

By Carole Levitt

## Keeping Your Firm's Online Content Up-to-Date

### Current content

### on a law firm's

### Web page draws

### visitors who may

### become clients

Once a firm has launched its Web site, the next challenge is to keep the site's content updated. Clients, potential clients, and other attorneys need a reason to return to the site on a regular basis. Unfortunately, many attorneys view their site as little more than an extension of their firm's print brochure, and as a result their sites include the same biographies, practice area descriptions, and list of clients and verdicts as the brochure. A Web site, however, can and should be a more dynamic creation.

Keeping a site fresh can take more effort than a busy attorney can give. Attorneys Karen Sugi-hara and Larry Tjan soon learned this lesson after launching their site. As a result, they developed Next Client (found at [www.nextclient.com](http://www.nextclient.com)), which provides fresh content for the Web sites of attorneys. Their customers choose the design and title of a customizable, private-label newsletter that contains articles written by legal scholars and attorneys (without bylines). The newsletter appears on the cus-

tomers' site. For \$59 per month (and a one-time set-up fee of \$150 that is waived for annual subscribers) attorneys select from a list of 13 practice areas and then receive a link each week to automatically update their site's newsletter with five new articles. Two thousand attorneys subscribe to Next Client, and the company is now establishing a system to allow customers to send their newsletters via e-mail. E-mail newsletters are unobtrusive marketing tools that keep clients educated about the legal issues affecting their industry.

Another company that provides similar services is Practice Development Institute, with 10 practice area newsletters to choose from ([www.pdiglobal.com/lawfirms.html](http://www.pdiglobal.com/lawfirms.html)). For firms that want more than newsletter content, Consultwebs.com develops or edits content for law firm sites. The staff includes three writers, one with newspaper writing experience and another with a paralegal background.

Before adding content to your site, it is important to know your target audience. For example, if your target audience includes a significant number of Spanish-speaking clients consider posting your site and newsletter in Spanish as well as English. In addition, consider developing new audiences. Your fellow attorneys, for example, may reward your efforts to draw them to your site. Robert Kohn (Web site: <http://www.kohncommunications.com>), a

well-known marketing coach, is a strong believer in using attorney referrals to increase a firm's business. A good way to reach this audience can be with an educational site or having a part of your site dedicated to attorneys rather than clients. An informative site can attract attorney referrals in the same way it can attract clients. Most attorneys are likely to feel more confident making a referral to a firm with an educational site than one with nothing more than an online brochure. Biren Katzman is a firm that understands how to use their site for referrals and specifically dedicates a section of the site to attorney referrals (see [www.biren.com](http://www.biren.com) and then click on Potpourri and then For Lawyers).

Many avenues are available for creating the original articles that can gather clients and referrals. Most attorneys already have the raw material for informational articles about their practice areas. For example, rather than write something entirely new, an attorney can review and copy and paste from motions, briefs, forms, and contracts. Then the attorney can take some time to reshape these writings into plain English for Web site visitors. This is not as daunting a task as it may appear. For newsletters, less is often more. An attorney can select one issue from a brief and write a short article about that single issue, for example. Web site content does not have to be lengthy or scholarly—and, in fact, it should not be. Rather, an article can make a single point, in plain English on approximately one page, about an area of law. Finally, those who do not have time even

for repurposing existing material can direct an associate in the firm to write the article. This exercise can serve as a learning experience for the writer as well as for the Web site visitor who reads the final product.

Another avenue for original content is the Web. Lawyers who lack usable background material in-house may create somewhat original content in a relatively short amount of time by writing summaries of recently decided cases or reviews of publications in their practice area. To research articles for review, lawyers may use Findarticles.com, a free full-text database with articles from over 300 popular journals. The National Library of Medicine's Gateway (at <http://gateway.nlm.nih.gov/gw/Cmd>) may be useful to medical malpractice attorneys who are searching for scholarly medical articles.

To add summaries of recently decided cases within the firm's practice area, attorneys can start with the Los Angeles County Bar Association's Daily EBriefs, a summary of recently decided state and federal cases. (They are free to Association members.) Because the cases are labeled by practice area, attorneys can avoid checking every recent decision in order to find a few pertinent cases. After reading the full case, an attorney can write a summary and an analysis for Web visitors.

Many other free e-newsletters offer fresh ideas. Some are geared to specific courts only and others to specific practice areas. Some newsletters geared to specific courts are Find Law's e-summaries of recently decided cases (available for California and many

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other jurisdictions) and Law.com's California News Alert. Some newsletters that are geared to specific practice areas are Find Law's topical newsletters and EPIC Alert, a free newsletter of interest to First Amendment litigation attorneys ([www.epic.org](http://www.epic.org)).

If you do not have time to write summaries, you may add content to your site by creating links to articles that are relevant to your practice but published by others. Another option is to request permission to post other people's articles (with attribution to the authors). To find suitable articles, use Findarticles.com and other similar sites. A Web page that contains one case summary, a few links, and a boilerplate description of your experience with the matters discussed in the case and links can be updated weekly with a small investment of time.

### Greater Sophistication

Attorneys whose clients (or potential clients) have a large amount of bandwidth should consider placing Web content into a multimedia format. Attorney Larry King's site ([www.larrykinglaw.com](http://www.larrykinglaw.com)), which has audio clips on over 50 legal topics, offers a good example. Realizing that not all visitors have the bandwidth to take advantage of multimedia, a print version of each clip is also

available. Other multimedia ideas to consider for your site include posting the Power Point slides that you presented at a conference or audio or video excerpts from a class or seminar you recently taught. Google indexes Power Point presentations, so search for presentations that others have placed online and ask the authors of the suitable ones for permission to place them on your site.

Google can also be the starting place for a search for law firm sites in your practice area. For example, users who type "immigration attorney" into a search engine and then review the results are likely to note that the Siskind, Susser, Haas & Devine site ([www.visalaw.com](http://www.visalaw.com)) is more educational than most. Greg Siskind, who began as a sole practitioner in immigration in Memphis, Tennessee, now has a worldwide immigration practice with offices in the United States, Canada, and Mexico—thanks in part to his early use of the Internet. SSHD claims to be the very first firm on the Web, having established its site in 1994. The site claims to receive more than 200,000 hits every week from over 60 countries. Siskind also claims to be the first to distribute a firm newsletter electronically (Siskind's Immigration Bulletin has over 30,000 subscribers). Another of SSHD's online newsletters is restricted to immigration prac-

tioners. The site contains numerous current educational articles, with topics ranging from "B-1/B-2 Visitor Visas" to "Grounds for Asylum and Refugee." Also available at the SSHD site are various documents, charts, and forms.

Some attorneys may question SSHD's practice of offering intellectual property for free (especially the forms), but numerous arguments can be made for the good business sense of this policy. First, it is one way of adding valuable content to a site without having to create it from scratch. Second, many attorneys have learned that clients generally appreciate knowing that the forms are there for the taking but prefer to have the attorney do the work. Third, even when clients do choose to use the simple forms on their own, most attorneys find the client will later return to the firm for their more complex transactions. So that visitors may reach an attorney, a site should contain request forms for a consultation. Finally, once a client is signed, many attorneys realize that providing substantive content on their site can help clients become better informed and more satisfied.

Search engines can be a somewhat haphazard way to find sites with excellent content, however, so a firm's site developer should also research lists of law firm sites. *Law Office Computing* magazine and Internet Marketing Attorney.com (IMA), for example, list top picks. The list on the IMA site is titled "Micah's Nifty 50." These 50 sites have been selected solely because they feature a nifty component—something that exceeds the usual attorney biographies, practice area descriptions, or news about the law firm. In contrast, *Law Office Computing* considers the overall quality of a firm site, from aesthetics to navigation to content. IMA's list of 50 top picks are chosen from 250 of the largest firms, while *Law Office Computing* lists the five top picks among small firms and the top five among large firms. *Law Office Computing's* 2002 small-firm winner was Parker & Waichman ([www.yourlawyer.com](http://www.yourlawyer.com)), and its large firm winner was Miller Nash ([www.millernash.com](http://www.millernash.com)), a firm of 150 lawyers with offices in Oregon and Washington. IMA also chose Miller Nash as its top 2002 pick. A common feature of the top picks is educational and up-to-date content.

Once you have decided to keep your site current, the following sources provide some tips: the Law Marketing Portal, whose listserv was credited as the place where Miller Nash got many of its best ideas (visit <http://www.lawmarketing.com>), Find Law's Lawyer Marketing News newsletter (at [newsletters.findlaw.com/sample/marketingnews.html](http://newsletters.findlaw.com/sample/marketingnews.html)), and the Legal Marketing Association ([www.legalmarketing.org/about](http://www.legalmarketing.org/about)). ■

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