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Search Engine Optimization Tips

WEBSITE MARKETING

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No-cost search engine optimization tips for your website

Before you pay a consultant to help increase your website's rank in search engine results, implement these tips.

To help potential clients find you, a well-written website is a key part of any marketing strategy to aid you in this goal. Even if a majority of potential clients hear about you through a friend or family member, they will likely “check up” on you before they make the first phone call to your office. In this world of “trust, but verify” it is important that you have a good website presence on the internet. We no longer blindly trust a referral from others. As we investigate a product, service, or company that we hear about, it is the verification piece of our research for a lawyer that will be within your control. And, potential clients are not the only visitor you will receive. Other attorneys, even those who intend on referring clients to you, will try to find you online so they can learn more about you. If there

Manage every aspect of your website presence; it is the only piece of internet real estate you own and control in its entirety. Unlike a Facebook page, which contains styling and colors not relevant to your firm, a website is the strongest expression of who you are and what you do. You control every color, photo, word, and design element. Use this to your advantage! A good website can help you, and a poorly created website can hurt you.

The tips below should be a good starting point to help you optimize your website for search engines so that potential clients can find you online. And, it so happens that a website optimized for search engines contains relevant text, good photos, proper formatting such as headings, and is well-organized. Therefore, by optimizing your website for search engines you will end up with a better website for visitors to read and learn more about you!

Give each page a relevant HTML title

The title of the webpage appears in the top bar of the browser and is also indexed, or read and stored, by search engines such as Google and Bing. If you have administrative access to the website and you are able to edit the title of each page, you should provide a good title for each page. An example of a short or poorly written title may be “Smith Law” or “Smith Law – Homepage.” A better title may be “Smith Law – Personal Injury Lawyers in Austin, Texas – (555) 999-1000.” Another good example is “Smith Law – Personal Injury Depositions and How they are used”, if the page in question is meant to explain the use of depositions. In other words, a good title contains more than your law firm name or the page’s purpose. It should contain a tagline, phone number, your location, or description of the areas of law you practice in. Search engines often already know your location but a visitor to your website may still come across your site from outside of your area and it is a nice gesture to quickly inform them of where you operate.



Folders and subfolders are important

The “folder” or directory where subpages are placed is also important. An example of what this means is the fictitious Smith Law of Texas may have a domain name “www.smith.com” and they practice personal injury and criminal defense. The pages of website content dedicated to personal injury should be in a separate folder than the pages dedicated to criminal defense. This folder structure will appear in the address location of the pages of the site, sometimes referred to as a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) or “link”. Here is an example: <http://www.smith.com/personal-injury/why-depositions-taken-car-accident.html>.

If you are a Wordpress user and you want to edit the address of a page on your site, including the folders and subfolders for pages, click **Pages** in the **Administrative** access section of your site. Select or highlight the page to edit and click **Edit**.

Provide good page descriptions

You should also provide metadata content to describe the content or purpose of each page. This metadata will be indexed by search engines, which primarily look for the **Description** meta-tag (if you do not provide your own summary and description, the search engine will create one of its own). As described above, if you are a Wordpress user, click **Pages** in the **Administrative** access section of your site. Select or highlight the page to edit and click **Edit**. As you edit each page there may be a section where you can provide a summary of the content of the page. There is a limit to the amount of text held in the “description” metadata that will be indexed by search engines. Some examples of meta-tag “descriptions” metadata area:

Meta Tags

Metadata is defined as data about data. It is additional data, not visible to visitors of your site, that describes each page and what it may contain.

- A personal injury firm serving Jones, Smith, and Harold counties north of the capitol. If you've been in an accident at work or in your vehicle call us. (555) 999-1000.
- We serve parents, fathers, and mothers who need an estate plan. Powers of Attorney, Wills, Trusts, and more. Leave a legacy. (555) 999-1000.

Wordpress users: install the Yoast plugin

If your site is run on Wordpress, which is a content management solution to help companies and people manage the text, photos, and design of their websites, you should install a tool such as the Yoast SEO plugin. This plugin, and others like it, will aid you with the two tips described above – title, description, and other search-engine specific content of the pages of your site.

SEO plugins such as Yoast SEO are commonly used tools to help companies with search-engine optimization

To install a Wordpress Plugin, log-in to the administrative access of your Wordpress installation. Go to **Plugins**, a menu item on the left-hand side of the screen and click on **Add new** button at the top of the page. You will then be able to search for plugins using the search form at the top of the new page that appears. To find the Yoast SEO plugin you may type-in “Yoast”, and then click on **Search Plugins**. When it appears in the list of search results click on the link that says **Install Now**.

Note

There are many plugins a Wordpress user can install to help them manage their website, and Yoast SEO is one dedicated to search engine optimization. It is popular and effective which is why I recommend it.



What is a search engine index?

A search engine will index websites on the internet and by indexing content, it can categorize the different pieces of information on each webpage before it is included in its database. The information collected will be stored and later used by the search engine to provide results when users search for phrases or words. An example of indexing and how it is used is as follows. The Smith Law firm published a webpage on its site that describes depositions and how they are used. A search engine will index that page, which means it will collect the title of the page, the content headings, text, and images within the page. If the page contained a paragraph that described how a deposition is recorded and later turned into a text transcript, the search engine would store in its database that text and therefore the understanding that Smith Law has content on its site for someone interested in learning more about depositions. Later on,

if a user of the search engine attempts to search for “deposition recording” or “deposition transcript” the search engine will find in its database the recently indexed information found on Smith Law’s site, and will display to the user within the results of their search a link to that specific page about depositions.

Get listed on Google Maps

Online exercise
Claim your “Google My Business” account or create a Google+ account to do the same.

Localized search engine results are a common and important way for search engines to cater to their users, and, for businesses to be found by potential clients. In the legal profession that local marketing strategy is important because lawyers operate within specific states and areas. Search engines will learn of your location by indexing content of your site and looking for addresses found within the text of the site, phone numbers (and therefore area codes), or descriptions of the state and counties you operate in. However, to make the search engine’s job that much easier, you should find your law firm’s listing within Google maps and “claim” your business. If you already have a Google+ account for your company, you should associate that listing with your Google+ account.

- <https://www.google.com/business/> will lead you to the **Google My Business** features for business owners.

Ask for positive reviews using your Google account

Once you create your Google+ account, or claim your business, you can begin to improve your listing with photos, phone numbers, operating hours, links, and more. Google will also collect customer reviews, rated between 1 and 5 stars, and list them in search results, Google Maps results, and your “business” profile. It is highly likely that business with one or positive reviews will rank higher in search results. And, to rank higher means your law firm’s website is shown before other sites, even those of your colleagues.

Ask friends, family members, and if confidentiality is waived, current or former clients to provide positive reviews for you through Google.

Write about rarely discussed topics of law

You should write and publish content in your website that is relevant to the areas of law you practice. Moreover, that content should discuss the most basic and important subjects. For example, if it is estate planning, write text about Wills versus Trusts, or what is a Power of attorney.

The more ways to be found..

The more your website will be exposed to a wider audience and differentiated from your fellow lawyers in the area.

1. Try to think of rare, unique, or specialized topics that attorneys rarely write about online.

2. Write about that topic and publish it on your website as part of a page, or a post. A page is often a more permanent and less time-sensitive set of content, such as a page about “Personal Injury” in general. A post is usually a blog post that is about a more specific topic, such as spinal fractures and how to prove their existence in court, or a timely topic regarding a new law, case, or viral news item.

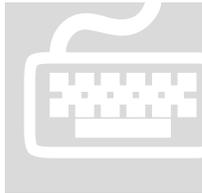
Pages and Posts are the ways you will publish content

A key part of how you will optimize your site for search engines is through the publication of good content, as often as you can, that is well-formatted with headings and subheadings. To go the extra mile, add a photo to each page or post!

Write good, relevant content!

Content is king. Without text to index the search engine has no “data” to collect about your site. It will store little to nothing in its database and therefore be unable to show your site in results for users of that search engine.

The above reasoning is why you must write good content. You should write a fair amount, fairly often, and with an eye towards readability. Here are some tips on how to write “good” content.



1. Write at least **200** to **300** words per page or post.
2. **Show what you know!** Don't just tell people you practice “personal injury” and stop there. Instead, describe the sub-elements of personal injury, the types of injuries that can occur, and how you meet with clients.
3. **Do not make your law firm website all about you.** Write about the law, the area of law, cases, or the types of clients you cater to. (For example, if you work in agricultural law, write about how farmers can transfer water rights, cases relevant to water law in your state, and how corn crops need water and what farmers can do to comply with irrigation and water diversion requirements of their state).
4. **Use headings and subheadings.** Separate the text into paragraphs, and before each paragraph provide a heading that describes what the paragraph is about. Search engines will not only index these headings, but visitors to your site will scan for these headings thereby helping them find the information that matters to them.

5. **Overall, treat the creation of website content like a law school exam essay.** Start with the fundamentals and go from there. Show the visitor you know the law, don't just tell them you graduated from a law school or that you help people like them. Show them you are proficient by explaining trials, lawsuits, contracts, agreements, mediation, and more. Show them you understand them and their business but explaining how law affects their industry.

Link to other website or webpages in your content

The internet is a network, a connection of text to other relevant text. This is the "hypertext" of <http://> that begins any website address (<http> stands for hypertext transfer protocol). Not only should you link to other pages within your own website, but you should provide links to other websites or webpages that are maintained by other organizations.

A good way to achieve this goal is to link to state laws or summaries of cases. You may also link to the state bar pages relevant to the content of a particular page. For example, if you are creating a page which describes land use regulations for gas stations, provide a link within the text of the site to environmental quality laws, the environmental and land use sections of your state bar, or cases related to gas stations and their zoning regulations in your state.

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