TAKING THEIR
TEMPERATURE

by Micah Buchdahl

what's hot at firm web sites

DOT-COMS AND PURE E-COMMERCE COMPANIES have gone the way of mood rings and pet rocks in the last year, yet the Internet remains alive and well in the professional services industry. That includes YOU—lawyers and law firms—in trying to implement the World Wide Web to maximum benefit and efficiency.

The use of Web sites and related Internet technologies continues to help law firms better operate from a business development perspective to enhance current client relationships and create new ones. Firms also are benefited as they use the Web to collaborate on work product.

Here in the sunny climate of Arizona, we find some good examples of using Web sites in day-to-day practice.

Arizona Attorney asked me to review the state of law firm Web sites in your region and to point out some pros and cons. A few caveats: Just like the magazine, in my role with West Group and Findlaw, my employer counts on your business—thus, I cannot be totally candid with every example. The only site reviewed in this article that was developed by West Group is that of Gallagher & Kennedy—so the disclaimers are out of the way. If you are doing things really wrong, I think you know who you are. For shame! Here, we concentrate on accentuating the positives and making some suggestions for the future. Also keep in mind that this article was written in early summer. It is safe to bet that at least one of the sites mentioned herein has undergone a makeover in that time period.

The general rule of thumb in 2001 is that a new Web site is created, on average, every 18 months. So if you are still staring at a first-generation site on your browser, it might be time for revamping. One of the beauties of the Web is that making changes, small or wholesale, is much simpler than with traditional collateral materials.

Hey, Is the Arizona Bar Site Any Good?

by Micah Buchdahl

FOR ONE THING, trust me when I say I live in a glass house. Whether it is working on the FirmSite program for West Group or building my personal site at www.internetmarketingattorney.com, there is no such thing as the perfect Web site. Web development can be fun and rewarding, but you need time and patience. However, I do often provide audits of Web sites and thought I would put the site of the State Bar of Arizona through its paces.

Domain Name and Metatags My preference is "arizonabar.org" rather than the initials. Decent metatags were in place.

Design I am not one to judge colors, because I am colorblind and my wife picks out most of my clothes anyway; I'm not a big fan of the "wallpaper background." What are those? Lizards? I felt like I was taking a Rorschach test. The page was a little crowded, but I prefer crowded with resources than crowded with wasted images. Get your message across right away, and keep the download relatively quick!

Navigation Solid! Consistent left-hand navigation just the way I like it, and the ability to search the site by keyword—a must for making the end-user experience as easy as possible.

**Content** I looked for everything I would want from my bar association— seminar info, CLEs, ethical considerations, etc.—and found it. Many bar associations have done great jobs providing resources online. It is probably tougher getting more of our colleagues to use them on the Web and to stop waiting for the Pony Express to deliver the snail mail.

Interactive Communication Again, well done. Every page provides an e-mail link, which is good. The ability to register online for seminars, CLEs and membership is important if you want the site to replace many costly, less efficient means of communication. I also liked the e-mail address and listserv features.

Freshness It is clear that content is continually updated. I would clean up the home page a bit and put the latest and greatest front and center. Lack of freshness can mean death to many sites. It tells a client you are not taking the site seriously and do not bother returning. One Arizona law firm site I visited was last updated five months earlier; that is too long.

Uniqueness There are different colors and lots of content. In general, unlike law firms competing against one another for a prospective client, it is not as important for the bar site to be unique in look and feel as it is to be useful to the members.

End-Users Again, a bar Web site is unlike that of law firms, which reach current clients, prospective clients, lawyer-to-lawyer, recruiting, consumer-based clients, or corporate or general counsel clients.
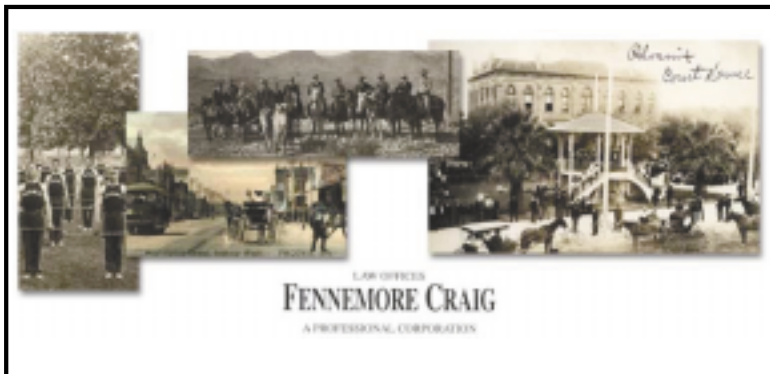

We start with Fennemore Craig for the sole reason that they start out right—with the domain name **www.fennemorecraig.com,** as it should be. Domain names with abbreviations, dashes, initials and the like are out. "In" are domain names that either have a marketing purpose, such as **www.yourlemonlawrights.com,** belonging to Krohn & Moss, with a consumer-based bend, or the intuitive name of a firm, such as "Fennemore Craig." Search engines like intuitive domain names, as do the people looking for you, your site or firms like you.

A recurring theme in the Southwest is the "look and feel" of the region on the home page. For Fennemore, it is the use of old-tyme photographs. One of the biggest problems on the site is the extremely long download time, due to too much content dumped on single pages. Using a 56K connection, I waited for nearly 30 seconds for the "News" page to download. The positive is that there was excellent content. The best bet is to list each item and link to it on a separate page. Also, the "news" dated back to February 2000, although they have a news archive. That ain't news. And the last update when this article was written was nearly three months old.

Overall, though, they accomplish the number-one goal, which is to provide excellent content through newsletters, articles and seminars. They promote pro bono and have a unique section of the site dedicated to recruiting. The firm needs to better promote the recruiting section, which was a simple hyperlink in the "opportunities" materials. For some reason, many Arizona firms were lacking the all-important ability to do a keyword search, and they missed some gimmes, like directions to the firm.

Brown & Bain also uses the "right" domain name at **www.brownbain.com.** They too use art in the home page design but keep it in a rotating position in the top-left. The color palette is pleasing, and the "correct" navigation is
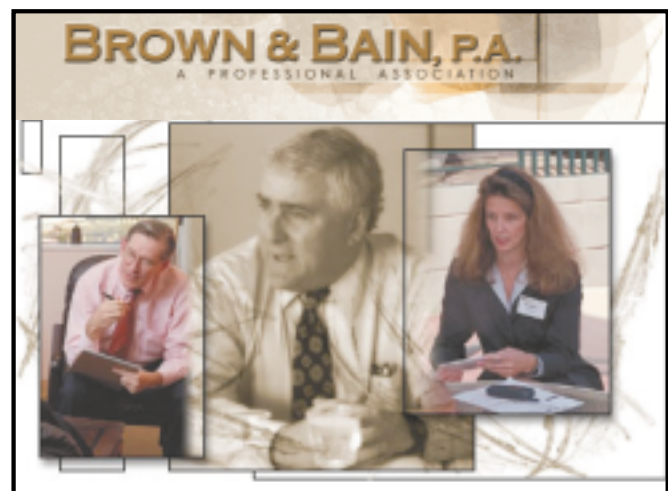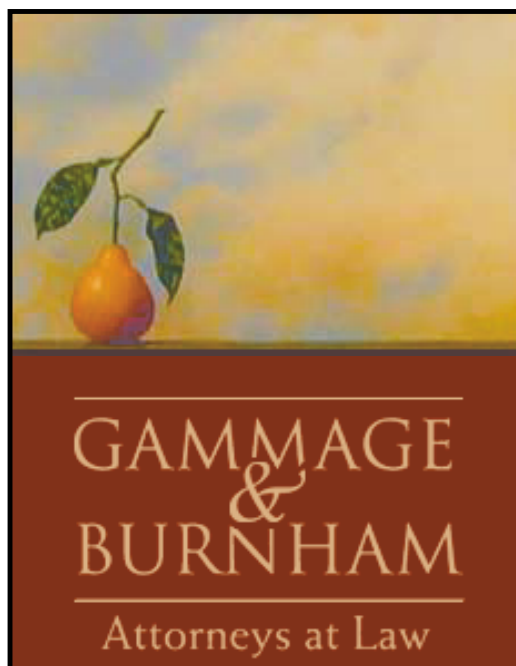
displayed—consistent, left-hand, as is an industry standard. The middle of the home page itself could be better used, for changing content or for an overview of the firm's practice.

One of Brown's features, the "Our Clients" page, is especially well used, providing a list of clients, linking out to their Web site through a second browser. What better way to show off high-end clientele to prospects while at the same time providing traffic to a client's Web site? Win–win!

The attorney profiles were well done, with the option of searching alphabetically or by practice area. Also, the main list provides phone and e-mail addresses for all.

Accessibility! Show it. Marketing consultants can create all the branding campaigns in the world for you. The reality is that most clients pick the best attorneys. Make finding those credentials as easy as possible. One problem on Brown's site was that the "Contact Us" section only provided addresses and phone numbers for Phoenix and Tucson. A big no-no. At a minimum, you need a generic e-mail address there. However, the best bet is a customized online form for gathering contact information. Again, there was no keyword search or directions.

Gammage & Burnham continues the use of art (you firms sure are much more cultured than those I deal with in the Northeast!). The home page at **www.gblaw.com** offers changing slides and links into five site sections. However, no firm description or information is on the page, so a visitor does not know where the firm is, and a search engine just crawling the front page would not be much help either. Both visitors and search engines need at least some good introductory information immediately, or they might never go deeper. Regularly check your Web site traffic reports to see where people enter and exit the site.

Starting with a click to "Articles" for me was a mistake. I was welcomed with a lengthy "Disclaimer." My preference is that a site disclaimer be on the home page or link off the first page of the site. End-users do not like to be discouraged from going further as they move from section to section. The site is database-driven, so it should be quite simple for the firm to make changes and updates. Arizona firms, like many in the country,

use the Web site as a key tool in recruiting wars; the recruiting content here was razor-thin, however. The look, download speed and attorney bios were the strengths.

A first glance at **www.omlaw.com,** the site for Osborn Maledon, may not provide a visual feast. But I would suggest it is one of the state's most useful firm sites: quick to download, no graphics, a one-sentence over-view of who they are, consistent left-hand navi-gation bar, a map to the office link and uniqueness with puzzles that tie into a "Solutions" theme. There are good bios with photos and a link to the firm's Martindale-Hubbell listing (I would have that link open a second browser
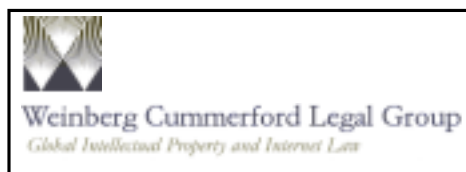
rather than leave the site). Osborn also has links to clients. Overall, they provide good content for a firm of their size.

Weinberg Cummerford Legal Group made me feel like I was in my neck of the woods, with a flash (and sound) show to guide me into the site at **www.weinberglegal.com.** I still prefer the content without the show at Osborn Maledon, but I also know the importance of showing technology clients that you know how to provide sizzle on the Web. Of course, some search engines might penalize them for overdoing it on the metatags. (Metatags are hidden HTML tags that provide site owners some control over how their pages are indexed by some search engines. Search engines that index metatag information include Infoseek, Webcrawler and AltaVista; to

Founded in Phoenix, Arizona in 1942, Jennings, Strouss & Salmon is a dynamic 80-lawyer firm with a diverse civil practice, serving the transactional and litigation needs of business clients located throughout the Southwestern United States, nationally and internationally.

look at the site's metatags, click on "view" and "source" on your browser). They offer a "clients only" section of the site, which is a nice way of providing added value to current clients and giving them reason to use your site as a resource. For a smaller law firm, it is a good job. I only beg them to get rid of the frames! They are so 1999! Again, there are limited contact capabilities provided.

Because I have involvement with Gallagher & Kennedy's Web site—**www.gallagherkennedy.com**—as they are a West Group FirmSite, all I can say is "perfecto"! (Just kidding.) For a slightly older static HTML site, it does a good job of presenting a unique look in home page design. Both Gallagher *and* Kennedy offer a welcome via video, using "technology on top of technology." There are good client links and excellent resources for those visiting the firm. A real pet peeve of mine is that some firms do not offer things as simple (and helpful) as maps, directions and hotels. GK's resources in that area are a plus. Those frames I hate? They have them, too. But they were "in" at the time of the site development. Really.

Jennings, Strouss & Salmon has that first-generation "collage look" going on the home page, **www.jsslaw.com.** A friend of mine at West Group used to say to me, "Hey, another freakin' collage!" But, that was often standard in first-gen sites. And I do not actually ever use the word "freakin'."

On the home page, I liked the top-front hyperlink promoting an upcoming seminar, being held in conjunction with Deloitte & Touche and AZSoft.net, linking to a page that described the seminar and that let me register right there, online. Never
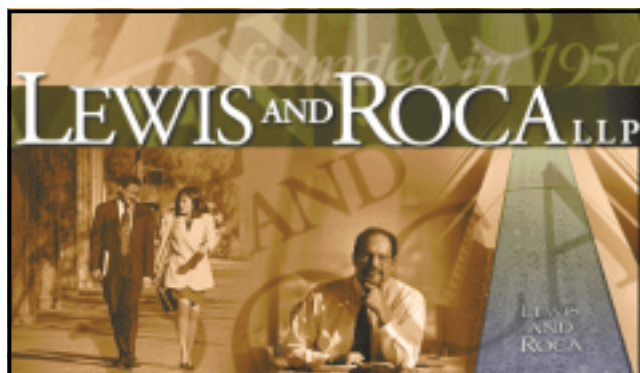
make me register any other way in 2001! That is putting the Web to good use.

They also had an introductory video. But the practice area descriptions were weak, only about a paragraph.

Without a keyword search and strong navigation, it is hard to find the "expertise." The best new sites today provide "related content," putting all the relevant items (bios, practice areas, newsletters, seminars) in one place— making it as easy as possible for the visitor to find everything on a certain topic. Some sites even customize the home page for individual visitors.

Now, I know that Lewis and Roca is planning its next-generation site. At present, though, the home page goes against today's best practices—no message or content on an all-graphic home page, at **www.lrlaw.com.** The use of graphics with no written words gives the firm no help from search engines seeking out a message. The site is quick to download and well organized. A site map is handy, but nothing is better than the ability to search words and sections of the site. All the content was in the "News" section, but it was hard to find. Like many early large-firm Web sites, it is closer to an online brochure than an ongoing resource. The content is there, but it just needs a little organizational work.

In nearly five years of developing Internet presence and marketing strategies for law firms of all shapes and sizes, I have determined that measuring success and truly rating a site's value is in the eyes of the law firm beholder. I've worked on great sites and truly sorry ones. But in both cases, the firm got what they asked for. Overall, the state of Arizona's law firm Web sites is fine, but as with all of the sites on which we work, develop and visit, there is always room for improvement. ⚖

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