

## ONLINE MARKETING QUESTIONS

I am trying to get more clients from my website. I am talking to an SEO consultant and he asked me whether people actually find lawyers by looking for lawyer websites. I realized I wasn't sure. We have a lot of info from marketing consultants that say that they are, but...

So here are my questions:

1. Are people actually getting clients from their internet sites?
2. I am loathe to get in deeper with AVVO - but is that perhaps the way to go?
3. Perhaps Facebook or LinkedIn might be a better idea?

Any thoughts? Thanks.

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Not an attorney, but my wife is a solo here in NH and I run a marketing platform for solos and small firms.

I would say that it's absolutely the case that attorneys are finding clients through their websites. But attorneys (and all small businesses really) fall into two camps with their websites. The top 5% or so that spend the effort and time to do consistent online marketing will typically dominate search results, and so they tend to get the lion's share of online leads. Everyone else, well, they might get one or two leads a month, but the vast majority of their traffic comes from folks that already know them either via referral or some other means.

So I guess that's my way of saying, people are definitely searching for attorneys online. But if you look at any search for say Elder Law Attorney [insert your city] you'll get 5-6 actual law firm listings, and the top 2 or 3 are generally dominated by FindLaw or Avvo. So unless you can get into that top 5 or 6, it's going to be pretty hard.

And getting there takes a lot of time and consistent effort, but the payoff can be huge. To know how huge, I'd ask around your local network for folks that are showing up for those top listings and see what their opinion is. My guess is that the top 4 or 5 firms in search aren't hurting for clients.

If you're going the SEO route, I would definitely focus on local search (as opposed to SEO in general). Ask your consultant about the results they've gotten for local businesses and ask for referrals that you can talk to see what they think. Oh, and if you have any local search specialist mention paying or otherwise collecting reviews from anyone other than your direct clients, run for the hills. I would actually ask them specifically what their strategy would be concerning reviews and whether or not they would consider paid reviews. If so, run.

As for Facebook and LinkedIn, that's highly specific to your particular ideal client. Normally I suggest staying away from Facebook as they have a history of making it harder and harder for businesses, but Elder Law is one area I would actually suggest testing it out.

Warning: this is completely a guess and not backed by experience as I haven't tried it for Elder Law, but given the amount of Facebook activity I see out of my not elderly but not young parents, that could be really promising. There's a personal and family element to Facebook that just isn't present on other social networks and it could be a great place to start. If you want to talk specifically about some ideas that could drum up some traffic through Facebook, I'm happy to chat on the phone (for free, I just love talking about this stuff :-))

A local entrepreneur around here has an end-of-life planning guide that probably serves a similar market and she's been doing a great job with Facebook. Feel free to check out Lasting Matters on Facebook and see if it gives you any ideas.

And with LinkedIn, my guess is that it might be useful for referrals from other attorneys, but in terms of time spent, you might be better off with spending that time on nurturing your network of referrers by sending notes or interesting articles or just setting up times for coffee to keep you top of mind. (Email marketing is a great way to semi-automate this.)

Best of luck!

Bryan Marble (not an attorney)

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Since everyone claims to be an SEO expert, my favorite technique is to run a search on the firm. If they cannot do it for themselves, how can they do it for you?

SEO is not a black box, but it does take time. Of course, I have a referral practice so don't use the things I know day to day either, so my comment is worth what you paid for it.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

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What sort of work do you do?

I think that immigration and criminal attorneys are found online, I would suspect that transactional and estate lawyers are not.

Matthew Buck

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This estate attorney is found online - website with a blog and an office Facebook page. When asked who referred them, more and more clients say they found me on the Internet or by using Google. Probably running 40-50%.

My online marketing plan is pretty simple. Have a webpage that looks decent, use recommendations for making online resources senior friendly, and write and post periodically. I've paid very little. Back when I went solo in 2008, I used a designer recommended by Scott Barer and paid about \$350 for my web design. It has changed little over the years (and I'm confident that if it needs updating that y'all will be kind enough to tell me). I now have a webmistress who post my blogs, finds photos, makes my site mobile device friendly, and does periodic updates such as for me in a moderating role at the DC Bar's Practice 360 this Friday. She works efficiently. Some months her invoice is \$55 or so and others are maybe \$125, and some are \$0. Never paid a penny to an SEO expert.

<http://dmatthewslaw.com/>

[facebook.com/DMatthewsLaw](https://www.facebook.com/DMatthewsLaw)

Deborah G. Matthews, Virginia

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Even if you are referred to someone by a colleague or past client, the first thing they will do is look you up. At the very least, you want to make sure you dominate the first page for your name. You can do this by having an online presence (Twitter, LinkedIn, Quora, Slideshare etc.). These sites all rank very highly so it is good to capitalize on their ranking.

Content marketing has replaced SEO as the king of marketing. Writing blog posts and posting valuable content (written by others) across all social channels positions you as a curator and resource.

Also, looking into your site traffic (Google Analytics) and seeing where people are coming from (how they land on your site) and how long they spend on your site may provide you with some actionable takeaways. By doing a few tweaks (ie adding an appointment setter application) to your website may enable you to convert more of the visitors into paying customers.

Thanks

Eva Hibnick

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What kind of practice? About 1/2 of my practice is family law, and about 1/2 is bankruptcy. Almost all of my family law practice comes via referrals; about 1/2 of my bankruptcy practice now comes from referrals, and the other 1/2 from either AVVO (not the prime version) or my bankruptcy blog (or other website of mine, I have several).

"Who is the preferred potential client?" is really important. My best clients are via referrals, usually; AVVO clients, if retained, are generally good; clients who only fined me via my blogs may not be as good. I nurture first my referring sources; then I work to keep updated my AVVO listing and websites in terms of my professional activities; then (and I am WAY behind) I look to update and add new posts to my blogs.

Online is increasing as a source of good clients, and I think it is very important to get some basic site up; I don't think I every have and don't imagine I ever would choose to spend money with an "SEO consultant" -- by now, I probably know more than many; I would consider if I had the budget consulting with a law office marketing expert, and, specifically, only one of those I have gotten to know through SOLOSEZ or related listserves.

GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN!

Gini Nelson, New Mexico

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As an attorney and Internet marketing professional for law firms, I completely agree with Jonathan's assessment - find a solid Internet marketing professional that understands law firm marketing. Here are a few quick suggestions:

1. The most effective forms of Internet marketing will differ depending upon an individual or firm's practice areas, as well as personal characteristics of the attorney(s). For instance, some areas - like PI, can be heavily dependent upon high search engine rankings; other areas - like corporate law, will not be as dependent. A good marketing professional will take the time to learn about your practice, the types of clients that you seek, and will develop an over-all marketing strategy based upon your needs, budget, and practice areas. What is to be avoided are "one size fits all" programs - specifically including the SEO programs offered by most companies.

2. Obtaining high search engine rankings should not be the first objective for any Internet marketing. The first objective should be to have a solid website focused on how a firm helps serve client needs in a way that will resonate with clients (and hopefully differentiate the firm from competitors). There are a variety of measures that can be helpful determining resonance, including feedback from clients and Google Analytics. If GA has been installed, look at factors such as the average number of pages viewed, the average time on website, and the bounce rate (the percentage of times that users leave your website after only seeing one page). If page views and average time on site are low, and if the bounce rate is high (such as over 70%), these are likely an indication that a website is not resonating well.

It is not helpful to engage in an SEO program if a website is not resonating; it only leads to a lot more visits by people who are unlikely to call or contact the firm. A marketing professional will be able to assess website resonance, and offer specific suggestions on any changes that might be helpful. Then, a targeted SEO program can be undertaken - if this is deemed to be of high priority.

3. There are huge number of Internet opportunities available; more than anyone can possibly do. A marketing professional will be able to assist not only in helping determine which opportunities may be the most beneficial, but also how to prioritize opportunities so that they can be undertaken effectively.

4. An Internet marketing plan should be tailored to a firm's needs, budget, and objectives, and, critically, to a firm's overall marketing plan. For example, some attorneys like to blog; if this is the case, a marketing professional can assist with developing blog objectives, a blog schedule, and blog syndication plan (including social networking). Some attorneys don't want to blog, but are great at off-line networking. If this is the case, it's not helpful to develop a comprehensive blogging program that is unlikely to be undertaken.

5. Internet marketing is much the same as offline marketing - the best results are achieved through ongoing marketing over time.

I hope this is helpful. BTW - really like the "personal" photos on your site - great touch! - but would suggest that you consider adding a page about yourself with your picture.

Regards,

Jeff Lantz

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First, stop talking to an SEO consultant. Those people generally are not worth the money you spend on them. I would talk to someone like Mark Merenda or Conrad Saam ([www.smartmarketingnow.com](http://www.smartmarketingnow.com) or [www.mockingbird.marketing](http://www.mockingbird.marketing)). These folks don't just focus on SEO but rather how your internet marketing can be most effective. There is a lot more to this than just SEO.

Jonathan G. Stein, California

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If the SEO guy doesn't know then I'd guess he/she has no experience in this subdivision of marketing and you might want to question his/her qualifications. A lot of this has to do with the geo where you are and what you practice, blog always produces phone calls, but it should be consistent, plain language with technical terms someone might search for.

Michael A. Huerta, New York

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I know that I get calls from potential clients from all of my listings " my website, my listing on fine Laura, my listing at avvo , linkedin, etc. The only ones of these well known sites that I pay for are findlaw for a basic listing and my own website. There are a few specialized local directories that I do also pay nominal fees for.

I did not upgrade to avvo pro or to the paid-for LinkedIn. I don't track the metrics for conversion from potential client calls to actually engaged because I get a lot of calls. But that should tell you that all of these listings do provide exposure.

I have been around for a long time and have had my own website since sometime in the 1990s, so I have been indexed and come up on search engines. I have not paid any S EO for optimization. However if you are just starting a website, I guess it and have had my own website since sometime in the 1990s, so I have been indexed and come up on search engines. I have not paid any S EO for optimization. However if you are just starting a website, I guess it may make sense for some S EO work. Be aware however that a lot of these offers are 99% BS. I don't know how you tell those from the real ones.

Good luck.

Miriam Jacobson, Pennsylvania

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You should also consider your market. I live in Anchorage, Alaska. In my area, a very small market, my website is one of the best. I have consistently high google rankings, even though I have never paid for SEO and don't blog.

I get tons of calls from potential clients who found me on the first page of google, and compliments all the time from other attorneys who are impressed with my site. Most other attorneys in my state and practice areas just don't bother with websites, or put up the bare minimum, or what they can find for free.

I also have a twitter and facebook page, but they aren't linked from the website. No blog. It's just not worth my time if my website is already generating more business than I can handle.

I agree with everyone who is saying that if an "SEO expert" has made an unsolicited call to you for business, chances are they have no idea what they're doing. If you're going to pay for marketing, definitely use someone that has familiarity with your market, and specifically with lawyers, and it helps if they've worked with solos or small firms. Anything else is just a waste of your money and time.

Monica Elkinton, Alaska

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Answers to your questions.

1. Yes. Lots.
2. No.
3. Facebook dark posts are definitely a good way to go. Facebook redirects with javascript after prospect has visited your site is another key way to go.

You need to redo the copy on your homepage. "I am a caring, capable attorney devoted to helping my clients prepare for tomorrow." I'm sorry but prospects don't care if you are caring and devoted. You should start immediately with the "issues". That's all they care about. You need copy such as "You need to protect your family when you are gone..." "You are probably wondering what happens to your parents' assets when they pass on without a will." Get right in their heads. Give a little free information and offer up a consultation. Spice it up.

Add tons of content. Go nuts. Here are twenty-one pages of content:

1. A list of Frequently Asked Questions and Should Ask Questions;

2. 10 pages of FAQs.

3. 10 pages of Should Ask Questions (questions clients should be asking if they knew better).

You start with that and within 30 days your site starts to drift up in rankings.

Very truly yours,

Nick A. Ortiz, Florida

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When people find me online, it's most frequently through Avvo, Yelp, or Google Places, all of which list my specific geographic location alongside client reviews. I do get found through my blog, but much less frequently. You don't really need an SEO expert to tell you that your business should have a well-developed presence in all the local online listings.

I would also question spending any portion of my marketing budget on a consultant who doesn't offer any expertise relating to attorney marketing specifically.

Best regards,

Rackham Karlsson, Massachusetts

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I do estate planning and probate and get a very significant number of clients from web searches.

I've got ultra basic website and blog:

www.flawyer.us

I do NOT necessarily get a bunch of referrals from "probate attorney the villages florida", though I do come up, Avvo and such tend to dominate that sort of thing.

What I DO get results from are topical searches:

What if my husband cuts me out of the will in Florida?

Common law marriage in Florida

Do I need a living trust in Florida

That sort of thing. Â Google those terms and see what comes up.

I get a LOT of traffic and a LOT of inquiries.

The point is, I put a bunch of substantive information out there on questions people regularly ask; I've been doing this for 18 years I know what questions people ask. I write the posts and such to address those questions. I will also regularly include stuff in the post such as: If you have any questions about this or any other estate planning in The Villages, Florida, give my office a call.

Google indexes it all.

Ronald Jones, Florida

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The fields I practice in, OSHA and environmental, are hard to find and many people don't already know a lawyer who does these things. Therefore, I get a lot of contacts through my website, even from referring lawyers who themselves had to google for somebody.

Shell Bleiweiss, Illinois

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It really depends on who your target market is. If you are targeting wealthy baby boomers for estate planning purposes, your best marketing is probably in-person networking.

What do you do and who is your avatar?

Susan Burns

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We track the sources of our new clients. The number of those who marked "website" or "internet" as how they found us has been steadily climbing over the last few years. However, referrals are still our number one client generator.

Very truly yours,

Timothy A. Gutknecht, Illinois

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