The Changing Playing Field for Lawyers

As founder of the exclusive directories for family and criminal lawyers – Aussie Divorce and the Criminal Lawyers Directory – I am in a unique position when it comes to speaking to a wide variety of lawyers around the country.

From these discussions, it’s clear to me that many lawyers are struggling with rapid changes in an increasingly competitive and difficulty industry. And it clearly centres on how to stand out from the crowd to secure new clients given the domination of the internet.

The internet is the greatest change on the playing field. In the past, lawyers could rely on clients phoning them directly for advice. Now, clients go straight to Google first. Whether we like it or not, the internet is providing most of the information that consumers need - short of representation in court where the services of a good lawyer remains critical.

We already know consumer behaviour in searching for information is extensive. Even we, as exclusive family and criminal lawyer’s directories, have to work hard to provide thousands of pages of information that clients are most likely to search for and discover.

So, the biggest question from lawyers is: What do we do?

Your firm’s website – the new window-front to your business – is the most important place to start. Is it up-to-date? Is your message on your website properly and clearly selling the services you’re providing?
Are there too many services displayed in a way that will confuse and scare off a potential client?
Are there so few services that clients might feel you’re not capable of providing all the skills they’ll need?

The reality is, many law firms treat their website as an after-thought. But, having a good website and managing search engine optimisations SEO, are not things you can effectively do without the help of a specialist if you want to better direct clients to your business.

The next issue is as important – response times to both online and direct phone inquiries.
Few people now ring a lawyer on a whim. A call usually follows research on the internet. And, given people’s increasing impatience, you often only have one shot at winning a client. However, it’s clear from speaking to many clients that the thing they hate most from that first phone call is being interrogated by someone who can’t help them immediately. It’s critical, then, not to interrogate a potential client but to put them through to the relevant legal person as soon as you can. Having key people on rotation who can take a call immediately is a clear and useful strategy. When people are surfing the internet, you’re rarely the only one who’ll receive a call.

Social networking is the next area. Many lawyers are adopting social networking because they think everyone’s doing it. Often, though, they don’t understand how it works or how to make the most of it and, importantly, how to effectively integrate it with search engine optimisation. Social networking works on the same principles you used to build your contact base of friends and colleagues as you were going through school and university and throughout your working career. Today social networking platforms such as Facebook and Google+ enable you to build the momentum of what your business is achieving. These give you an incredible ability to reach a larger audience and to communicate with them.

Networking is another factor many lawyers underestimate. In my early years of real estate, I realised that the importance of effective networking often centred on the people you’re employing in your target market. Do they have a local network base that first your demographic so you’re targeting the right clients in your area of law and
locality. Business is hard to come by – there is little point hiring people with networks unrelated to the one you’re chasing.

**Marketing is one of the areas least understood by many lawyers.** Online marketing is one of the most affordable and accessible to many legal firms. It’s also becoming the hardest to dominate because so many people can now do it. So, how do you stand out from the masses online?

It’s essential to have to have multi-layered approach, which means spending more, and spending more effectively. If you expect a single approach to work then it’s doomed to fail. Many successful businesses have a rule of spending between 5 and 7 percent on marketing. But, many make the mistake of looking at gross income – again, marketing becomes an after-thought. The most successful firms have business plans, and project what they should be making with the lawyers they have on hand – and then spend 5 to 7 percent of that projected income. That should then be divided between branding of the business and online marketing including things such as Google adwords.

As founder of the exclusive and most successful online legal directories – Aussie Divorce and the Criminal Lawyers Directory – these strategies come directly from years of valuable experience.

For more information and advice, contact Alan Weiss

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