

5 Website Blunders

99% of Attorneys Make
That Cost Them Clients

...and how avoiding these mistakes
can get your phone ringing.

Fact

In 2011, 58 million American consumers sought the services of an attorney.

Of that group, a full 76 percent used the internet to research their legal issues and ultimately choose a lawyer. This information is part of a 2012 study by LexisNexis, and we use it here to emphasize the importance of getting your website right.

In this report, we hope to “demystify” the process of building and maintaining an effective website. To do so, we’ll illustrate the most common mistakes we see on attorney websites and explain how to replace them with the best solid practices — practices that will help you capture the attention of the search engines, attract more visitors and dramatically increase the number of prospects and clients contacting you.

Now let's get started.



Mistake #1

Poor Content

What we mean

Visit several of your competitors' websites, and we bet you'll find them saying pretty much the same thing:

- How long they've been around
- Their clients come first
- Representation you can trust

Really? Clients don't care how long you've been around. Experience is an expectation. It doesn't make you unique. What your potential clients really want to know is that you'll make them a priority and they can trust you.

Remember that the purpose of your website is to attract, engage and entice clients to contact you — so while we're at it, do your website visitors have the skills or desire to decipher your impenetrable legalese? Probably not. And they're more than likely irritated by distracting images that get in the way of textual information, too. So get rid of the fluff and the fog, and give consumers what they're looking for — useful, easy-to-read and easy to comprehend information that addresses their real concerns.

Practices to avoid

- Rotating or distracting background images
- Speaking legalese or "talking down" to visitors
- Being impersonal
- Focusing on yourself, your firm or your achievements instead of on the needs of clients

Why they're bad practices

- Rotating images or distracting backgrounds disrupt your visitor. You want them reading your content and moving towards contacting you.
- You know the law, but your clients don't. Strive to write on a 5th grade level.
- Being impersonal is boring and lacks emotion. Inject personality, engage and attract the "ideal" client by being real.
- No one likes a lot of boasting — especially when they've got genuine concerns that aren't being addressed.

Reality check

While the visual design of your website is important, it's not nearly as important as your content. Our clients in general spend way too much time worrying about the visual appeal of their website and far too little time creating compelling content. Sure, the look of your website matters — but only if it looks bad. If it looks good, people move on to "what's in it for me."

Best practices

- Identify the reasons why clients seek your services.
- Address their problems and concerns in your content.
- Talk about how you can solve their problems.
- Make content scannable with bulleted lists and headers.
- Don't boast or brag. Positive testimonials and online reviews have a much greater impact. Demonstrate your abilities through your testimonials, reviews and compelling educational content.

In Summary

Focus on the needs of your prospects and clients. Put your energy into creating content that is all about them. Address their problems, tell them how you'll solve those problems and earn their trust.



Mistake #2

Getting Search Engine Optimization Wrong

What we mean

Search engine optimization is a lot like the law. In general it changes often, so you must constantly stay on top of it. Not only do Google, Bing and Yahoo update their algorithms often, but prospective clients also change the way they search for information.

When consumers have legal problems they turn to the web to find answers using search terms they understand. While the phrase “criminal defense attorney Columbia South Carolina” might seem perfectly logical to you, a potential client is far likelier to search for “How much time can I get for felony drug charges in South Carolina?”

This is what’s called a “natural language search.” And the search engines are getting better all the time at interpreting natural language. The more responsive they get, the more specific their results become. So if your website doesn’t contain content that educates consumers and answers their questions directly, it won’t turn up in searches — and that means you’re missing out on opportunities to gain new clients.

Practices to avoid

- Using inadequate search terms in your content
- Excluding educational content
- Adding recycled news to your website

Why they’re bad practice

- Using legal terms won’t connect you with your prospects. They don’t know your world.

- People want to be educated, not sold. Educational content shows your expertise and builds trust.
- Old, recycled news isn't unique. Google likes unique, relevant content.

Reality check

Before people decide to retain you as their attorney, they've probably done their research, evaluated several of your competitors websites and are in the vetting process. To do this they search online — and based on the quality of your search engine optimization, they'll either find you or they won't.

Best practices

- Get to know your prospects and clients. Find out what questions they ask and how they search for information online.
- Update your website whenever relevant new information becomes available.
- If you have recycled or duplicate content on your website, remove it. It's hurting you more than it's helping you.
- Install web tracking software on your website. Google Analytics is free and provides a wealth of information on how people find your website. Another piece of software we highly recommend is LuckyOrange.com. It records real-time videos of people interacting with your website. Knowing exactly how visitors use your website can be incredibly valuable.

In summary

Real people don't use generic search terms. And the search engines aren't using them anymore either. How would you search online for a watch? If you searched for "gold watch" you'd have to browse through 3 million results to find the one you want. Instead you narrow the results by typing in "Michael Kors Medium Gold Watch." The point is, your potential clients do the same thing — so narrow your focus.



Mistake #3

Ignoring Social Media

What we mean

Facebook has over a billion active users. Do you really think none of them have recently gotten a DUI, committed a crime or discovered they need a will? Don't kid yourself. Your potential clients are using social media — and if you're already linked to them through friends and business associates, they'll find you. In addition, social media sites allow you to form new connections with people at the speed of light. It's basically networking on steroids and when done properly, it yields BIG results.

Practices to avoid

- Picking the wrong social media channel
- Not having a strategy for reaching your ideal client
- Not advertising on social media
- Sharing the wrong type of content
- Being overly sociable

Why they're bad practice

- Pick the wrong social media channel and your advertising and content may fall on deaf ears.
- Taking a scattershot approach to social media makes you look desperate and unprofessional.
- Social media advertising is cheap, targeted and effective — there's no reason not to use it.
- By not sharing meaningful content you're missing a golden opportunity to educate prospective clients and become the go-to person for their legal problems.
- Personal accounts are for friendly exchanges. Leverage your business accounts to form connections and strategic partnerships.

Reality check

We can't think of a faster, easier way to connect with people than social media. Local networking events are great, but they pale in comparison to targeted social media marketing in terms of time, opportunity and the ability to follow-up easily and consistently.

Best practices

- Make sure your professional profile is accurate, up-to-date and sends the right message.
- Start small — connect with your best contacts first.
- Define your target audience, and learn what social channels they prefer. Then use each channel appropriately. For example, while humor works well on Facebook, LinkedIn is more business oriented.
- Give your website visitors the opportunity to connect with you — keep your social media badges visible and easy to access.
- Test advertising and content for highest impact measured in results, responses and shares.
- Build a personal brand that sets you apart from your colleagues by creating and sharing valuable information.
- Connect with prospects and strategic partners — you never know where that next referral will come from.

In summary

Remember the classic Dale Carnegie title, “How to Win Friends and Influence People?” That’s what social media can do for you in a nutshell. With judicious use of your social channels of choice, you’ll be connecting with people you might otherwise never encounter. You’ll get your name and your expertise out there where people can find you — and you’ll be building a solid reputation and a productive professional network.



Mistake #4

Not Building Trust

What we mean

Testimonials and reviews build confidence and trust. Consumers buy from people they know, like and trust. There's been a great deal of marketing research around this idea of social proof. The results show that consumers are strongly influenced by testimonials and online reviews. Peer reviews are trusted by 70% of surveyed consumers.

Before someone decides to retain you as their attorney, chances are they've done their research. If they're savvy online users they've read your reviews and testimonials. By excluding testimonials from your website and ignoring online reviews you're overlooking a golden opportunity to build confidence and trust.

Practices to avoid

- Not consistently asking for testimonials
- Not asking for testimonials at the right time
- Not paying attention to reviews about you or your firm

Why they're bad practice

- Testimonials build credibility and influence trust, and you simply won't get any if you don't ask for them.
- Asking for a testimonial right after your client has received a favorable outcome ensures that you get one in the best light possible.
- Reviews are social proof — essentially an online referral. People trust reviews on credible sites like AVVO.

Reality check

Let's face it, Amazon includes reviews on products and vendors for a reason. People want to know what others think before they decide to part with their hard earned money. Your prospective clients are no different. They want to feel like they're making the right decision and sometimes a few good reviews and testimonials is all it takes.

Best practices

- Create a profile on AAVO and ask clients to submit their review — ideally just after you've helped them with their legal challenge.
- Monitor Google Local Listing reviews. Respond to reviews appropriately — never argue with a negative review, and take a minute to acknowledge the positive ones.
- Proactively request and collect testimonials to add to your website.

In summary

Don't underestimate the amount of influence testimonials and reviews have on potential clients. Sure, your state bar probably has some guidelines related to displaying testimonials on your website but we've found in most cases it's nothing that can't be easily worked around with a simple disclaimer.



Mistake #5

It's Built, I'm Done

What we mean

Many lawyers think that building and publishing a website is all it takes to get their phone ringing. If it were that simple, you'd be rich by now and we'd be looking for new jobs. Think of your website like a house. What happens to your house if you don't maintain it? It falls apart over time.

Your website is no different, except that instead of falling apart, it never makes it to the top of the search engines, or it continuously drops lower and lower in search results — either way, it's not bringing you more business.

Practices to avoid

- Adding duplicate content to your website
- Ignoring website analytics
- Abandoning search engine optimization (SEO) and content publishing
- Doing nothing

Why they're bad practice

- Google and the other search engines don't reward you for duplicate content. They like fresh, relevant content.
- What isn't measured isn't improved.
- The way your prospects search is always changing and your website must account for this.
- There's a cost to doing nothing. If you're lucky you'll maintain status quo. Chances are, though, things will get worse.

Reality check

No one said online marketing was easy. It takes time, tenacity and a clear understanding of what to do and what not to do.

Best practices

- Develop a content marketing calendar and live by it.
- Create fresh, high quality, relevant content and publish often. If you can't produce regular high-quality content yourself, get some help.
- Install web analytics software today — then act on the information you get.
- Ask your clients how they found you and what search terms they used.
- Periodically review your website analytics to discover new keywords, the most popular pages on your site and which pages get the least attention from visitors. And make improvements accordingly.

In summary

A website should be viewed as a living entity that changes, grows and improves over time. Update your website with compelling, relevant and fresh content – as often as possible. Be aggressive. You are competing for the top spot on Google. Assuming that it will be easy is not realistic.

A Final Word

Quite frankly, none of this is rocket science. But it IS hard work — work that, like some legal cases, goes on forever. Of course, there's a big payoff. Your website can provide a huge boost to your law practice if it's properly managed and maintained.

About the Owner

Trent Smith

As founder and CEO of Jango Studios, Trent Smith has seen web marketing evolve in a way that makes it more difficult than ever to compete online.

While other businesses struggle in not knowing what to do, Trent has developed a systematic approach to online marketing that's measurable and achieves results.

To arrange a free analysis of your website, please email or call me:



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