

Attorneys Online

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Advertising is a relatively recent development in the legal profession, and not all law firms engage in it today. Nonetheless, it is advisable for every law firm to take note of the important resource the internet has become to consumers seeking products and services. Computers are a household standard, and the internet provides information on every profession, in formats from simple 'yellow page' listings to proprietary web pages with audio and video presentations. Even among lawyers and firms that chose not to advertise, the importance of the internet as a consumer resource should not be overlooked.

There is a large assortment of online listing vehicles for attorneys. A lawyer seeking to be included in commercial online attorney listings could pay to have his or her name inserted in such sites as findlaw.com, lawinfo.com, lawyers.com, or the many 'yellow pages' services now online. There are at least four national listing services for personal injury attorneys, and others for family law, criminal law and so forth. Association membership is a vehicle for specialty listings: the Consumer Attorneys Association, the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys, The Council of Parent Attorneys, etc.

Then there are the localized ecommerce service listings for regions that are just as aggressive in seeking exposure on the search engines. In short, an attorney could make a significant investment in listing services alone. However, a simple listing is a hit-and-miss proposition: there is nothing in a mere listing that invites interest from the shopper. A personalized web site for an attorney or a law firm is the highest and best use of the internet.

A law firm with its own hosted website can accomplish a number of things. Most people who are conducting a random search for an attorney are probably somewhat frightened, not certain of the law regarding their problem, and concerned about cost. Moreover, there exists today a widespread skepticism about attorneys, especially among the uninitiated. A hosted website can ease some of those uncertainties, and thus invite contact from the potential client.

The website can describe the firm's areas of legal focus. It can act as an educational tool, explaining the basics of selected areas of law and suggesting some initial steps for the potential client. Eventually the client will end up in a lawyer's office somewhere, so providing some initial online education will give the law firm a benign and positive first impression.

A hosted website can provide an email template for an initial inquiry or invite a telephone call, 'no strings attached'. The website can suggest a few online sources that provide detailed explanations of various legal specialties. Finally, the law firm's web site can address the issue of payment and explain any options that might be available in that area.

As with other forms of media, defense and personal injury attorneys are the most likely to be found using the web as an advertising service. Most law firms with other sorts of specialties that use hosted websites tend to be a little more subtle, stressing the firm's longevity or stability, its successes and perhaps providing biographies of the firm's principal members.

A hosted web site can be an effective introductory tool for an attorney or a law firm. It can provide an initial level of comfort with the firm before any personal inquiries need be made. It can establish the firm's credentials in its chosen areas of legal specialization and it can make the process of initial contact a comfortable one by explaining how and when fee structures are applied.

Connecting a potential client with a hosted web site can, in part, be a function of the site through the use of keyword optimization. But it is probably more practical to assume that the initial reference will come from some other, more common source such as a former client or the local bar association. At that point, the hosted attorney's website becomes an effective outreach tool, minimizing the intimidating effect of a simple telephone number and a downtown address. Madison Lockwood is a customer relations associate for ApolloHosting.com. She brings years of experience as a small business consultant to helping prospective clients understand the ways in which a website may benefit them both personally and professionally. Apollo Hosting provides website hosting, ecommerce hosting, vps hosting, and web design services to a wide range of customers. Established in 1999, Apollo prides itself on the highest levels of customer support.