



BY VIRGINIA “GINGER” BISEK

These days, people search the Internet for information before making purchasing decisions. This includes searching for legal services. Potential clients may first ask a friend or relative for a good lawyer, but the next thing they'll do is go online. Your website's job is to quickly establish a relationship of trust between you and your client.

If clients can trust your website on their initial visit, they'll pick up the phone and call you. However, gaining that trust can be difficult because many sole practitioners and legal organizations don't have the time or experience to successfully manage a custom-designed website. Although navigating the current tech terrain of website management and marketing can be annoyingly frustrating, it's not impossible to make your website useful for you and your client.

Look Beyond Your Favorite Research Provider

Often, law firms jump into the website market without considering a few things, such as the time needed to keep up a site. Certainly they consider that the website should bring in a percentage of customers, but they may not consider the day-to-day business of maintaining it.

You or your firm may have turned to recognizable companies such as LexisNexis or FindLaw (and many more smaller and equally respectable companies) to develop and market a web presence for you. But resorting to a third party doesn't mean you shouldn't do your homework. If you are using such a company, then you are spending roughly \$4,000 a year, at the bare minimum. This basically gets you a design you pick from a library of available templates and six web pages of content: a home or landing page, your profile, three individual practice pages, and a contact page.

In addition, your website will appear in search engine results on a rotating basis. How often it will appear depends on many factors (e.g., where your office is located) and is something to be discussed between you and your company representative. There are several other marketing features that you can purchase to increase your chances of being seen by the search engines and being found by potential clients. Again, discuss this with your company representative.

Successful websites come from those who do their homework upfront. You should ensure that you are getting the best possible product and service to justify this yearly expense.

Don't Create a Lazy Website

How do you keep from ending up with a lazy website? Here are some "don'ts" to avoid: Don't choose a design template from a library and throw your brochures at the project manager assigned to your account. Don't insert brochure copy into your web pages as is and launch your website without ensuring that the copy is formatted for the web. Don't use a bad profile picture or impersonal photos of smiling, happy people that you don't know or that your clients can't relate to. Don't use generic photos of tall buildings from unknown cities. Don't let third-party companies rush the development process.

Do Your Homework

When building or maintaining your website, here are some important "dos" to remember: Do understand your target audience so you can write effective web copy that speaks directly to that audience. Do format the copy to allow your potential clients to easily scan the information. Do take your time and pick a design template that matches your brand and allows you the flexibility to upload photos. Do get professional web photos done or know how to take them yourself. Do take the time to learn a content management system (CMS) so that you can be a part of the development process and make edits easily. Creating web copy can be done quickly; however, if you can't do it

yourself, hire a seasoned web copywriter with experience using third-party templates.

It's Not Too Late

Do the math — \$4,000-plus per year is not chump change. If you are converting several clients per year into paying clients direct from your website, congratulations! If you are not, then you haven't done your homework.

It's not too late. If you have a lazy website with a third party, you can still go in to the CMS, pick a new template, edit your pages, and start again. If you do your homework up front, you should be able to sit back for six months and see what develops. If you haven't turned visitors into paying clients, then it's time to look for alternatives. ☛



VIRGINIA "GINGER" BISEK

helps legal professionals and organizations create successful web copy. Contact her at ginger@virginiabisek.com.

The Corporate Counsel Section of the State Bar of Texas
and The University of Texas School of Law

present

34th ANNUAL CORPORATE COUNSEL INSTITUTE

DALLAS
April 19-20, 2012
InterContinental Hotel

HOUSTON
May 3-4, 2012
Four Seasons Hotel

The 2012 Corporate Counsel Institute is a must-attend event that offers your entire annual CLE requirement of 15 hours of credit including 3 hours of ethics.

Institute Highlights:

- *How to Say No (and Still Be a "Go-To" Lawyer)*
- *Best Practices in Contract Drafting*
- *Labor and Employment Law Update*
- *Rolling Out a Mobile Workforce*
- *Navigating the Minefield of Internal Investigations*
- *Compliance and Ethics Program Best Practices*
- *Update on SEC Enforcement Initiatives and New Areas of Focus*
- *The Role of the General Counsel during Times of Corporate Crisis*

www.utcle.org/conferences/CC12

UTCLE
512-475-6700