Lanham Act.

Now, let’s go back to the New Jersey suit of Helmer, Conley & Kasselmann v. Hark & Hark. Helmer asserted various claims including violation of the Latham Act, violation of the New Jersey Unfair Competition Law, Identity Theft, and other claims. As mentioned earlier, Hark allegedly took things a step further. Specifically, Hark allegedly used Helmer’s firm name in the ad copy as follows:



Helmer claimed that when a consumer clicked on the ad, they were directed to Hark's website as follows:



Assuming Helmer's claims were true, Hark's actions appear to be a fairly egregious and purposeful attempt at deceiving consumers. As of early 2019, the lawsuit had just begun. That being said, the New Jersey court has already issued a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction prohibiting Hark from continuing to market on Google Ads this way.

Is it Ethical for a Lawyer to Bid on a Competitor's Name in Ads?

Aside from legal liability, attorneys and law firms may face serious ethical consequences for bidding on a competitor's name. For example, the lawsuit filed by Helmer also claims that that Hark violated the following New Jersey ethics rules:

Rule 7.1(a) of the New Jersey Rules of Professional Conduct provides that "[a] lawyer shall not make false or misleading communications about the lawyer, the lawyer's services, or any matter in which the lawyer has or seeks a professional involvement."

Rule 8.4(c) of the New Jersey Rules of Professional Conduct provides that "[i]t is professional misconduct for a lawyer to . . . engage in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation"

New Jersey's rules are nearly identical to the corresponding American Bar Association Model Rules of Professional Conduct. Rule 7.1, provides:

A lawyer shall not make a false or misleading communication about the lawyer or the lawyer's services. A communication is false or misleading if it contains a material misrepresentation of fact or law, or omits a fact necessary to make the statement considered as a whole not materially misleading.

Rule 8.4 (c) provides:

It is professional misconduct for a lawyer to . . . engage in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation

As of now, not every state bar association has weighed in on whether it is unethical to bid on a competing lawyer's name in Google Ads. That being said, several states that have examined this marketing practice have found it to be unethical. For example, Florida Advisory Opinion A-12-1 provides that the use of "false, deceptive or misleading [meta tags] is prohibited" and that this prohibition also applies when "when lawyers purchase advertising on a search engine keyed to specific words or phrases."

North Carolina has also determined that bidding on a competing lawyer's name is unethical. A 2010 Formal Ethics Opinion #14 states:

It is professional misconduct for a lawyer to engage in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation. Rule 8.4(c). Dishonest conduct includes conduct that shows a lack of fairness or straightforwardness. See In the Matter of Shorter, 570 A.2d 760, 767-68 (DC App. 1990). The intentional purchase of the recognition associated with one lawyer's name to direct consumers to a competing lawyer's website is neither fair nor straightforward. Therefore, it is a violation of Rule 8.4(c) for a lawyer to select another lawyer's name to be used in his own keyword advertising.

Don't Bid on Other Attorneys' and Law Firms' Names

In the end, nothing good will come from trading on the names of your fellow bar members. By engaging in questionable marketing tactics, especially if those tactics are successful, you are risking an ethical or a legal complaint against you.

Additionally, attorneys must be highly selective regarding the marketing agencies they hire and well-informed regarding the marketing tactics their agency may use to drive leads. Although there are many marketing agencies that cater to lawyers and to law firms, most of these agencies have no inkling of the fine legal and ethical line lawyers and law firms must walk when marketing to potential clients.

Click Fraud

If you are a lawyer who is advertising through Google Ads, then chances are a portion of your daily ad budget is wasted by click fraud. In fact, studies show that between 2016 and 2018, over \$7 billion were wasted by advertisers on fraudulent clicks! For lawyers' Google Ads campaigns, I have encountered substantial fraudulent activities that, if left unchecked, cause significant financial losses and poor campaign performance.

What is Click Fraud?

Click fraud is a “black-hat” method of sabotaging a competitor’s PPC (pay-per-click) advertising such as Google Ads. With Google Ads, one method of click fraud I see is competitors repetitively clicking on an ad to drive up the cost and to exhaust a law firm’s daily budget cap. Click fraud can also stem from bots clicking on your ads. Bots, or Internet robots, are also known as spiders, crawlers, and web bots. Bots comprise roughly 50% of all Internet traffic. Although bots may be utilized to perform repetitive jobs, such as indexing a search engine, some of them are malicious. Indeed, it is estimated that as

many as 20% of websites that serve ads are visited exclusively by fraudulent click bots. Lastly, click fraud can come from “click farms.” A click farm is a commercial enterprise that employs a large number of people to repeatedly click on items of online content in order to artificially inflate statistics of traffic or engagement.

In addition to causing financial losses, click fraud also impacts your campaign’s performance by driving up click-through rates (CTR’s) on ads without leading to any conversions. These inflated CTR’s without conversions reduce your keyword quality scores which, in turn, means you may pay more per click than your competitors who have higher quality scores.

Here is an example of a Google Ads account for DUI defense and how click fraud, if left unchecked, can significantly increase costs. Recently, I took over the management of various Google Ads campaigns for DUI defense services in and around Phoenix wherein the law firm is spending over \$20,000 per month. After making hundreds of adjustments to improve the account’s performance, I turned my attention to the firm’s server logs, their Google Analytics, and their Google Ads reports and I discovered that this account was being bombarded with click fraud activity. After two weeks and much effort to unroot and block the various sources of click fraud, the account’s performance increased dramatically:

-
- Cost per conversion came down 35.06%
 - Conversion rate went up 97.07%
 - Invalid Click Rate came down 27.58%

Furthermore, assuming an average cost per click of \$50, by preventing 222 fraudulent clicks I saved the law firm over \$11,000! The takeaway here is that if you are running Google Ads campaigns, you must be diligent about monitoring and combating click fraud.

Does Google Block Invalid Clicks?

Google refers to click fraud as “invalid clicks.” According to Google, click fraud is an “illegitimate” action such as an unintentional click or a click resulting from malicious software. According to Google, here are examples of what it considers invalid clicks:

- *manual clicks intended to increase your advertising costs or to increase profits for website owners hosting your ads*
- *clicks by automated clicking tools, robots, or other deceptive software*
- *extraneous clicks that provide no value to the advertiser, such as the second click of a double-click*

Unfortunately, Google does not actively block or prevent click fraud from happening. Instead, Google “examines” each click on an ad and touts using “sophisticated systems to identify invalid clicks and impressions and remove them from your account data.” That means in most cases Google detects and filters out invalid clicks in real-time before advertisers are charged. If Google misses the invalid click in real-time, you may see a credit applied to your Google billing statement for “invalid activity.”

In my experience, Google does not do a perfect job of screening for invalid clicks. Therefore, Google provides that “[i]f we find that invalid clicks have escaped automatic detection, you may be eligible to receive a credit for those clicks.” Indeed, for some clients, I have been able to recover thousands of dollars each year by creating and submitting invalid activity reports to Google seeking a refund. These refunds are called “invalid activity” adjustments. Claims to Google for refunds may be made once every two months.

How Can You Tell if there is Click Fraud?

For those of you who are skilled (and brave) enough to manage your own Google Ads account and to track click fraud, you will need your internal reporting for your web server, Google

Analytics, and Google Ads to examine the following few pieces of information:

- IP address
- Click timestamp (the time when someone arrives on your site after clicking an ad)
- Action timestamp (the time when that person completed an action on your site)
- User-agent (shows type of computer or device, internet browser, software, and more).

By examining this data, you are looking for suspicious behaviors and patterns such as:

Multiple clicks from the same IP address or User-Agent in a short time period - For example, if a user clicks your ad 3 times within 10 minutes, chances are this is malicious activity.

Multiple clicks made by different IPs from the same range of IP addresses - For example, if you received back-to-back clicks from 172.165.11.10, 172.165.11.20, and 172.165.11.30, chances are this is malicious activity.

Multiple clicks from the same User-Agent – For example, if you receive multiple clicks from someone using the same mobile phone device ID, regardless of whether there are different IP addresses associated with those clicks, then it may

be malicious activity. Additionally, user agent data is useful when the malicious activity may involve a VPN (a virtual private network) that obscures/changes the user's IP address.

Little to no time spent on your landing page – For example, if, after clicking, the user spends no time or mere seconds on your landing page and then bounces out of your site, chances are this may be malicious activity. Similarly, if you see an IP address with multiple click timestamps but no action timestamps, then that is probably click fraud.

How Many Clicks Are Too Many?

Before you begin panicking about the same user clicking your ad multiple times, it is important to understand that some consumers may click on an ad more than once as they conduct online research and make their hiring decisions. Therefore, it is also important to consider the practice areas you are running ads for and the stages a potential client may go through before making his or her hiring decision.

On the one hand, if you are running ads for drafting wills, it is more likely that most consumers are mulling over their options before they come to the decision to hire an attorney. Thus, the consumer may click on your ad, and perhaps your competitors' ads, more than once during a day, a week, or a month. On the other hand, if you are running ads for DUI defense, chances are the consumer who is conducting an online search has an

immediate need to get out of jail or seek next-day representation at a bond hearing. In this scenario, a legitimate consumer is not likely to repeatedly click on your ad minutes apart.

Please note that it is not uncommon for multiple clicks to come from the same IP address when there is a proxy server involved. A proxy server acts as a gateway between you and the Internet. If you're using a proxy server, Internet traffic flows through the proxy server on its way to the address you requested. By checking the geolocation of the IP address using sites such as whatismyipaddress.com, ip2location.com, whatismyip.com, or iplocation.net, you may discover a concerning IP address belongs to a proxy server at a public place such as a university or coffee shop. If you're still unsure whether the activity is malicious, then look at the search queries from that IP. If the searches are very different, it's likely a proxy server. If the search queries are similar and are occurring over a short period of time, then chances are the clicks are fraudulent.

How Do You Prevent Click Fraud?

IP Exclusion

After you have come up with a list of malicious IP addresses, it is time to block them from ever seeing your ads again as follows:

1. Log in to your Google Ads account at ads.google.com
2. Select the campaign you wish to block IP addresses from seeing your ads
3. Select "Settings" on the inner menu on the left
4. Click on "Additional settings"
5. Under "IP Exclusions," paste the IP addresses you are wanting to exclude
6. Press "Save," and the IP addresses are now blocked

Geotargeting

Another way to block your ads from showing to competitors and others who may be maliciously clicking your ads is geotargeting. In Google Ads, in addition to choosing where your ads display, you can exclude your ads from displaying in

various geographic regions by country, region, city, or postal code as follows:

1. Log in to your Google Ads account at ads.google.com
2. Select the campaign you wish to geotarget
3. Select “Locations” on the inner menu on the left
4. Select “Excluded” from the horizontal menu over the map
5. Click the round, blue pencil icon to add excluded locations
6. After adding your excluded locations, click save

As a standard practice, when I set up Google Ads campaigns for lawyers, I exclude many foreign countries and territories unless the law firm provides services overseas. Countries that are impoverished or have lower labor rates are usually at the top of the list when it comes to fraudulent click sources. That being said, despite blocking foreign countries, I still see foreign IP addresses sneaking through. So, even if you block other parts of the country or foreign countries, it is still a good idea to go back and look over the logs of IP addresses clicking on your ads and to block suspicious IP addresses from future clicks.

Content vs. PPC

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Every lawyer wants the most bang for their marketing dollar. Given the choice, the question becomes which marketing tactic is best - content marketing or pay-per-click advertising?

Comparison & Analysis

Many lawyers have asked me what they should do when they think they're not getting enough leads from their website. Should they engage in PPC (Pay-Per-Click) advertising such as Google Ads or should they focus on content marketing to drive inbound leads? In this section, I'll compare both forms of online marketing for attorneys and declare the winner!

Outside In vs. Inside Out

Before we compare content marketing vs. PPC campaigns, it's helpful to understand the fundamental difference that separates these two forms of online marketing. Essentially, content marketing is "inside out" while PPC is "outside in." PPC is "outside in" marketing because you are creating marketing material on other platforms, such as Google Ads, to drive traffic to your law firm's website. Content marketing is "inside out" because you are encouraging traffic to your law firm website by developing marketing material directly on the site itself.

The Pros of Content Marketing

Fuels Relationships – The ideas behind content marketing are to educate and to inform your audience while addressing common questions and issues relevant to your law firm's practice areas. For example, a criminal defense attorney could benefit from publishing an article about "what to do when you're arrested." The audience's engagement with your content can fuel relationships so that website traffic inbound from that article turns into highly qualified leads.

SEO Boost – There is an added bonus to developing good content for your law firm's website. When your content gets shared, these inbound links signal to Google that your articles have a degree of authority. From a SEO standpoint, the more authority, the more your articles are likely to be visible in search engine results.

Evergreen Content – One last "pro" to add to the list is the evergreen nature of content. Aside from the time or the financial investment to create content and the cost of hosting your site, there is no ongoing investment. Once your content is out on the Internet, it stays there indefinitely.

The Cons of Content Marketing

Although I use the term "con," I like to think of it more as a "challenge" to content marketing. That being said, effective

content marketing requires an investment of thought, time, and a distribution strategy.

Time & Effort – Developing quality content takes time and effort. Before I write an article, I think about topics that may interest our site’s visitors. I wonder what questions or issues our audience may have such and I keep a running list of topics to blog about. As for time, I spend time researching topics, writing the article, proofreading it, adding the meta title and meta description, choosing a relevant image, and posting it to my website. In all, I invest about an hour or so of my time. Afterwards, I invest several more hours distributing the content as discussed next.

Plan for Distribution – Developing a good plan for content marketing includes the distribution of your content. For example, your distribution should include social sharing on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. However, simply sharing your content on social media isn’t enough. To encourage followers to share and to engage, you need to reciprocate by taking the time to engage with your followers by sharing similar content, commenting on their shares, and replying to those persons who comment on your posts.

Tracking Performance Takes Effort – Unlike PPC advertising, tracking the performance of your keyword sand phrases, conversion rates, and ROI takes a bit more time, effort, and know-how. Essentially, tracking conversions and ROI requires

some understanding of how to use a tool such as Google Analytics to analyze factors such as search traffic, direct traffic, referral traffic, bounce rates, site flow, and many other factors.

Lack of Immediacy – There is one other challenge worth mentioning. Essentially, the payoff for content marketing is not as immediate as running a PPC campaign. Depending on SEO factors, your website’s structure, and other factors, search engines such as Google may, or may not, show your content for search results.

Some of our clients believe that it takes Google weeks or months to rank content after it is posted. That’s simply not true. If you are following good SEO practices, your post can be indexed and showing up in searches within minutes.

The Pros of PPC Advertising

Instant Gratification – The first thing that comes to mind as a “pro” for PPC ads is the instant gratification you’ll receive. If your ads are set up and maintained properly, you’ll get top placement immediately. What’s more, you’ll get leads more quickly than with content marketing. Additionally, PPC ads can be created and distributed rapidly.

Precise Targeting – With PPC ads, you can target your audience and the geographic locations of your ads with near

pin-point precision. What that means for your law firm is that you can pre-qualify your site's traffic based on your location or other factors to make sure you are driving the right people to your site.

Easy-to-Track Performance – With a PPC campaign, you can immediately track the performance of your keywords and phrases, which ads bring in the most traffic, conversion rates, and your ROI. Compare this to content marketing, where results can take months to determine and changes can take weeks to implement.

Leveling the Playing Field – Lastly, PPC advertising can level the online marketing playing field for lawyers. Even if you're a solo practitioner, you can still compete online with the "big" firms.

The Cons of PPC Advertising

Costs – Paid ads can seem enticing for lawyers because you can control your budget and how much you spend per click. However, don't let anyone fool you – PPC campaigns can be costly. Unlike searches for other products and services, the term "attorney" is the 4th most expensive keyword in Google Ads. Even for a well-optimized campaign, I commonly see attorneys paying anywhere from \$50 to over \$150 per click depending on their location and the practice areas they promote.

Not Evergreen – PPC is the marketing equivalent of crack cocaine. Once you're on it, it's really hard to get off of it. When PPC works, it's hard to justify reducing your law firm's PPC budget to fund new marketing approaches such as content marketing that may prove less effective in the short run but will drive ROI in the long run.

Set Up & Optimization – I've seen many examples of poorly run PPC ads such as criminal lawyers showing up for family law attorney searches or lawyers' ads showing up in geographic locations that are well outside of their market area. Running a successful campaign is an art that requires knowledge about creating a relevant landing page for the ad, choosing the proper keywords and terms, proper use of Google Ads extensions, use of negative keywords to filter out irrelevant searches, and many more factors. If you decide to run a PPC campaign, then consider doing what you do best – practicing law – and hire a company that specializes in running Google Ads campaigns for lawyers.

Which Wins? Content Marketing or PPC Advertising?

The answer is – both are winners in their own right. Obviously, each has its pros and cons, but those pros and cons are unique to each form of marketing. For example, you can focus solely on content marketing, but be prepared to be patient waiting for

the results. The long-term payoff from content marketing is much greater than PPC, but it takes time. Likewise, you can focus solely on PPC ads, but be prepared for a long-term investment if you don't plan to develop any content. In all, based on the difference between "inside out" vs. "outside in" marketing, I recommend a "one-two" combination of content marketing and PPC advertising to market your law firm online.

Facebook

If you aren't advertising on Facebook, you may be missing out on the potential to create brand awareness for your firm and to target specific types of cases and clients.

Advantages of Facebook

I've spoken with many lawyers who don't see the value of advertising on Facebook. After reviewing the activity on some of these attorneys' Facebook Pages, I doubt whether they've attracted a single client. Their posts only have a handful of "likes" (usually from friends and family) and little to no comments or shares. In other words, *rigor mortis* has set in on their Facebook feed. Fortunately, if you're reading this book, I will explain to you exactly how to breathe life and vigor into your Facebook Page and to use Facebook ads effectively to market your law firm. Before I detail how Facebook ads can really work wonders for your firm, let's look at why Facebook advertising makes sense.

Facebook Advertising Makes Sense

Facebook makes perfect sense as an advertising medium. Why? Facebook is undoubtedly the largest social media network in the world. Here are a few recent statistics that demonstrate the reach of Facebook:

- As of March 2019, there were over 2.38 billion monthly active users.
- There are 1.56 billion daily active users.
- Facebook adds 500,000 new users every day; 6 new profiles every second.
- 72% of all U.S. adults online visit Facebook at least once a month.
- Facebook takes up 22% of the internet time Americans spend on mobile devices, compared with 11% on Google search and YouTube combined.
- Users spend an average of 50 minutes per day on Facebook.

Law Firms Have Ignored the Benefits of Advertising on Facebook

Although there are 50 million active small business Pages, only 2.5 million of those businesses pay to be "active advertisers." What this means is that many businesses, including law firms, have yet to discover the benefits of paid advertising on Facebook via "boosting" posts or running text or video ads. Therein lies a huge potential for your marketing voice to be heard online as opposed to trying to be heard (at great expense) over the din of all the law firm ads saturating

local TV stations. Additionally, advertising on Facebook has its advantages over advertising on local television as follows:

Rapid Ad Placement

If you've ever run an ad on TV, you know that from start to finish it can take days or weeks to prepare your ad and book your run times. If you are "boosting a post" or running a graphic/text ad, Facebook only takes minutes to set up. Even if you are shooting a video for your Facebook ad (note – video ads typically perform better than other ads), Facebook is still much quicker than television.

Control Of Your Budget

On average, I've found that the CPM (cost per one thousand impressions) on Facebook is higher than the CPM of advertising on a local television station. However, unlike TV ad campaigns that require a few months of commitment, you can exercise much more control over your Facebook ad budget. Basically, you can spend as little or as much as you want and you can turn your ads off and on as often as you like.

Control Of Ad Targeting

Compared to television advertising, Facebook gives you much greater control of your ad's target. Here are some of the ways you can target your ads:

- **Location:** You have the option to target your audience based on location including countries, states, provinces, cities, congressional districts, zip codes, or any combination of locations.
- **Education:** You can select your audience based on education level, fields of study, schools, and undergrad years.
- **Interests:** You can choose specific interests (such as law, divorce, criminal justice, etc.) that are important to your audience.
- **Behaviors:** You can select people based on purchase behaviors or intents, device usage, and more.
- **Connections:** You can select your audience based on whether they're connected to your Page. Anyone who has a friend connected to what you're advertising will see their friend included in your ad.

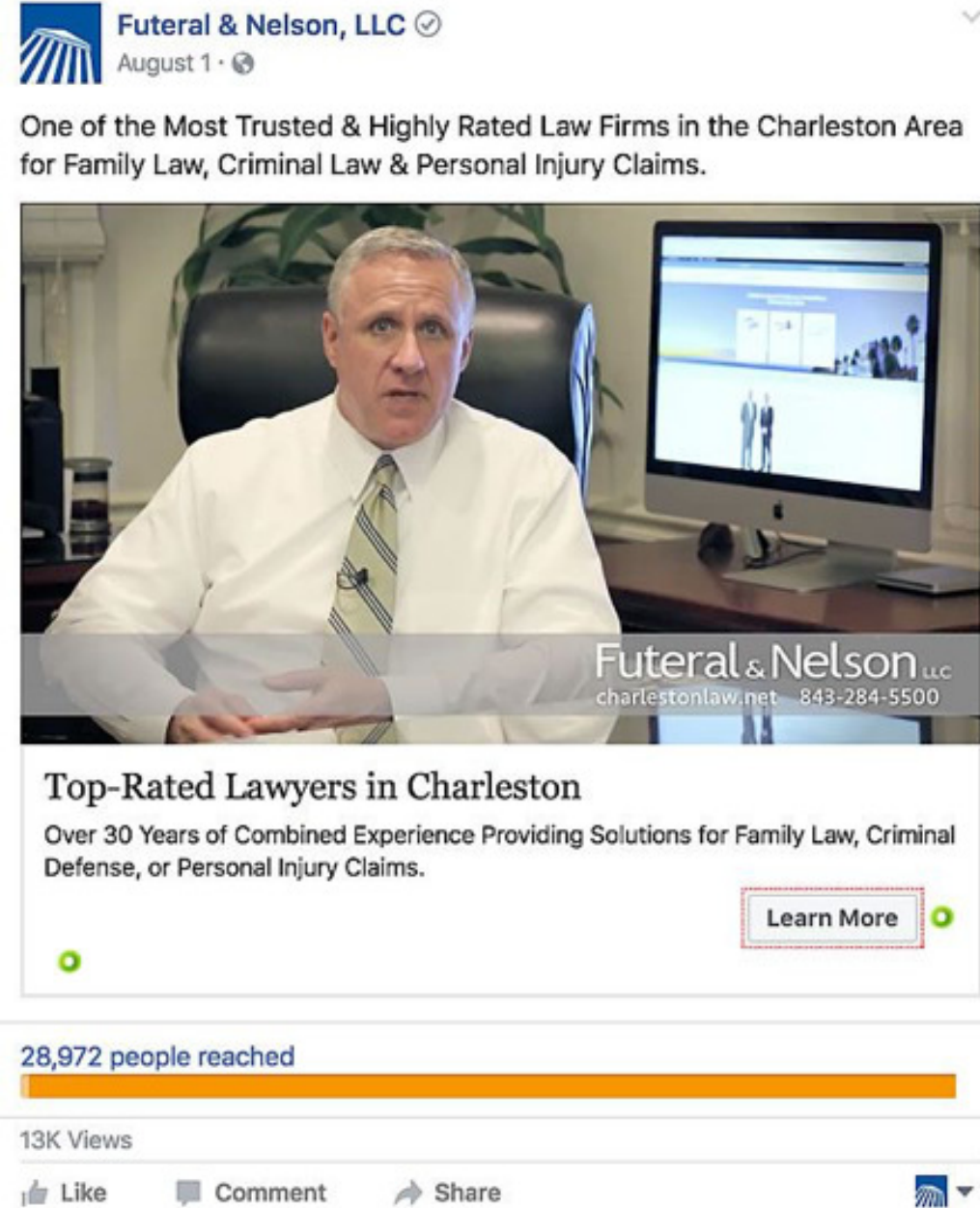
Section 2

Real World Examples

To illustrate how effective Facebook advertising can be for attorneys, I've broken down my examples into 3 primary goals that your Facebook ads should focus on: (1) brand awareness; (2) promoting practice areas; and (3) targeting specific cases/clients. These examples are from campaigns I ran for my own law firm.

Example 1 – Building Brand Awareness

To build the public's awareness of your law firm, I recommend using a 15 to 30-second video to promote your firm such as mine shown in the screenshot below. Overall, video ads get more attention and interaction from Facebook users than static, image, and text-based ads. Here is an example of a video ad I used to promote my law firm's services:



The screenshot shows a Facebook video advertisement for Futeral & Nelson, LLC. The ad features a video of a man in a white shirt and tie sitting at a desk with a computer monitor. The text on the ad includes the firm's name, a date of August 1, and a description of their services as one of the most trusted law firms in the Charleston area. A 'Learn More' button is highlighted with a red dashed box. Below the video, the ad shows performance metrics: 28,972 people reached and 13K views. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Share'.

Futeral & Nelson, LLC ✓
August 1 • 🌐

One of the Most Trusted & Highly Rated Law Firms in the Charleston Area for Family Law, Criminal Law & Personal Injury Claims.

Futeral & Nelson LLC
charlestonlaw.net 843-284-5500

Top-Rated Lawyers in Charleston
Over 30 Years of Combined Experience Providing Solutions for Family Law, Criminal Defense, or Personal Injury Claims.

[Learn More](#)

28,972 people reached

13K Views

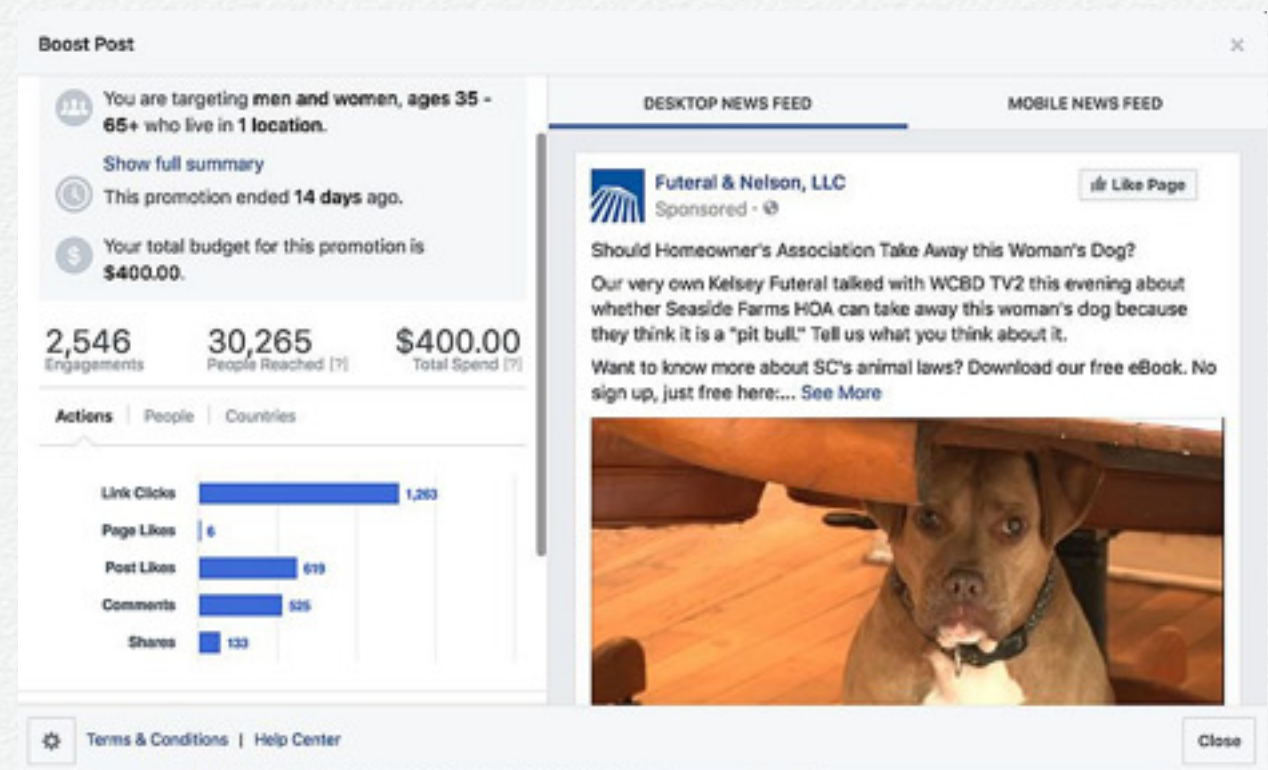
Like Comment Share

As for the CPM for this campaign, it was about double the CPM for a television ad in my local (Charleston, SC) market. Having said that, the cost-per-click (CPC) was low at 22 cents and the click-through-rate (CTR) was high at 11.01%. This ad generated 19 new intakes for a cost-per-acquisition (CPA) of \$30.58 per lead. Overall, this ad's CPC, CTR, and CPA are MUCH better compared to most Google Ads campaigns for law firms. Plus, my firm continues to build awareness through impressions on Facebook.

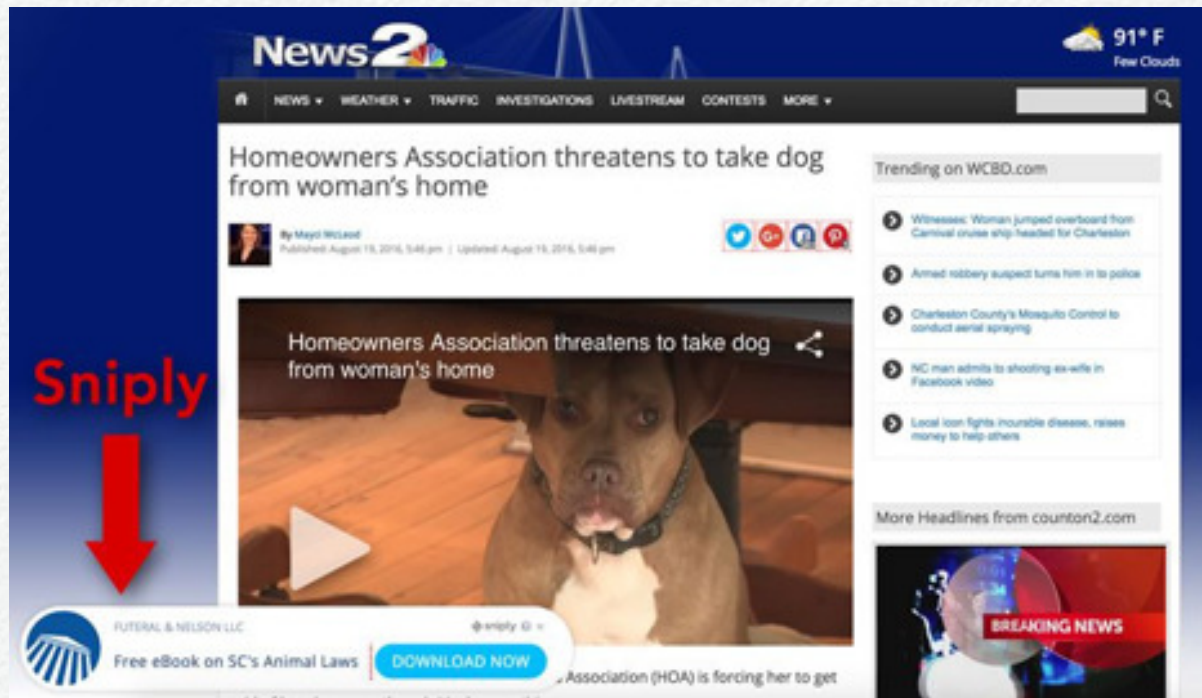
Example 2 – Promoting Practice Areas

To market practice areas, I typically don't create an ad such as "we do family law" or "we'll help you when you've been injured" because Facebook users don't interact or engage very much with these ads. There is a much better approach that I call "soft sell/hot topic." Here's what I mean by that. First, I find a hot topic in the local news that fits into the practice area I want to promote. In this example, I promoted animal law. Albeit animal law is far from a lucrative area of practice, my wife (who is also a lawyer) and I enjoy helping pet owners. Anyway, I saw that the local news was covering a story about a homeowner's association that was threatening to take away an elderly woman's dog because it was a "pit mix." On the day the story broke, I created a post on my firm's Facebook Page linking to the news coverage. Then, I boosted the post with a budget of

several hundred dollars to run for just a few days because interest in the story would fade after about 72 hours. Below is a screenshot of the results that shows over 2,500 engagements, over 500 comments, and a reach of 30,265 persons:



All that is well and good, but what about driving traffic to my law firm's website? Standing alone, it appears that all I did was drive traffic to the news station's website. That's where the "soft sell" comes in using a service such as Sniply or Linkis to add a call-to-action to the links you share. As you can see from the screenshot below of the link I shared on Facebook, I used Sniply to create a call-to-action to download my law firm's free eBook "Animal Laws in South Carolina – Piecing It All Together."



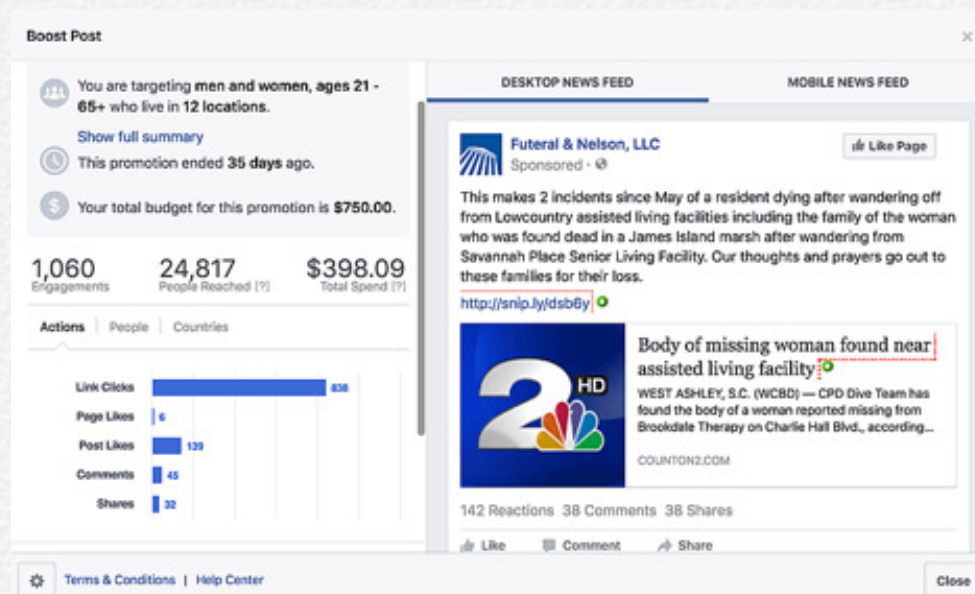
When Facebook users clicked on the Sniply call-to-action, they were directed to the download page on my firm's website as shown in the next screenshot:



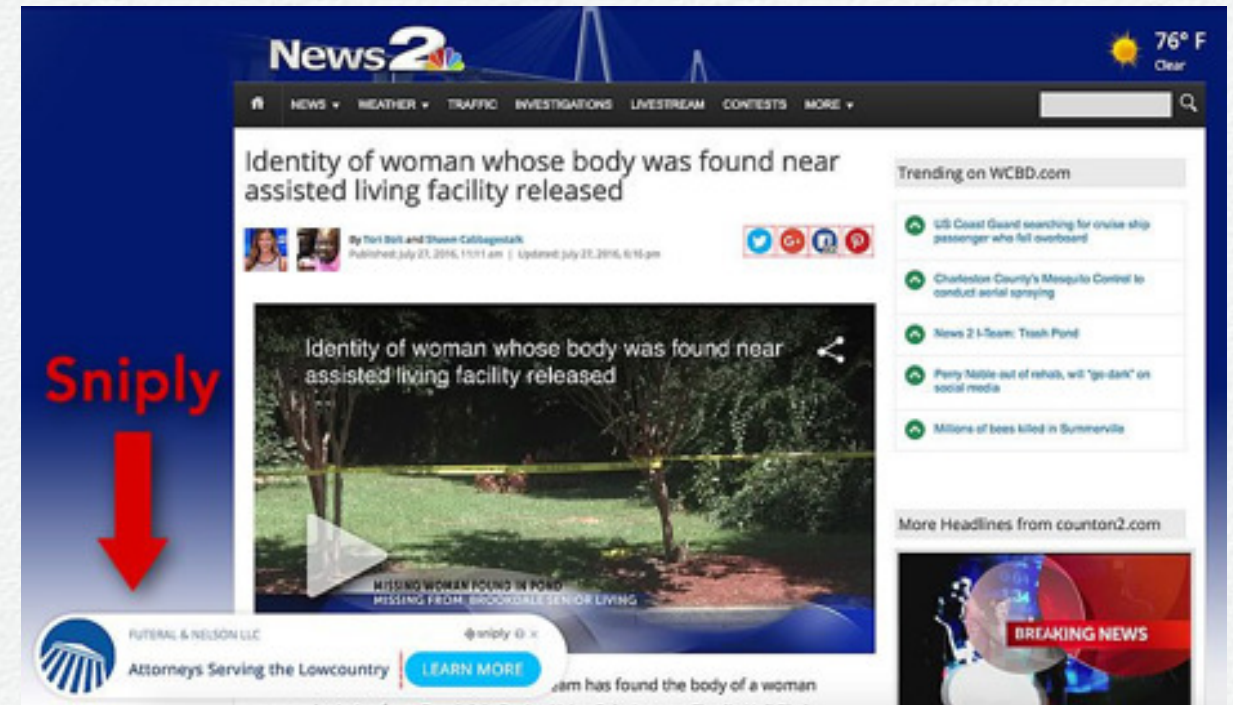
In addition to creating brand awareness for my firm via several hundred post engagements (shares, likes, and comments), Sniply stats showed that the call-to-action was clicked 1440 times, my analytics showed that our book was downloaded 107 times, and my firm took in two new cases that week regarding equestrian veterinary malpractice. Remember that for the soft sell/hot topic approach to work, you must move quickly to capitalize on whatever is currently trending in the news that may fit within your practice area.

Example 3 -Targeting Specific Cases Or Clients

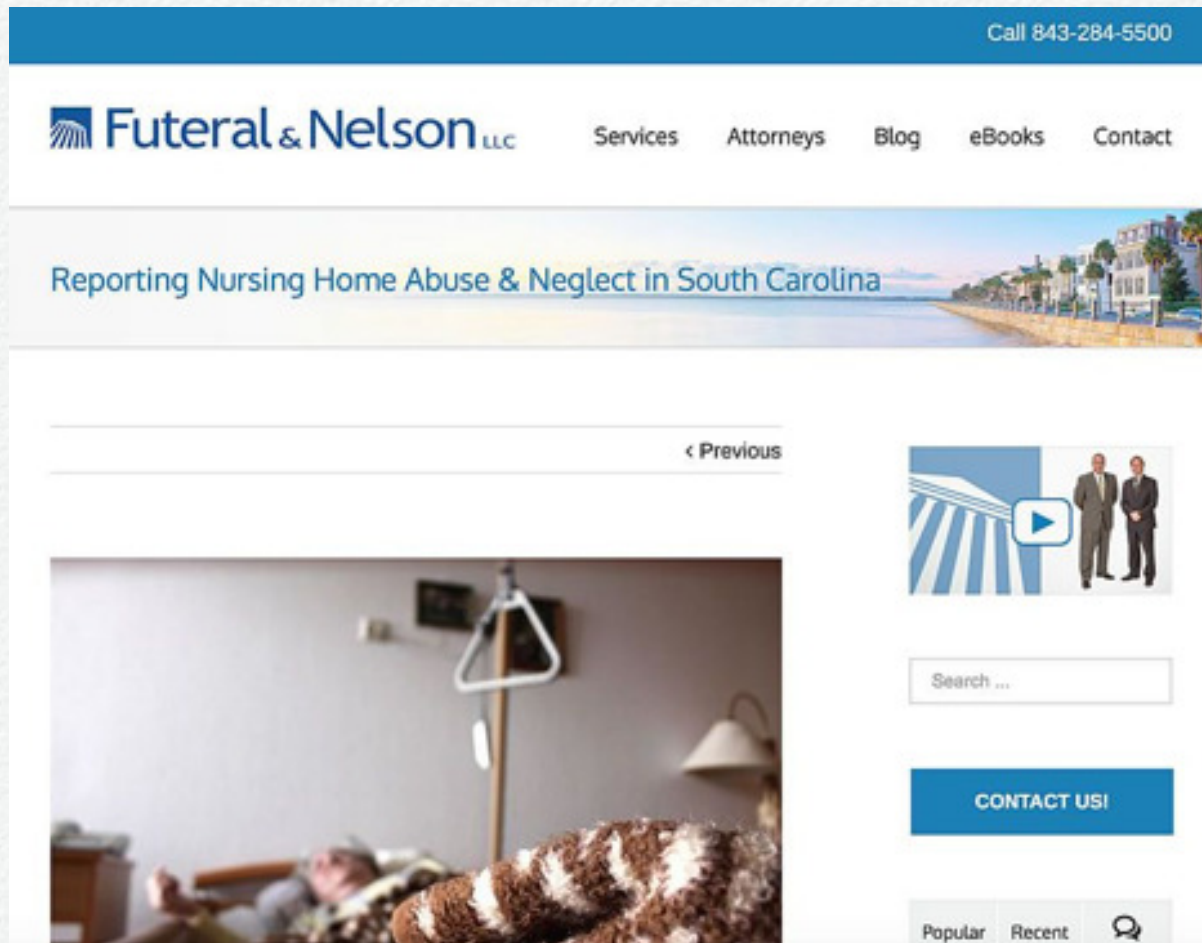
Targeting a specific case or client is identical to a soft sell/hot topic approach with a slight twist. In this scenario, you know that there is a certain case or client you want to sign up but you haven't the means to contact the potential client directly due to ethical prohibitions, lack of information as to how to reach the potential client, or you don't know the exact identity of the potential client. In this example, my firm was trying to reach the family members of an assisted living resident who died tragically after wandered away from the facility. As it so happened, my firm was representing the family of another assisted living resident who also died tragically after wandered away from a different facility 3 months earlier. Here is a screenshot of the post and the results:



Here is a screenshot of the call-to-action on the link:



And here is my firm's web page that was tied into the call-to-action:



Although my firm did not get a lead regarding the second assisted living facility resident, the link to our firm's page was clicked over 100 times and my firm did receive 3 leads regarding unrelated assisted living facility abuse and neglect claims.

Final Thoughts on Effective Facebook Ads

Keep in mind that there are other factors that can influence the effectiveness of your Facebook ads such as the text of the ad or post, the graphics or video you use for ads, the ad placements (desktop vs. mobile, etc.), and your choice in demographics such as location and other factors. Also, just because your ad is effectively using the budget you started with doesn't mean your ad will be more effective by increasing your budget. Over time, Facebook uses internal algorithms to make adjustments to "optimize" the display of your ad depending on your budget. When you jack up your budget more than 5% to 10% of your original budget, you throw the "optimization" out of whack and, typically, see a poorer performance. I recommend increasing your budget in small increments and waiting 24 hours to see how the ad is performing before making additional adjustments. The same principles are true if you start changing other attributes of your ad such as geotargeting and demographic adjustments.

Video

8

Law firms use video to advertise, to drive traffic to their websites, and to increase their conversions. Unfortunately, many law firms don't see a good return on their investment because they are creating ineffective videos.

Core Concepts for Success

This section explains the elements to create successful videos for marketing, real-world tips that get results, and common mistakes to avoid.

Concentrate on What Your Audience is Searching for Online

One of the biggest mistakes lawyers make with their video marketing is taking an ad-hoc approach to selecting the content of their videos. To be truly effective, video marketing strategies must be based on data instead of based on your assumptions. The goal here is to build video marketing for your law practice that is predictable. If you don't focus on data-driven content, then you are just creating videos for the sake of having videos.

In the early stages of search, consumers are often looking to educate themselves about a particular legal matter before they're ready to hire a lawyer. These are the searches you want to concentrate on using data. Data-driven video marketing

centers around keyword research and search volume metrics. Keyword research involves identifying popular words and phrases people enter into search engines. This research will give you an understanding of how high the demand is for certain keywords and phrases. By using data, you can get a good idea of exactly how many monthly searches there are for each video topic you produce.

Tell Stories

I have reviewed countless attorney videos that have the same look and say the same thing in the same way over and over. What these videos are missing is a connection based on emotion. Prospective clients are dealing with emotional issues such as a divorce or criminal charges. Your videos are an opportunity to create trust in your ability to solve their problems and return their life to normal. To that end, don't just create videos that talk about your firm or your services. Instead, tell stories about the legal issues your clients were facing and explain how you were able to resolve these issues for them. Stated another way, don't focus your videos on you. Instead, focus on valuable content to make your videos as helpful as possible. Always remember, you are not selling yourself; you are selling a solution.

Keep It Short & Simple

In the digital marketing world, shorter is better especially when it comes to using your videos for paid ads. In fact, the most successful video ads are shorter than 60 seconds and the best performing ads are 15 to 30 seconds. That being said, if you are not creating videos for ads but for showcasing on social media, then your optimal video length is 2 minutes.

Include a Call-to-Action

One of the important features of your video is your call to action. This is where you “close the deal” by prompting your viewer to do something such as visiting your law firm’s website. If a potential client watched your entire video to the end, then they have a clear interest in your legal services. This interest is why you need to prompt the video viewer to take action such as clicking a link for more information or prompting the viewer to call to book a consultation.

Focus on Quality

Naturally, the primary goal behind video marketing your law practice is to attract high-value cases and high-quality clients. Nevertheless, I frequently see low-quality lawyer videos that sound and look cheap. If you create high-quality, engaging videos that establish your practice as the “go-to” firm, then you will see results. However, if you create cheap and

unremarkable video content, then you will flounder online with all the other lawyers who are doing the same thing.

Here are some important tips for creating quality videos for your law firm:

Write A Script

What you say in your videos is crucial to connect with your target audience. That is why you should take the time to plan your message. When scripting your video, pay attention to the following:

- Introduce the subject of the video.
- Keep sentences short and to the point.
- Avoid legal jargon.

Avoid “Talking Head” Videos

If you had the time to search for lawyers’ videos, you would literally find thousands that look exactly the same – a lawyer talking in front of a blue (or colored) backdrop. If you want to differentiate yourself from every other lawyer marketing video, then choose a setting and a format that is more engaging than just a lawyer talking to a camera.

Use Quality Lighting, Video, And Audio Equipment

Again, the goal is to avoid looking cheap. Additionally, poor lighting, video, or audio is distracting and causes viewers to focus on the deficiencies of your video instead of your message/content.

YouTube

YouTube is one of the most influential social media channels available on the Internet. In this section, I will explain to you exactly how to use YouTube ads effectively to market your law firm. Before I explain how you can use YouTube to draw in big cases and more clients, let's look at why YouTube advertising for lawyers makes sense.

Why YouTube Advertising for Law Firms Makes Sense

Here are a few recent statistics that demonstrate the reach of YouTube:

- YouTube has over a billion users.
- More than 500 million hours of videos are watched on YouTube each day.
- YouTube reaches more 18-49 year olds than any U.S. cable network.

- 85% of the U.S. Internet audience watches videos online.
- Viewers retain 95% of a message when they watch it in a video compared to 10% when they read text.
- Internet video traffic made up 69% of all global consumer Internet traffic in 2017.
- Internet video traffic is quickly approaching 80% of all consumer Internet traffic.

The point of sharing these statistics is to show that if you aren't advertising on YouTube, you are missing out on the potential to create brand awareness for your law firm and to target specific types of cases and clients.

Steps for Effective Marketing on YouTube

Lawyers face a particular set of challenges when it comes to legal video marketing. The best way to overcome those challenges is to have a clear set of steps that will result in effective video marketing that is specifically tailored to your law firm.

1. Create Value

A slick promotional video showcasing your office and services is all well and good, but that's not something that the average YouTube user is going to sit and watch when they have other, more entertaining content to view. That's why you have to make videos that your audience will want to watch. The best way to start this process is to consider the questions that your firm is most commonly asked.

Start gathering data about phone call inquiries, email inquiries, or questions on your website and social media pages. The more often you are asked the same questions, the easier it will be to determine exactly what the subject matter of your video marketing should be. People rarely search for an ad, but they will head to the video platform in order to find answers.

2. Be Frequent

Having one or two videos posted to YouTube is not going to be enough. Ideally, you should be aiming for a fresh piece of video content to be uploaded at least once a week. One of the most important things to remember is that your video content should not be used to promote your law firm explicitly. Of course, having a few self-promotional videos isn't going to do you any harm, but you will get a more positive response to your law firm

video marketing if you focus on answering questions and providing value.

If you develop a consistent pattern of uploading frequently, then you can start to benefit from embedding those videos into your website and building up a loyal audience of people who look forward to your new uploads. Those are the people who will think of you first when they have a need for legal services.

3. Share To Facebook

Once you have your YouTube video created and uploaded, there is a lot more that can be done with it. Of course, social media can be a complicated area to tackle when it comes to marketing, but your video can be valuable on platforms like Facebook. However, don't only share your video from YouTube directly to Facebook. Instead, take your original file and upload it directly to Facebook. That's because the social media giant will promote a video that comes from its own pages. They don't want to give other websites like YouTube clicks when they can keep users on their own site longer.

4. Don't Forget Your Call To Action

This is a term that is prevalent across digital marketing strategies, and your law firm video marketing is no different. It is the act of including something in your video that you hope will

result in a viewer taking a positive action. It could be a link to your website that you hope they will click on, an email list that you hope they will subscribe to, or even just leaving a comment and starting a discussion about your video content. The best thing about including a call to action in your marketing is that it makes it very easy to determine how effective your content is. If your call to action is suggesting a website visit and you have a thousand views but no visible increase in site visits, then something will need to be changed.

5. Hire Professionals

When you spent your early years having to study law, the chances are that you didn't learn even the basics of marketing. It's hard enough studying to be a lawyer without learning an entirely new industry. That's why agencies exist to help you with your law firm video marketing.

Optimizing Your YouTube Videos

YouTube is a great platform to build a following for your videos. However, most lawyers do not optimize their videos, and these videos get buried in a long list of other videos on the same or similar legal subjects. In other words, just like your search listings on Google, you need to optimize your videos to appear high within YouTube's first search results page otherwise no

one will see your content. Some of YouTube's main ranking factors are:

- **Watch Time** – how long people watch your video.
- **Audience Retention** – the percentage of your video that people watch.
- **Engagement** – how people interact with your video such as likes, comments, or shares.
- **Click Through Rate (CTR)** – whether viewers click the links you include.

Here are the main areas to focus on to optimize your YouTube videos:

- **Video Title** - Your title should include your primary target keyword and be compelling enough to click on.
- **Video Description** - Your video description should be 200 words or more. In your description, include your main keyword and describe what the video covers so that potential viewers can understand why they should watch it.
- **Video Tags** - Use approximately 5-10 tags, include your keyword in at least one of the tags, and make sure the tags reflect the content of your video.

-
- **Mention Keyword** - YouTube has the ability to “listen” to the content of your videos and will rank your video’s relevance to the title, description, and tags. Therefore, include your keyword in your video script.

Reviews

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is.” ~ Scott Cook, Founder, Intuit

9

Your Online Reputation

As a parent, I've taught my child to be more concerned with character than reputation. After all, your character is who you really are, while your reputation is merely who others think you are. However, in the business world, the reality is that consumers focus first and foremost on your reputation.

When I started practicing law in 1993, the only way to research and find other lawyers was (a) word-of-mouth; (b) a listing in Martindale Hubbell's printed volumes, or (c) the yellow pages. Today, many people conduct research online to select a lawyer, and part of that research includes online reviews for lawyers. If you're ignoring online reviews for your law practice, then you are missing out on a significant online marketing opportunity.

I've long since lost count of how many times clients have told me that they came to my law firm because of my firm's positive online reviews. You don't have to take my word for it. There are various surveys such as one conducted by Software Advice, Inc., that a whopping 83 percent of prospective clients use

online consumer reviews as the first step to find a lawyer. Also, approximately 50 percent of potential clients use online reviews to research a lawyer's quality of services. Lastly, studies show that 70 percent of clients are willing to commute to hire a lawyer based on whether the lawyer had better reviews and higher ratings.

Overall, I can't emphasize enough the need for law firms to pay attention to their online reputation and to the need for ongoing online reputation management (ORM). I want to share with you how social media can be a powerful, fast-paced outlet for angry, upset consumers to create chaos for any business, including law firms. Then, I will give practical advice regarding online reputation management including simple tools to monitor what people are saying about your law firm (or business) and how to respond to negative reviews. Also, I will explain how you can clean up negative reviews on Yelp and Facebook.

The (Viral) Nature of Client Complaints Online

Social media can promote the exchange of ideas and social awareness, spark intelligent conversations, and positively influence minds and hearts. On the other hand, social media can be a cesspool of irresponsible gossip, misinformation, and hateful exchanges. Regrettably, social media is filled with users

who have no filter, who exercise no restraint, who don't fact check, and who have knee-jerk public reactions to anything that upsets them. Many of their followers react the same way.

Before long, a digital backlash against any business can be exponential to include negative reviews and comments from persons who are not your clients.

Don't Ignore the Need for Online Reputation Management for Your Law Firm

For many law firms, I see that they are largely ignoring their online reputation. For example, many law firms do not claim their Yelp listing. Consequently, they ignore reviews on their listing. By ignoring these reviews, including positive ones, you are suggesting to consumers that you don't care about their experiences. These firms also ignore reviews on Google. Lastly, many firms do not respond to any reviews, either positive or negative, on Facebook.

"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." ~ Warren Buffet

The takeaway is this – don't ignore what is being said about your law firm online. Claim your Yelp listing so you can review and respond to what your clients are saying. Similarly, respond

to ALL reviews that are left on Facebook, Google, Yelp, etc. Take the time to either say thank you for the positive reviews or to respond to the negative ones.

Getting Reviews

Lawyers sometimes ask me what is the best way to get online reviews. The answer is simple – just ask your clients. Having said that, just asking isn't enough. You need to make it easy for your clients to leave you a review by giving them specific, easy-to-follow, instructions. The most effective way is to send your client an email asking for the review and inserting links to the sites where you would like them to leave a review such as Yelp, Google, and Facebook. Here is an example of an email I use for my clients:

Dear Client,

I want to thank you for putting your trust in me and my firm to help you. We hope you never have to go through another similar experience, but there are always other persons out there that need help but don't know where to turn. That's why I would truly appreciate an online review from you to let others know that they can trust in us too.

Please visit the following sites to leave a review or comment:

GOOGLE:

Google reviews are especially helpful to keeping our law firm thriving so we can continue to provide service to the community.

If you already have a Google account, such as Gmail, you can go to: INSERT YOUR GOOGLE BUSINESS PAGE URL HERE

Login and click on the "Write a review" link.

FACEBOOK:

Go to: INSERT YOUR FACEBOOK BUSINESS PAGE URL HERE

- 1 Please "Like" our Page.*
- 2 Go to "Reviews" on the left side of our Page's Timeline*
- 3 Click the "Write Review" button*
- 4 Click the gray stars to choose a rating and write an optional review*
- 5 Click "Public" or "Friends" to select your audience*
- 6 Click Post*

YELP:

Many people look up lawyers on Yelp, so a review here is very helpful.

Go to: INSERT YOUR YELP BUSINESS PAGE URL HERE

Click on the “Write a review” link.

There are many websites that allow consumers to leave reviews for lawyers. Some of those sites market to lawyers such as Avvo, Lawyers.com, Super Lawyers, and more. However, if you focus on nothing else, focus on Yelp, Google, and Facebook. You may be surprised that I mentioned Yelp. In fact, according to the survey I mentioned earlier in this guide, Yelp is the No. 1 consumer review site for people choosing lawyers.

Monitoring & Responding

Monitoring Online Reviews

At JustLegal Marketing, my team has access to various sophisticated, robust tools for social media “listening” and online reputation management. However, for those of you do-it-yourselfers, there are a number of free, easy-to-use tools for you to monitor your own brand. Here a few examples:

1) **Google Alerts (Free)** – Google Alerts lets you easily monitor the web for new content. Simply sign into your Google account, visit <https://www.google.com/alerts>, and add keywords and phrases that interest you, such as the name of your law firm. Then, Google Alerts will send you an email notifying you of new content on the Internet that matches your terms. You can also customize the frequency of these alerts such as daily or weekly.

2) **Perch (Free)** – Perch is an app for iPhones and Android and a web-based app that monitors activity on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Yelp. When someone leaves your firm a review on these platforms, you’ll get a notification on your phone.

3) **Yelp Biz (Free)** – This app for iPhone and Android allows you to monitor your firm’s listings, receive notifications of reviews, respond to reviews, and report inappropriate reviews

4) **Google My Business (Free)** – Among other things, this app for iPhone and Android allows you to monitor and to respond to reviews left by Google users.

5) **Facebook (Free)** – Like the other apps I described, the Facebook app will notify you whenever someone leaves your firm a review and it allows you to respond.

6) **Twitter Dashboard (Free)** – this app has features similar to the Twitter app but also allows you to monitor mentions of your brand.

Although these apps will help you monitor what clients are saying about you online, using several apps is cumbersome because you have to check multiple apps, etc. to aggregate all of the potential online reviews you may get. Also, when you get reviews, you have to log into different websites to respond to these reviews. Consequently, many law firms simply don’t have the time to keep up, and reviews are ignored.

Responding to Reviews

Whether a review is positive or negative, you should always respond to it. By responding, you are demonstrating that you

are actively engaged with your clients and that you care about your online reputation. Also, responding to reviews is the polite thing to do.

Responding To Positive Reviews

Responding to positive reviews is easy. Here is a sample response for any client who leaves you a positive review:

Dear Client, thank you kindly for taking the time out of your day to leave our firm a review. We welcome feedback, and it is always nice to hear when we have met a client's expectations. If you or someone you know ever needs a lawyer, we're always here to help.

Responding To Negative Reviews

Of course, the best way to avoid a negative review is to give your clients' the best service possible. However, there are always those clients who, no matter what you do, will be dissatisfied with your services. Also, there are those cases that, for reasons out of your control, the outcome did not meet the client's expectations. In other words, in time, you are bound to get a negative review.

When responding to a negative review, don't let your pride get in the way of responding professionally. The worst thing you

can do is trade barbs with a former or current client who has maligned you online. Keep your response generic (to preserve client confidentiality) and professional. Also, invite the reviewer to contact you privately to address their concerns.

To help you get an idea of an appropriate response, here is a sample response to a negative review:

Dear Client. We sincerely thank you for leaving your review. As much as we'd like to receive nothing but glowing reviews, we welcome all feedback. Feedback such as yours allows us to take into consideration our clients' concerns and experiences and to improve on our service. If you would like to speak with us privately and confidentially about the issues you mentioned in your review, we would definitely like to hear from you in person.

Responding To “Black Hat” Reviews

I deal with “black hat” reviews from persons who are not genuine clients of the lawyer or the law firm. These persons pose as a client to leave bad reviews. Some of these persons may be the party on the other side of the case or their friends or family. In some instances, these persons are actually hired to target a law firm's competitors to leave negative reviews. Unfortunately, there is not much you can do to stop this behavior. Sites such as Yelp and Facebook aren't very helpful in removing black hat reviews. If you can't get the review

removed, then here is a sample professional response to a black hat review that alerts other readers that the review isn't genuine.

Dear Reviewer, thank you for your review. Although we have no record of you being a former or current client of our law firm, we welcome all feedback.

Handling Negative Reviews

Don't Respond Emotionally

Many businesses (including law firms) caught in the cross-hairs of a social media outcry respond defensively to negative comments and reviews. Essentially, they respond to consumer complaints by focusing on their “side of the story.” Although a defensive approach is a natural human response, in the business world this approach comes across as unapologetic and is likely to exacerbate the problem. Before you reply in anger, out of frustration, or defensively, take a depth breath and force yourself to look at the consumer’s complaint objectively. For example, ask yourself these questions: Who is the consumer? What is their beef? Can you piece together exactly what happened? What does the consumer want? What solution can I offer to the consumer’s problem?

Respond with Empathy

Regardless of whether you feel the consumer’s complaint is unjustified or if even you feel threatened, use genuine empathy

in responding to the consumer. In other words, whether you agree with the consumer, take the time to understand their feelings and to express that understanding to them.

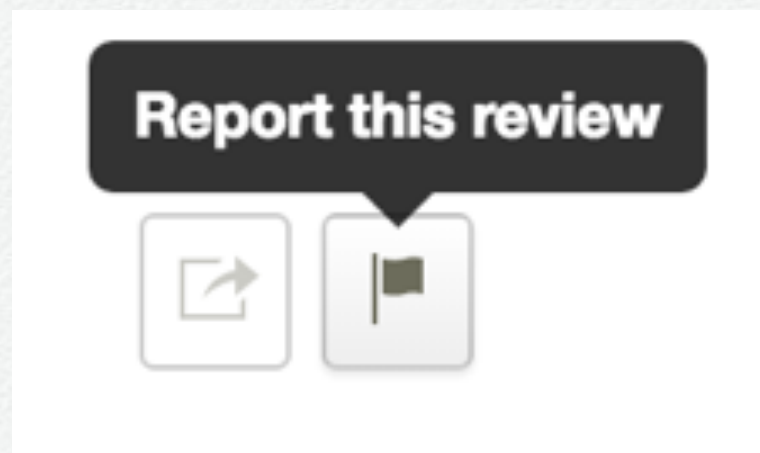
Offer a Solution

Some solutions are easy. For example, I recently left a negative review on Yelp for a local restaurant. The manager responded the next day by refunding the entire cost of the meal and inviting me back to meet the manager and enjoy another meal. Although I may not take the manager up on her offer, the refund was a nice touch.

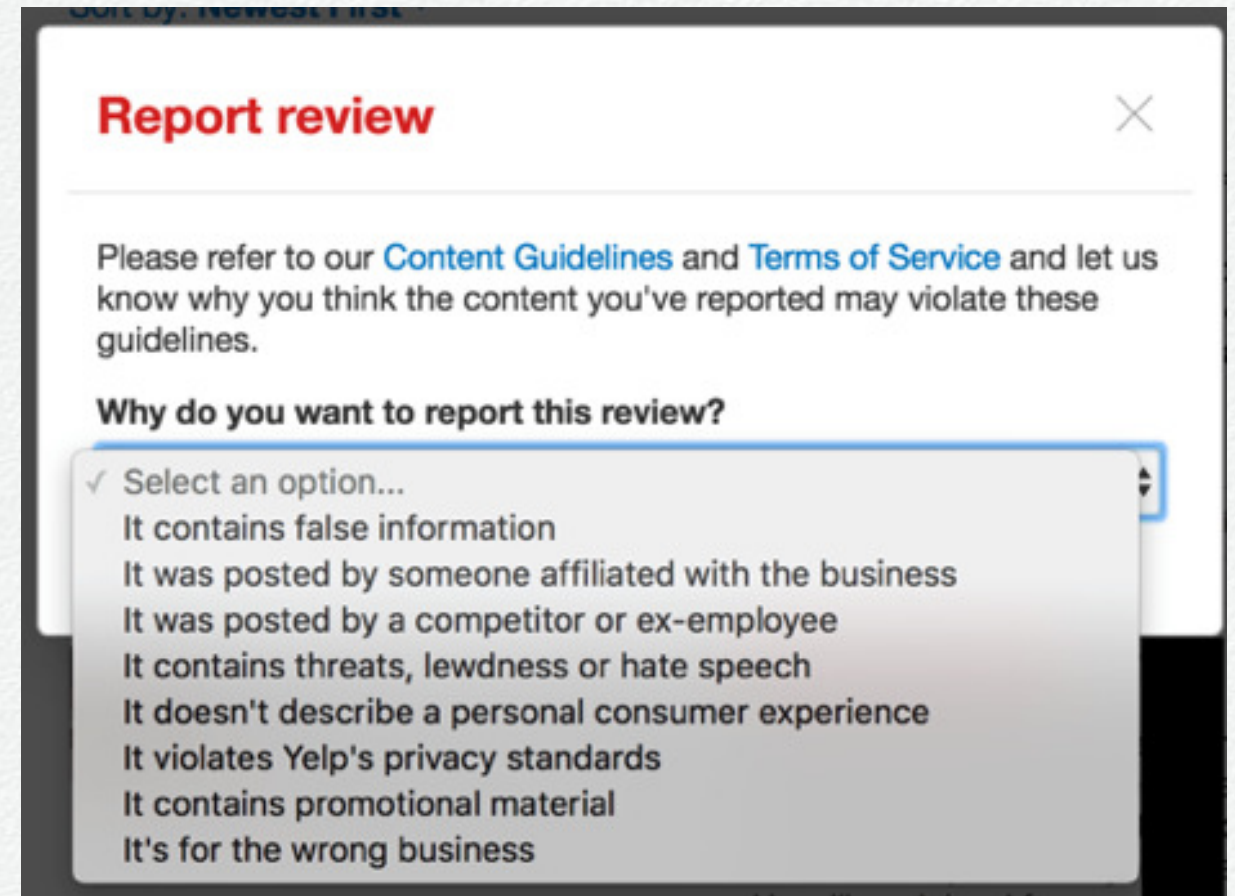
For a law firm, offering a solution can sometimes seem impossible. For example, if a client is upset with the outcome of their case, there is little that can be done. However, if the client complains about their phone calls being ignored, you can offer a solution such as sharing your cell phone number with the client to make it easier to stay in touch. Regardless, even if a solution may not appease the consumer, taking corrective action ensures that you’re giving your clients the best service possible.

How Attorneys Should Handle Negative Reviews on Yelp

Third party reviews can come from anywhere. For example, my law firm received a negative review from an opposing party. Fortunately, there are some steps you can take to remove negative reviews from third persons if the reviews violate Yelp's Guidelines. Essentially, you select the flag icon associated with the review as follows:



From there, you will be prompted to select the reason why you are reporting the review:



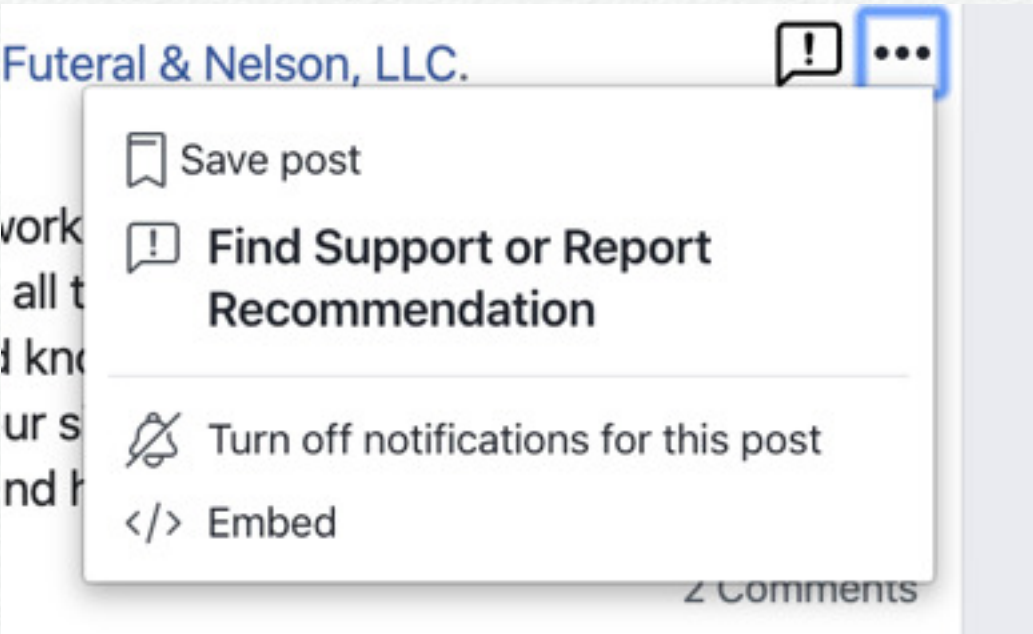
How to Handle Negative Reviews on Facebook

In addition to monitoring and responding to consumer reviews on your Facebook Page, there are some steps you can take to remove negative reviews on Facebook if the reviews violate Facebook's Community Standards. Until recently, Facebook used a 5 star rating system for reviews. Now, consumers have a choice between "recommending" or not recommending your services.

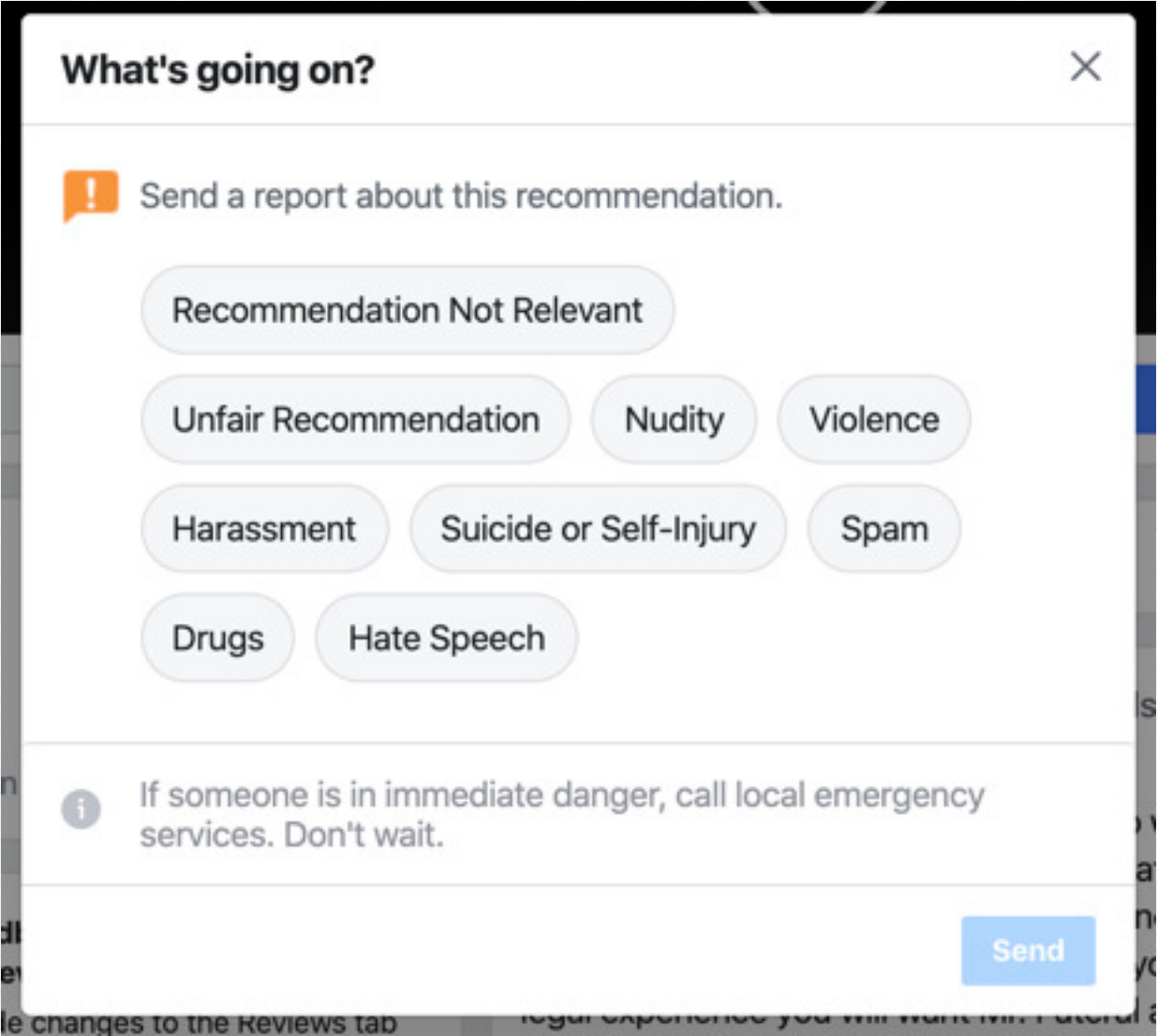
Unlike Yelp, Facebook won't remove reviews from consumers who've never had a personal experience with your law firm. In other words, anyone can trash your firm as long as it doesn't violate Facebook's standards such as threatening violence.

To make matters more complicated, you can't report a review that doesn't include commentary. In other words, if someone doesn't "recommend" your firm, but they don't elaborate with a comment, you can't report that review. However, if they leave a comment, you can report the review as follows:

Next to the review, click the ellipses and choose "Find Support or Report Recommendation."



You'll be prompted with the following screen to report the review:



In a worst-case scenario, you can take control of your Facebook Page by selecting options to stop displaying reviews. On Facebook, go to Settings > General > Reviews and select "Edit."

After choosing “Edit,” you will be presented with the option to “Disable reviews.” Although this is not my “go-to” position for dealing with negative reviews, this is a viable option when you are flooded with an overwhelming number of bad reviews.