



Building the Brand on Broadband



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Introduction

What does brand building on broadband mean? Well if you are a tech company you know (more or less). But what does it mean for a law firm? Not much, because most firms are not doing it. The legal industry is still woefully behind the curve with respect to the changing business landscape. How many firms leverage pay per click (PPC)? A few do, but not many. Still fewer understand search engine optimization (SEO) and the ability to generate business via organic traffic. Most don't feel a need to, but that will change.

If you look at the websites of top firms there is little to differentiate them. They all look as if same person designed them. Most attorneys have an innate aversion to marketing. It is a concept that appears foreign to their sensibilities. Why is that? There are many reasons for this, but an important one is that there is very little (if any) business training provided at most law schools. For established practices the “culture of the billable hour” gets in the way. There is simply no time to innovate because everyone is too busy billing.

As a consequence, there remains a significant opportunity to leverage new media in ways that could lead to a sustainable competitive advantage. The legal industry has always been a laggard (or so the conventional wisdom goes) with respect to technology adaptation. That may now be an overbroad generalization but one that still resonates, especially vis-à-vis technology adaptation with respect to marketing (i.e. as opposed to the “back office”).

The objective of this offering is to quickly and effectively establish the strategy and action plan that will drive deliverables required to build your firm’s brand on broadband. In short, it focuses on showing our clients how to publish, promote and prevail.

Approach & Methodology

Contrary to the approach taken by most firms, building an online presence is not something that you assign to your IT department and/or contract out for (at least not at the onset). This presence says everything to potential clients about who you are, what you do, and your value proposition. It will be more strategic to some firms depending on the type of law practiced. Where it is strategic, the online presence will play an important role in differentiating the firm from direct competitors, and thus contributing significantly to a sustainable competitive advantage.

Therefore, the first question to be answered is how strategic is your online presence to the future of your firm? The answer to this question drives both the amount of time and the amount of money that you should invest. Increasingly, clients are finding representation via the Internet. Unless you are so well entrenched that this kind of exposure is superfluous (very few firms satisfy this requirement) then your online presence requires the same level of attention (perhaps more) as any other strategic initiative.

Our approach to this engagement is to create the framework, including the project plan, which will drive the initiative. Once this framework is in place then (and *mostly* only then) is it appropriate to discuss details related to a technical implementation.

Build a Presence

The old adage that “content is king” applies to your online presence. It is not enough, and probably does more harm than good, to have a presence that consists of nothing more than a canned sales pitch. You need content that tells a story that informs; which demonstrates the value that your firm brings to the marketplace in general, and more specifically, to a particular client’s legal issue. You need content that educates and builds trust.

To accomplish all of the above, you need content that *engages* the prospective client’s interest and/or reinforces the client’s decision for having selected your firm in the first place. It is difficult to delegate this responsibility to a third party, and if you do, you’re unlikely to be happy with the initial results. The lack of attention paid to a firm’s online presence is the primary reason that there is very little differentiation in law firm websites—and where there is, it is obvious that the firm’s senior management was directly involved (usually in boutique firms).

The development of quality content is time consuming. You must first develop the message and then consider the bewildering number of options for delivering it, including: text, video, blogs, podcasts and others. Clearly, the keyboard pounding can be delegated, but the thinking behind the content requires input from partners and/or staff directly involved in selling the firm's services. As discussed below, the better the content the more traffic driven to the site is likely to convert from a curious surfers to a paying clients.

This engagement will help ensure that your firm develops its content in a manner consistent with its strategic objectives. This is accomplished via collaboration with key personnel and through concrete examples of where it is being done effectively.

Drive Traffic

The days when you could game the search engines into driving traffic to your site are mostly over. Sure there are still some "black hat" operators but Google (increasingly the only game in town) has become very sophisticated in its ability to detect and punish them. There are only two legitimate alternatives for driving traffic. The interaction between the two is where the innovation is taking place.

The first and most straightforward alternative is to leverage Google via its AdWords program (i.e. paid advertising based on keywords). It is straightforward only in the sense that it is easy to get started. Google's dominance of the search space eliminates the need to consider either: (1) other search engines (at least initially); or (2) the myriad of directories that want to take your money in return for questionable value.

AdWords: Pay-Per-Click (PPC)

AdWords is Google's PPC flagship offering. Many attorneys are now starting to put a "toe in the PPC water" while others have been quietly (and successfully) leveraging it for quite some time. However, its effectiveness is still a rather well kept secret within the legal industry. Using AdWords, attorney/advertisers specify the keywords (e.g. "personal injury attorney" or "patent attorney" or "divorce attorney") that will trigger their ads and also specify the maximum amount that they are willing to pay per click. The attorney only pays if the ad is clicked.

Google refers to AdWords as return on investment (ROI) driven marketing. Why? Because unlike "spend and hope" marketing, AdWords provides the attorney with a set of tools (see analyze results below) that

allow the calculation of ROI with a level of rigor previously unavailable. Although there is certainly a learning curve to its effective use, Google is continuing to make the process more and more “user friendly” and the tools it provides are free to its advertising clients. The result is that with some training, this advertising vehicle is well within the reach of talented firm support staff, once the initial campaign strategies have been developed.

This engagement explores the opportunity of using AdWords as a way to drive traffic to your firm’s website. Through a set of facilitated sessions, and Internet research on competitive usage, a set of keywords is developed to help jumpstart the initial campaigns.

Organic Search

Organic search refers to driving traffic to your site by ranking high enough in Google’s “page rank” algorithm that when a user types a relevant search query (e.g. “patent attorney”) your site is high on the list of search results. This is the opposite of PPC in that it is not paid advertising in the sense that you do not pay Google directly. But that does not imply that there is not a cost associated with “ranking high.”

First and foremost you must understand the fundamentals of how PageRank works. It values links from sites that link to your site (a kind of attribution authority) and it values relevance (i.e. to the search query) in your content. As mentioned above, Google has gotten quite sophisticated at not being gamed. For example, metatags are now virtually ignored by the algorithm. For content to be relevant it must be legitimate and current.

Essentially the way to rank high is to provide meaningful content and enhance your firm’s digital footprint on the Internet. A “practice blog” is an excellent way to maintain a site current with content that is relevant to what you do. This is an obvious, but often not well understood, “side effect” of blogging. When you provide quality information related to a practice area you not only inform your clients (and potential clients) but you also feed Google’s search engine with what it needs to improve your ranking.

Blogging addresses relevance and timeliness but how do you increase your firm’s digital footprint (i.e. increase the number of inbound links to your site)? The most effective way to do this to become engaged in the wider conversation regarding your practice area that transpires daily on the Internet. When you comment on other relevant sites you leave a URL footprint. When you join a professional networking site

and write a profile you leave a URL footprint. In short, there are almost an unlimited number of creative and professional ways to increase your digital footprint. Mostly what it takes is time, energy, and a willingness to engage—coupled with a solid understanding of Google search.

This engagement helps explore ways in which your firm can leverage organic search results in order to drive additional traffic to your site. Over time, organic search may be the most cost effective manner to drive traffic and increase conversion rates.

So What About the Destination?

It should go without saying that it makes very little sense to use PPC and organic search strategies if the destination (i.e. your website) is not compelling enough to drive *conversions*. The name of the game is the acquisition of new clients. There must be something of value on your website that converts them from the curious to the paying (i.e. for most firms this means a signed retainer agreement and a check that has cleared). This is why you invest in quality content. This is why your content must be much more than a canned sales pitch—consumers are becoming quite sophisticated vis-à-vis their online expectations.

This engagement puts an emphasis on the destination because at the end of the day it is the destination that is the differentiator.

Analyze Results

You can't manage what you don't measure—at least not in a competent and professional manner. Whether you are driving traffic to your site via PPC or organic search, you need a way to track your investment. You also need to understand your business objectives. These will likely change over time, based on what you learn from your campaigns, but you need a “good sense” of what these objectives are upfront, otherwise you are back to “spend and hope.” You not only need to understand what a potential client does post clicking on your ad; you also need to track user behavior no matter what mechanism they used to arrive at your site. This is the brave new world of web analytics—the tools and processes you use to determine your ROI.

Despite a bewildering array of software now available to help your track results, there are a few proven and inexpensive packages that get the job done. Moreover, Google now offers free equivalents as well. Tracking

results is not a question of spending significant capital on high-end software, but rather (like most things on the web) a question of literacy. The best way to learn is to get started. There is no one size fits all solution. Your marketing campaigns are likely to be unique to your firm's value proposition. The way you ultimately track will be unique as well—based on your campaigns and your business objectives.

The engagement explores widely available tracking strategies (i.e. tools/processes) as a way to “jumpstart” your analytics program.

Summary

To summarize, this engagement facilitates the creation of a strategy and action plan that will allow your firm to build its brand using broadband. It provides a “time boxed” approach for creating a winning strategy in a cost effective manner. The focus is on critical success factors that drive revenue and not on technology—although the use of enabling technologies is clearly implicated.

This engagement is priced at \$225.00 per hour. Strategic stewardship of project deliverables is performed on an as needed basis over the course of the project. Once as strategy and a plan is in place other technical resources must be identified. LawTechTV makes recommendations with respect to trusted and proven resources. However, the selection of the technical talent required to implement is strictly a client choice, as is the purchase of any enabling technologies. Our focus is on strategy, planning and stewardship.