

E-MARKETING MADE EASY STRATEGIES FOR LAWYERS

Introduction

Your E-marketing should extend beyond your website and emails about your seminars, if you want to make your mark in the virtual world.

Online news and e-marketing are often neglected by lawyers, especially the Bar. Most Bar websites are static brochures, while e-mails about seminars mark the limit of other e-marketing. If you have the motivation, there is plenty of opportunity to stand out.

This practical guide to E-marketing for lawyers:

- explains how to breathe new life into your website and underlines the importance of regularly updated news content.
- makes suggestions for maximising the effectiveness of marketing e-mails and E-zines/bulletins
- covers the full range of other E-marketing possibilities.

Two other companion LawComms publications provide in-depth guidance:

- *Guide to News Publishing and the Art of Writing*
- *Website Health Check – A Self-Assessment Guide.*

Both are free to download at www.LawComms.com.

Barrister or Solicitor?

While many of the examples here refer to barristers and their websites, all the principles apply just as strongly to solicitors.

E-marketing plan

To make any progress with e-marketing, you will need an e-marketing plan. This should complement your existing marketing plan and cover three key questions:

- Where are you now? If you have tried any e-marketing, what has worked best? Do you have any useful feedback from clients or online visitors? What can you gather from website and other statistics?
- Where would you like to be? Can you set goals in relation to the clients you wish to target, or how e-marketing should contribute to chambers?
- How will you get there? Is action needed in relation to training, resources, systems? What steps need to be taken, and what is the timescale?

There is one golden rule of marketing to remember: acquiring a new client costs more and takes longer than strengthening existing client relationships. E-marketing offers many opportunities to build up client loyalty.

LawComms can work with you to develop an effective and practical e-marketing plan.

What is e-marketing?

The e-marketing shopping list includes a wide range of activities. This guide covers:

- your website as the starting point
- online news
- extranets
- marketing emails, E-zines/bulletins and viral marketing
- E-publishing and podcasts
- Search Engine Optimisation and keywords
- Link-building
- online campaigns
- social networking, blogs, text messaging
- web awards
- banner advertising, pay-per-click and search engine optimisation (SEO).

Your website is the starting point

Is your website robust enough to support all your other e-marketing activity? Before you do anything else, carry out a thorough health check:

- Does your home page make an impact?
- Is the look and feel right? What image does your site convey?
- Do you keep the home page looking fresh and different?
- Website or cobwebsite? Is everything up to date?
- Is the site user-friendly and easy to navigate?
- Do you have useful relevant content?
- Is it accessible for users with disabilities?

LawComms publishes a Website Health Check guide to help you: www.lawcomms.com. We can provide an evaluation of your website, with suggestions for action points, free of charge.

Online news/media relations

Online news updates provides the best means to keep your Home Page looking fresh, to show off skills and achievements, and to maintain prominence in search results. Members' cases make the best material.

When LawComms (www.lawcomms.com) surveyed all 252 chambers websites in June 2008 52% of their Home Pages had nothing but static brochure-style information; they lacked even the simplest updates. One in

five Bar websites lacked updates of any kind anywhere on the site. Only a quarter carried news about members' cases – the lifeblood of the set's reputation.

News items should be published on the Home Page, and should include updates about member's cases. This would give all visitors immediate information about the set's activities, and ensures that the Home Page is regularly refreshed, creating a different impression each time a regular user visits the site.

Some Bar websites have a menu on the Home Page providing a link to "News". But in quite a few instances, news could be found only from a subsidiary page, such as "About Us", 2 or 3 clicks from the Home Page. Relegating news updates to another page, out of sight, means that visitors are much less likely to see them.

Some sites use scrolling headlines but these can be too slow or too fast, take too long to load, or tell the visitor too little to tempt them to read the full story.

A better option uses a panel on the Home Page which carries a series of headlines with short summaries of each story, and a link to full information on a news page.

Some sets have opted to use a news feed from a third-party provider - presumably because there is no one in-house with the time to write material. This has a double disadvantage: it tells visitors nothing about the work and qualities of the set itself; and it tempts them to go off to another website to follow up a story.

These Bar websites demonstrate a variety of approaches to the presentation of news:

www.39essex.com/index.php

www.5rb.co.uk

www.tooks.co.uk

www.2bedfordrow.co.uk.

A guide to News Publication is offered by LawComms, to help gain the specialist skills involved: www.lawcomms.com. LawComms supports Chambers by researching and writing online news stories and disseminating news releases.

Extranets

Extranets use the web to provide exclusive access to selected users. An extranet can provide: privileged access to information free of charge to registered users; access for an individual client to documents and information about their individual matters; or a paid-for e-commerce service.

I KBW (www.1kbw.co.uk) is one of relatively few sets with a client extranet and generally chambers seem not to have considered their use.

Marketing e-mails

E-mail is widely used by barristers and clerks to communicate with instructing solicitors, but its use in marketing is largely restricted to seminar announcements.

Although an obvious e-marketing technique, there are many questions to address if you are to make the most effective use of e-mail as a medium:

- Which email database is most suitable? If you have one of the chambers' Practice Management systems, can it actually generate e-mails? Many sets use a separate marketing database instead.
- What will ensure that recipients will actually open your message and read it?
- How do you write a compelling e-mail?
- Which is the best day and time to circulate emails? Wednesday lunchtime is reported by one online magazine as the peak time for downloads.

Key guidelines for effective e-mail campaigns include the following:

- Make the subject-line relevant and interesting
- Keep your e-mail short
- Get straight to the point – start with your strongest point
- Include a clear "call to action" inviting the recipient to take a further step
- Send from a named person and give full contact details
- Include a greeting/salutation
- Avoid attachments (which usually get ignored)
- Link to a "landing page" on your website which is specifically relevant to the e-mail
- Include the http//: in web addresses (not all email systems interpret web links correctly if this is missing)
- Provide opt-out instructions
- Double-check accuracy of dates, phone numbers, web links and so on. The best way to do this is to send the email to yourself (before sending it to anyone else) and read it carefully!

LawComms can help you devise a strategy for marketing emails, and provide draft material.

E-zines and bulletins

The most effective e-bulletins (emailed newsletters) provide key points, written succinctly, in a format that makes it easy for recipients to scan quickly to identify information of practical relevance to them.

Bland brochure-style text is unlikely to be read, because recipients lack the time and patience.

HTML and PDF formats can be made visually attractive. But recipients may opt not to open, download, print, or read your HTML or PDF pages. Plain text emails, with simple punchy information and with links to detailed material on your website, may work more effectively.

Garden Court's Housing Law and Immigration Law update emails provide only a link to the full magazine-style PDF, with no indication of the contents or highlights:

www.gardencourtchambers.co.uk/bulletins/index.cfm.

In contrast, Daniel Barnett's employment law emails provide you with a summary in the email itself, so you can decide whether you want to get the full detail: www.danielbarnett.co.uk.

Consider whether you have the time and resources to support regular publication, and whether your e-zine fills a need in the market. Starting, and then discontinuing, an e-zine initiative sends a negative message.

Viral marketing

Viral marketing involves people spontaneously emailing friend and work colleagues with links to online videos, games or jokes that they think are cool or funny. You need to create strong and original content to attract this kind of attention. Probably not for the inexperienced to attempt!

E-Publishing

Seminars are identified by many chambers as their most successful marketing tools, because they provide an excellent opportunity for face to face contact. However, seminars demand significant time and effort for preparation.

One way to maximise utilisation of this time and effort is online publication of material based on the seminar presentations.

Publishing articles on your own website is one option. Place articles in the section of your website about the relevant specialist topic. Most chambers websites relegate everything to an "Articles" section but busy visitors are unlikely to take the time to browse through all your material. They are much more likely to find articles in a section focussed on their own specialism.

In addition, consider 3rd party websites such as www.legalhub.co.uk (with 80,000 users a month) which are free to use. More costly are the legal content "aggregators" including www.mondaq.com, www.linexlegal.com, and www.lexology.com, which provide online legal information services.

LawComms can help you devise a strategy for e-publishing, place articles on your behalf, and edit material for publication.

Podcasts

Podcasts seem an obvious medium for communicating legal updates to busy solicitors or business people. As with e-publishing, they offer a channel for re-using the valuable work devoted to seminar preparation.

Barristers feature on legal podcast sites including:

www.cpdcast.com/

www.insitelawmagazine.com/

But it is hard to find individual chambers websites which include them. One set that provided podcasts, and plans to re-start this service, because they found such a positive response, is www.orielchambers.co.uk/

Pinsent Masons have weekly 10-minute Outlaw Radio broadcasts about technology law: www.out-law.com/page-7212.

Web 2/Social Networking

Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter etc constitute the Web2 online social networking phenomenon that has come to dominate thinking about the future of the internet. Should lawyers try these?

Why you should

On one view, social networking websites are essential marketing and legal research tools for lawyers. The American Bar Association's "Law Practice Management" magazine explains the benefits in a March 2009 article: www.abanet.org/lpm/magazine/articles/v35/is2/pg28.shtml

Clifford Chance and Linklaters are amongst law firms which have created corporate pages on Facebook, but most law-firm related groups seem to be populated by trainees or would-be trainees.

One company has used social networking to build up a community and to connect with customers: look up Wiggly Wigglers on www.Facebook.com. With some imagination, this approach could surely be applied by barristers chambers to, for example, an area of rapidly-changing law.

Twitter provides online distribution of text-message style information, and attracted significant media interest in spring 2009. If you're not familiar with Twitter, track down some famous twitterers such as:

<http://twitter.com/stephenfry>,

<http://twitter.com/lilyroseallen>

<http://twitter.com/chrisdjmoyles>

Could lawyers make any use of Twittering?

- Perhaps Counsel working on leading edge law could “tweet” bits of information from latest research, developments, and cases.
- Juniors (with light diaries!) could “tweet” updates from major trials (whether or not the set was involved) as they unfold.
- Glasgow law firm Inksters uses Twitter to tell “followers” about house property coming onto the market: <http://twitter.com/shetlandhomes>
<http://www.inksters.com>

Why you shouldn't

So far, lawyers seem to have focussed on the risks: how much time will staff waste updating their profiles; will staff make inappropriate comment or disclose confidential information as they chat online? Do social networking sites just create unmanageable legal risk for business? Should staff access be blocked because they foster social NOT-working?

In March 2009, two “Times Law Page” articles sounded these warnings:

“Don't make a twit of yourself while tweeting”:

<http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/article5976805.ece>;

“Unwary companies using networking sites could be exposed to allegations of discrimination, race hatred or worse”:

<http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/article5976907.ece>.

91% of respondents to a reader survey of legal IT experts by the authoritative Legal Technology Insider publication said they could think of no business use for a tweet: <http://www.legaltechnology.com/>

Blogs

Even the Bar Council has blogs; one of the contributors claims 23,000 readers:

<http://blog.barcouncil.org.uk/>

Only few individual barristers have blogs, and these tend to provide background and chat rather than legal content. It is unclear how effectively these contribute to practice development. Examples include: Jane Lambert, an IP/IT specialist at <http://nipclaw.blogspot.com/>; and Jacky Gilliatt, family lawyer at <http://bloodyrelations.blogspot.com> whose site includes an excellent list of other law blogs.

Text messaging

Solicitors use SMS texts (which can, of course, be sent from a computer as well as a phone) to remind clients of appointments or to notify them of key milestones in their matters – for example hearing dates, exchange of contracts etc.

Web awards

Awards can provide recognition and raise your profile The prestigious global WebbyAwards are now in their 13th year but there are many other awards:

- legal, such as www.legaltechnologyawards.co.uk/
- national, such as the Dell Small Business Excellence Awards <http://www.dell.co.uk/ceaward>
- even local; there are, for example, web awards schemes for Brighton & Hove, Hertfordshire, and Hampshire.

Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) involves use of a range of techniques to ensure your site appears near the top of "natural" search results (as opposed to sponsored links).

An increasing number of experts offer to help you with search-engine operation, and chambers are increasingly interested in the potential for SEO. Why is this?

How important is Search Engine Optimisation?

At first sight, SEO might seem to be of less importance to barristers than to solicitors. While solicitors might need clients to be able to locate them through searches for "personal injury lawyer" etc., solicitors would be unlikely to use Google to find a barrister.

But there are four reasons why prominence in topic-related search results might be important:

- Client choice: Informed clients – senior business people, or clients involved in high-profile or leading-edge cases – might want to contribute their own ideas about choice of counsel rather than leave it entirely to their solicitors
- Direct access: In November 2008, the Bar Council ran an Access to the Bar awareness day for would-be users, the media and opinion-formers. This channel may become a more important source of referrals in future.
- Solicitor awareness: Appearance in search results by solicitors for specialist material will help your reputation.
- Specialist markets: If you are active in markets without the traditional dependence on the instructing solicitor in the UK, for example, arbitration services, international work, good search rankings could be vital in attracting clients.

What are the key SEO techniques?

Techniques to optimise your website performance in search-engine rankings include:

- When re-designing a web-site, or creating a new site, use search-engine-friendly technology to make it as easy as possible for search-engines to access and analyse your content

- Also, for new sites, manually submit the site to search engines
- Identify and use keywords effectively – as discussed below
- Describe your services clearly in your content, highlighting your unique characteristics
- Develop links from other relevant websites to your own
- Update your website regularly.

SEO is portrayed as technically complex and has become a growth business, but there is plenty of support for those who want to try for themselves: <http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters> provides a DIY SEO toolkit; <http://www.google.co.uk/webmasters/> includes tools to check and enhance your website's performance in searches.

What are "keywords"?

"Keywords" on your website underpin your search-engine ranking. Do yours match those your intended audience are using for their searches?

Making effective use of keywords involves:

1. Think about the people who you want to visit your website
2. Identify *keywords* – the search terms results for which you would expect your site to be listed.
3. Use these keywords throughout your content – generally, the higher up the page, the better - and in the page title

The guidance on <http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters> and <http://www.google.co.uk/webmasters/>, mentioned above, provide more guidance on choosing, using, and evaluating your keywords.

You can evaluate and select keywords by using a keyword research tool like www.wordtracker.com, which will tell you which terms people use when they search for services like yours.

This tool gives invaluable data in the form of a "100-day count," which reveals how many times a specific term (keyword) or combination of terms (keyword phrase) was used in all Internet searches in a period of 100 days. Importantly, it also provides a "competition" count, showing how many times the term appeared in competing Web sites.

"Metatags" use keywords and were formerly an important way of labelling web-pages for the benefit of search engines, to help improve search ranking, although less important now. Metatags for any website can be revealed from your browser toolbar by selecting "view" then "page source" in your browser tool bar. As well the html coding for the page, the information will include the "meta name description" and "meta name keywords" and these may give you ideas for your own site.

LawComms can help you devise and apply keywords to your website, to help maximise your profile in search results.

SEO techniques to avoid

Some techniques are referred to as 'black-hat' search engine optimisation techniques, which search engine operators consider to be attempts to manipulate their indexes. These are to be avoided because, if they are identified by a search engine, the site using them may be completely excluded from search results. "Black-hat" techniques include:

- * websites that automatically redirect visitors to pages
- * hidden text on pages
- * pages with nothing but keywords and links to other websites
- * content intended only for search engines
- * links from websites that replicate content belonging to other sites.

Link-building

In-bound links from other websites to your own are an effective way to increase your profile in search results – an important SEO technique. To identify which sites already link to your site, go to www.yahoo.co.uk and, in the search box, type "Link:" (without the quotation marks) followed by the web address you want to research.

Many agencies offer link-building services, promising for example to obtain listings for your site with 2,000 directories. However, for search engines, the quality and relevance of referring sites are more important than the quantity of links.

"Black hat" techniques are used by the less scrupulous to manipulate search engines; these include links from "link farms", web sites that only includes a list of links to other websites. It is claimed that, if use of these techniques are identified by a search engine, the site may be banned.

The guidance on <http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters> and <http://www.google.co.uk/webmasters/>, mentioned above, explain link-building techniques. But you can also build your own links with partner sites, legal and business directories etc.

How do you choose where to build online links and collaboration? Begin by thinking methodically about where your potential clients might go online to find a specialist, get updates, or liaise with colleagues. Identify relevant membership groups, specialist web-pages, or directories. Then make sure your details and links are included on those sites and that you are regularly contributing.

For example, Emplaw's site features a call: "Barristers - ensure Solicitors find you". If you subscribe, the site will provide online links from mentions in commentary and case summaries to the barristers involved:

www.emplaw.co.uk/

Another example, also in the employment law field, is Workplace Law Network:

www.workplacelaw.net/

And check that you have an up-to-date entry on Delia Venables' listings of chambers www.venables.co.uk/bar.htm and in her legal resources pages.

LawComms can help you research and implement inbound links to your website, drawing the attention of visitors to other sites, and improving your position in search engine results.

Pay-per-click advertising

In Google and elsewhere, advertisers can create advertisements that appear as sponsored links when a user sees the results of a search that includes key words that the advertiser has picked.

20 Essex Street has a sponsored link that appears in search results for "human rights lawyer"; the results do not list any solicitors or barristers in the "natural" results.

Google makes it temptingly easy to set up advertising: <http://adwords.google.com/select/Login>. You pay each time someone clicks on your link, and so the data on the effectiveness of your campaign requires careful monitoring.

Display advertising, pop-ups etc

Display banners probably appeal to traditional advertisers because they look so similar to advertising in printed newspapers and magazines. But are they effective?

A banner is unlikely to prompt more than a small percentage of people seeing the advertisement to click through to visit the advertiser's site, unless it includes a clear and attractive reason for a direct response. To judge effectiveness, advertisers will need to have systems to log how many people do click through.

As with print advertising, online banners can also contribute to brand recognition.

One site used by chambers for banner advertising is, of course, Delia Venables' listing of bar websites: <http://www.venables.co.uk/bar.htm>.

Online campaigns

Online public interest campaigns offer many opportunities for posting comments, participation or provision of advice and support.

Family law practitioner Diane Roome launched her own campaign, using Downing Street's online petition system to call on the Prime Minister "to reject the Legal Services Commissions proposed fixed fees for Legal Aid in family cases" (you have until 20.3.2010 to sign her petition):

<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/familylegalaid>

<http://www.biltonhammond.co.uk/popUps/DAR.htm>

Your next steps

To take full advantage of the power of e-marketing, begin with a methodical review of your marketing – online and offline – and especially your website. Think which e-marketing techniques might help you connect more effectively online with your clients, potential clients, and other audiences. Summarise your goals and planned activities in a succinct e-marketing plan. Inform and involve your colleagues. Designate someone with the time, energy, and authority to oversee the process, and begin implementation. Keep monitoring the results and then, from time to time, review and update the plan. Ensure you have the resources to support implementation.

Gerald Newman runs LawComms, www.LawComms.com, which specialises in marketing communications for lawyers. Gerald formerly practised as a solicitor, launched major communications and online projects for the Law Society, and was Practice Director with Cloisters Chambers in the Temple.

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