

## **eMarketing: The Web Site**

Last time, we had a brief look at how email can be used as a marketing tool, both for contacting potential clients and for keeping in touch with existing ones. While your current clients will probably pick up the phone and talk to you if anything in your email caught their interest, for people who have no specific relationship with your firm the next port of call is likely to be your web site. In this article, we will look at how the web site can be designed to help move these people along the path to becoming a client. We will also take a look at how it should form part of your communications with current clients, and finally at what to do about the casual browser who has stumbled upon it.

Of course, there are other users of the web site. Competitors will look at it to find out additional information. Suppliers will use it to gain information that they hope will help them make a sale. In larger firms, a prime function of the web site is in attracting trainees and making the firm appear to be the best place to start a career after university. It is also worth bearing in mind that a large group of users for the web site will be your own staff, and as such it can help set the culture of the organisation and can have an effect on moral.

The first thing to do therefore is work out who your target audience is, and which of these areas you want to invest more time and effort into. As we are looking at marketing, we will concentrate on those parts of the web site aimed at possible or actual clients.

### **Content**

A typical law firm web site will contain the sections about the partners, the firm overall, and they types of work practised by the firm. There will also be information about upcoming events such as seminars, and usually some form of news or bulletin on legal issues. Finally, most firms provide a small body of larger documents available for download, often including PDF versions of the printed marketing literature, longer legal articles only available online and case studies.

This set of information covers almost everything a professional services firm needs to provide for free. For some firms, a more commercial part of the site may provide access to legal information resources for a fee, where the firm resells access to an online service such as that from Butterworths. Other firms may provide online applications or data processing for very specific legal areas. Both of these approaches are fairly specialist and as such are suited to a very small number of firms.

### **What do you want?**

Most people coming to a law firm site will be looking for some specific information, and if they are a potential client they will usually have a problem they are looking to solve. It is important therefore that people can easily get to detailed information. Often this will be on specific areas

of the law, although it may be information about a specific partner who they have heard of, or they may be trying to find a specific publication. Importantly, on that first visit it needs to be as easy as possible for them to get to all these areas, and then later look at the more general information about the firm.

It is even better if you know something about the person looking at your site in advance. There is more on getting them to tell you in the next section, but by seeing where they came from and where they started in your site it is possible to provide a more customised view.

There are four main ways that people will get to your site: directly, by typing in the web address; through a search engine; using a link from another site or following a link from an emailed newsletter.

By using unique links in email mailings, you can almost identify the person using your site (but be careful – they may have forwarded the email on to someone else). From this, you will know the topic they are interested in and the type of organisation they are from. Using this, the web site can be configured to display more relevant information; for example someone responding to an employment newsletter may be taken straight to the employment section of the site instead of the home page, or news on the home page may be set to be employment news.

If someone enters your site by following a link from another site, you again know a little bit about what they want. While you have no control over who links to you, there will be a number of referring sites that are important or even that you have paid to be on that you can identify. If you have an entry in a directory of private finance specialists for example, then you can again present someone following a link from that site directly with relevant information.

With search engines, it is harder to know what the person was interested in. However in many cases the search engine will be sending them to a specific page in your site, or possibly even a document. In these cases, you may decide you want to redirect them to a more general section, not least to ensure that they have all the navigation you would like to visit other parts of your site afterwards. It is advisable to make sure that the page or document that they found in the search engine is obviously accessible directly from wherever you direct them to; sending all search engine users to the home page is unlikely to encourage them.

### **The more we know the more you get**

Once you have someone browsing your site, from a marketing point of view the most valuable thing that can happen is that you get enough contact information to be able to follow up on their interest in a proactive fashion.

Ultimately, this needs them to register, and as people are not keen on this most firms are wary of requiring registration for any parts of their site. The key point is to make the process as simple as possible, and provide a reward for doing so.

The simplest registration process is to just ask for an email address. Two excellent places where this can be done are for downloading documents, where rather than providing a direct link to the document you can ask for an address to email it to, and in the news area where you can provide an option for someone to receive new articles on one or more topics by email. In both cases, in return for providing an email address the person gets more information more simply.

A slightly more detailed registration would involve asking for a password as well as an email address, in order to allow someone to log on to the web site again in the future. It is acceptable at this stage to ask for a name as well, and there is no harm in having one or two other optional boxes they can fill in such as organisation.

As this requires slightly more effort, the reward needs to be slightly higher. One area where this level of registration is important is in providing access to contact details. General firmwide phone numbers and email addresses, and for larger firms departmental contacts, should always be provided to everyone without registering, but most firms like to provide more access directly to partners. Direct dial numbers and email addresses for partners can easily be limited to logged on users. Not only does this have the advantage of allowing you to log who has accessed this information, but it limits unwanted spam by preventing the addresses being gathered automatically by computer.

Another reward that can be provided to registered users is greater access to news. Perhaps longer versions or additional information of legal articles can be made available that are not otherwise. You may also wish to provide greater control over subscribing to news delivered by email to people who have logged on.

Finally, there are existing clients. At this point the web site blurs into becoming an extranet, but there is still value in taking advantage of customising the public web site for these users. Registration is in fact simpler, as it can be done by the firm rather than having to be done by the user, but this model can be extended to give them an online ability to amend their personal and organisational contact details, possibly saving time and effort for the client partner and the accounts department. The concept of providing contact details to logged on users can be extended to include mobile numbers for partners or contact details for associates. Again, the content of news subscriptions and online access to news can be increased to provide additional value.

## **Summary**

Most law firms have adequate web sites that provide a broad range of background information and topical news, but in almost every case everyone sees the same thing. By making the effort to use the little information you have to adjust the site to the viewer, you can make huge improvements to how interesting they find it and how likely they are to take further action. With a site designed to reward users for telling you more about themselves, the web

site ceases to be inert brochure and becomes and two way medium that allows firms to actively attract new clients.

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