

Michael R. Arkfeld is an Assistant United States Attorney in Phoenix. He is the author of *The Digital Practice of Law* (5th edition) and a frequent speaker and columnist on the practice of law. He can be reached at Michael@Arkfeld.com.

Develop Goals Before HTML

FAST AND FURIOUS come the claims about your need to market on the Web:

- "One personal injury firm picked up two new clients within a week after its home page was launched."
- "One corporate law firm picked up enough business to pay for its site."

You do need a presence on the Web. But approach your involvement and investment with caution.

Building or Rebuilding Your Web Site

Before developing your site, consider several questions. What image are you trying to project, and how do you want to communicate that to your audience? What do you seek? There can be several reasons why you will want to develop a Web site. Among other things, you may want to attract new clients, service current clients, attract new attorneys or provide information.

With your main purposes and audience in mind, you can begin to gather content.


For example, if one of the purposes of the Web site is to attract new clients, then give value to your targeted potential clients for visiting your home page. A number of sites have firm newsletters, case law commentaries, analysis of legal news and practice guides that provide existing clients with legal knowledge of an area that interests them. Potential clients also will be attracted. Provide hypertext links to other areas on the Web in the same subject area. Firm materials such as newsletters, brochures and questionnaires should be downloadable at your site. Provide the basic law to clients. The essence of the Internet is the capability to publish and provide the beginnings of a dynamic relationship with people or companies.

Provide resources that are not easily accessible. For example, frequently asked questions (FAQs) about a particular area of the law could be a very unobtrusive way to market your firm, because potential clients will be referred to your site to view the FAQs.

Marketing Your Site

A Web site is a marketing and customer relationship tool, and you need to market it. Help clients and potential clients find your site. Prepare and implement a marketing plan that is in conjunction with your other firm marketing.

- Plan your Web site launch or relaunch. Send a notice by e-mail, postcard, flier and brochure or invitation to existing and present clients and potential clients, or purchase a targeted "opt-in" e-mail list. (Always keep in mind the ethical rules on this subject.)
- Send out a news release and send news clippings to your clients about your Web site. Respond immediately to press calls regarding your site.
- Make sure everyone in the firm is aware of your site, markets it and stays involved.
- Have your site address on business cards, stationery and brochures, fax cover sheets and other office marketing materials.
- Key words, such as firm name and specialty area, should be near the beginning of the site so search engines can find it.
- Check your metatags to ensure search engines find the areas under which you should be indexed.
- Register with search engines under headings such as "getting listed" or "submitting a listing." Focus on the top half-dozen search sites, because they get 95 percent of all hits. Some companies such as Submit-It (www.submit-it.com) will register your site with search engines for a fee.

Your site can and will be the hub of communications with your existing and potential clients. Once you have a site, you can solidify your communications and relationship with your clients by providing legal articles or other firm materials or "open" select environments or extranets for your clients for form libraries, discussion forums, questions and surveys, and a host of other applications. In coming years, your site will turn into an interactive sight at which audio, video and real-time communications will take place on a daily basis with your clients from anywhere in the world. 

For a story reviewing Arizona law firm Web sites, turn to p. 22.

Surfworthy Law Sites

Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison LLP employs a periodical style with a monthly feature on legal issues—www.brobeck.com

The site of California firm Cooley, Godward LLP is easy to use, simple to navigate and very accessible to the average browser—www.cooley.com

Haynes and Boone in Dallas provides a version of their site in Spanish—www.hayboo.com

Perkins Coie LLP, Seattle, updates its "Internet case digest" weekly and has an excellent summary of Internet law—www.perkinscoie.com

Dennis Kennedy has created a list of useful resources about law firm Web sites—www.denniskennedy.com/legalweb.htm