

HOW TO GET TO THE TOP

The experience and knowledge of mature lawyers is an asset in creating high quality website content that goes to the top of search engine rankings.

The online footprint of many Australian lawyers is limited to static websites that lack a coherent content marketing strategy. Unhappily this is prevalent among the vast group that would derive the greatest benefit from online marketing – suburban law firms and mature age lawyers.

I know because I am one of them. As a result of a joint venture with a multinational service provider I had to absorb the minutiae of website content marketing, blogs and search engine optimisation. Though I have long been published online, for a lawyer in his 50s it was a significant learning curve.

Unexpectedly the biggest hurdle was the interaction with consultants who controlled the technology and the website design that would push the online product to our customers. Over two years I found myself sitting at conference tables opposite (mostly) 20-something IT consultants who knew plenty about the internet but little of the real world needs of consumers of legal information. I often left these meetings in no doubt why mature lawyers and smaller firms shy away from an optimised online presence.

It also left me profoundly suspicious of social media and website consultants, particularly when hired by lawyers unfamiliar with online protocols. Though the professional expertise of mature lawyers is at a premium, there is almost nothing written about marketing ourselves on the internet by age appropriate peers who appreciate our needs. I soon discovered my frustration was shared by fellow practitioners.

So here is the good news. The accumulated experience and knowledge of mature lawyers

is an asset in the creation of high quality website content that is optimised for the internet, commonly known as “content marketing”. This is website content designed to attract prospective clients and convert already satisfied clients into word of mouth evangelists for your services.

Word of mouth has long been the most effective marketing tool for smaller practices. On the internet, word of mouth conversations take place at light speed and so represent an unparalleled opportunity for smaller firms and mature lawyers to leverage the human capital that differentiates them from their larger competition. Content marketing is therefore a way to increase and complement the traditional word of mouth these lawyers already know and trust.

Content marketing replicates the drivers of traditional word of mouth, which are then amplified by the networking effect of the internet: enhanced client relationships; the opportunity to broadcast a reputation based on earned trust; an holistic client experience; and plain English information that guides the client through the decision-making process.

Moreover, it is clear that Google, certainly the dominant directory for prospective clients of legal services, increasingly looks to high quality website content as the primary determinant of search engine rankings. Therefore the best online strategy for smaller suburban and regional law firms is to optimise the website content that both leverages word of mouth and improves search engine rankings.

In this regard content marketing is non-negotiable. Is the content on your website optimised for search engines and clients? Is

it written in accessible plain English? Does it have a FAQ section? Is the biographical information interesting as a narrative that acknowledges it is the critical first point of contact for prospective clients? Is the content humanising? Is the information driven by your genuine interest in the reader? Is it useful to your ideal or prospective client? Is there original content, written in an authentic and credible voice that builds trust? Have you conveyed a unique selling proposition?

What about Facebook and the other social media powerhouses? Contrary to the advice of many consultants, they are a dubious foundational online strategy. Lawyers looking to initiate an online strategy – and that should be every lawyer – are better advised to develop a presence where it matters, and that means the extension of word of mouth through high quality website content. Create great reader-oriented content and you will go a long way towards your online marketing goals. After that create more, particularly targeted blog content. Once established as a content aggregator, there is room to devote resources and time to the social media heavyweights as distributors of that information, but first work out your online identity with quality content.

The message is clear – no lawyer can succeed online without a content marketing strategy. This is good news for all lawyers, but especially mature lawyers and suburban firms that can most easily give voice to their already well-honed relationship skills. That’s an online strategy right there. ●

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