

## TIME TO RE-DESIGN YOUR FIRM'S WEBSITE

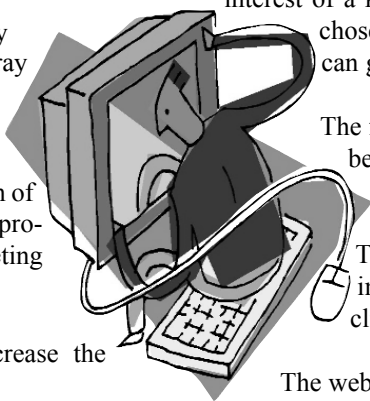
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Your firm's website was launched a couple of years ago.... maybe five years ago. So when should you think about a re-design of the site? A few things to check are whether the site is still working for you or if it was ever working for you.

### What You Should Consider

Some things to consider when contemplating whether you should undertake an overhaul of your website are:

- ◆ The age of the site. When compared to other law firms' or your competitors' websites, see how it looks visually and functionally and whether it is "old" in comparison.
- ◆ Your site should be updated constantly. If the information is old, stale and neglected, it may be begging for fresh content and/or a fresh look.
- ◆ The website, through its content and visually through the graphics, should accurately portray who the firm is and its target markets and clients.
- ◆ Websites should be maintained as a reflection of your firm's branding and identity as well as provide continuity with your firm's other marketing and promotional pieces.
- ◆ New functionality or technology may increase the value of and return on the site.
- ◆ Your site should be "professional looking" by presenting the best image of the firm and positively affecting viewers' first impressions.
- ◆ Your website should not be boring and uninteresting visually.
- ◆ Your site should not lack certain functionality. It should contain all of the features that you desire.
- ◆ A website should be easy to navigate. Users should not find it difficult to find the information that they need.
- ◆ Determine if the site "fits" your target markets and site users. It should not just conform to the wishes of the members of the firm.



- ◆ Finally, the site should impart valuable and useful information to the users that would help them in their business and/or life.

### Changing Times

In the years since first or second generation websites were launched, times have changed, technology has changed, and the focus of the website has also changed.

There was the day in the not too distant past where the advancement and availability of tables and frames greatly added visually and functionally to a website, although these advancements are taken for granted today. Other technological advancements over the recent past have made things possible that were not previously. Today, a site can have many interactive features. Flash technology, or movement within the site, can add visual interest of a kind that was not previously known. Other well-chosen and subtle technological "bells and whistles" can greatly add interest and function to a site.

The focus of the website itself has changed. Instead of being "firm centered," websites have become more "client centered." Today, new websites talk more than just about the firm itself and its attributes. They focus on the client, their interests, and the industries they are in. They have become more client service oriented.

The web affords the ability to help position the firm in the marketplace. There is a trend toward using the website to build more brand recognition and reinforce the firm's branding efforts. There is a conscious decision to apply consistent brand identity, logos, slogans, messages and visual designs in the website in addition to all the firm's other marketing and communication materials.

### Added Features and Functionality

Consider adding some of the following to your Internet presence:

- ◆ Show the firm's industry expertise. List the industries the firm serves. List the businesses represented by the firm. Present case studies of how the firm has helped clients from various industries. Remember, clients identify with

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being a member of an industry, not necessarily as needing "commercial litigation" representation.

- ◆ Create separate practice area or niche sites utilizing separate domain names where you can brand different parts of the firm's practice. These more practice area specific niche sites are more narrowly focused, provide more in-depth information about certain practice areas, and also draw more traffic to the firm's main site.
- ◆ Utilize streaming audio or video to tell the firm's success stories.
- ◆ Enhance client service through the creation of client extranets, or private areas where firms can share documents and other information with clients.
- ◆ Create a separate recruitment site where you can tell prospective candidates all about your summer program, career opportunities, practice areas, benefits, work life as well as post job openings.
- ◆ Create and use a unique tag line that separates your firm from the rest.
- ◆ Add Flash technology or other interactive functionality to make the site more visually appealing or add function.
- ◆ Add a current news feed or other integrated content to the site.
- ◆ Invite your users to sign-up on the site to get an e-newsletter.
- ◆ Post client alerts and topical newsletters in PDF format so the viewer can download them easily or view them online.

### A Tool for Your Firm

Your firm's website can be used as a tool to attract new clients, provide information to existing clients, as a relationship building device, and as a public relations and communications vehicle.

Importantly, you must identify who the firm is, what target markets the firm wishes to market to, and what message the firm wants to impart to its target audiences through the website.

Consider your current website in light of these factors, and see that it measures up to being the best website it could be with your firm needs in mind. Does your site appear up-to-date, professional looking containing useful and helpful information that your audience can identify with, or is the site dated and old or unprofessional looking? Does the site allow you to keep up with or stay ahead of your competition, or has the competition long

surpassed you? Does your site attractively create a visual identity and brand your firm? Is your website consistent with the firm's other marketing materials? What kind of impression of the firm does the site leave with your viewers?

Addressing the issues presented will hopefully help you answer the question of whether your current website reflects your firm's image in its best light, or whether it is time for a re-design.

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