

The Top 10 Law Firm Blog Best Practices

By Joshua Fruchter

For any lawyers still debating whether or not to start blogging, it's time to get off the fence. Research shows that journalists and business executives turn regularly to Google and other search engines to locate experts on particular topics. This makes blogs the perfect tool for individual attorneys looking to develop their reputations for thought leadership in "niche" areas of the law. To that end, this article reviews the top 10 law firm blog best practices.

1. COMPOSE UNIQUE, ACCURATE AND CATCHY TAGS

In its SEO (Search Engine Optimization) guidelines, Google stresses the importance of crafting and publishing unique meta, title and description tags for each page of a website or blog to help highlight for Google the focus of the page for purposes of indexing and displaying it in search results. Consistent with Google's guidelines, SEO experts polled by SEOMoz consider keyword use in title tags to be one of the top five SEO factors.

Catchy title and description tags also directly influence the percentage of searchers who will click through to your blog posts when they are displayed in a search result. That is because Google displays the title and description tag for blog posts in search results. The title tag generally serves as the hyperlinked text in the search result, while the description tag is generally displayed under the hyperlink to provide searchers with

Joshua Fruchter is president and co-founder of eLawMarketing, a provider of online marketing services to law firms and other professional service providers. He can be contacted at 866-833-6245 or at josh@elawmarketing.com. The firm's website is at www.elawmarketing.com and its blog is at www.lawycastand.com.

a better understanding of the content on the destination page.

As such, because they are displayed to search engine users, catchy title and description tags using relevant keywords can boost clickthroughs to your blogs from search engines. Conversely, poorly written (*e.g.*, vague, incomprehensible) title and description tags discourage searchers from clicking through to your blog, and thus squander the benefit of high search-engine rankings.

2. HYPERLINK KEYWORDS TO RELATED EARLIER POSTS

Experts agree that linking from one post to earlier related posts using keyword rich "anchor text" (*i.e.*, the text comprising the link) can provide important SEO benefits. Effectively, the linking page passes some "link juice" to the destination page, and thus boosts the visibility of the destination page with Google, which associates the keywords in the "hyperlink" with the destination page, thereby boosting that page's search-engine visibility in response to relevant queries. At the same time, linking to earlier content is useful to readers since it directs to additional material on the subject in which they are interested.

3. USE SOFTWARE THAT GENERATES SEARCH ENGINE-FRIENDLY URLS

Each blog post should have its own unique URL, and the end of that URL should be composed solely of keywords. For example: www.marylandcondolaw.com/implicit-warranties-for-new-condominiums/. In contrast, with other blogs, you may find URLs including numbers and/or question marks (such as "www.lawfirmblog.com?postid=5"), indicating that the software is pulling the blog post from a database. Search engines are not as "fond" of URLs with that kind of structure as compared with URLs composed solely of keywords. To compose search engine-friendly URLs, you'll need to use blogging software that supports this and other SEO best practices (such as #1 and #2 above). Our favorite is WordPress, one of the leading global blogging platforms.

One advantage of WordPress is that it is "open source" software, which means that the programming code is not proprietary, and can be modified and enhanced by any experienced WordPress programmer. As a result, because there are literally tens of thousands of programmers worldwide working to extend WordPress' capabilities, it is fairly easy to find "plugins" (*i.e.*, snippets of functional code) to support virtually any type of custom functionality you may wish to add to your blog.

4. SUPPORT SHARING OF BLOG CONTENT ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

A key goal of your blog should be to promote sharing and broad distribution of your content across multiple channels. This can be accomplished in several ways. First, deploying a "social sharing" button in the footer of each blog post encourages readers to share interesting content with their networks on social media sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, or via e-mail. Second, deploying an RSS feed allows readers to remain continually updated (via an RSS reader or via e-mail) about each new blog post as it is published. This encourages repeat visits as well as expanded distribution, since you are constantly placing new site content in front of your readers that they may share with their networks. Third, RSS feeds support display of your blog content on third-party websites such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Thus, for example, if attorneys at your firm publish blogs, links to recent blog posts can be inserted in these attorneys' profiles on LinkedIn and Twitter, and on the firm's Facebook page (if it has one).

5. SEEK INBOUND LINKS FROM TOPICALLY RELATED BLOGS/WEBSITES

The number of inbound links from topically related sites is another key criterion used by Google to rank sites in search results. Accordingly, your firm should aggressively seek to increase the number of inbound links from other topically related sites to its blogs (ideally, the "anchor texts" in these links should be descriptive of the destination page (instead of using a phrase like "click here")).

continued on page 4

Marketing Tech

continued from page 3

Two simple strategies for increasing inbound links are: 1) the firm should clearly link from each blog to all of the firm's other blogs, and from the firm's website (and any other online presence such as JD Supra) to the blogs. 2) Getting blogs listed in "law blog" directories secures inbound links from those resources. An added benefit of adding your blog to these directories is that many bloggers browse these sites looking for new and interesting blogs in their area of expertise. They may find and start following your blog, reference some of your posts, and thereby provide you with additional inbound links.

Here are links to submission pages for leading law firm blog directories:

- www.abajournal.com/blawgs/submit.
- www.lexmonitor.com/faq#a5.
- blawgsearch.justia.com/suggestblawg.
- www.uslaw.com/?action=pag&page=network#addblog.
- www.myhq.com/public/b/1/blawgs/.

6. LINK TO TOPICALLY RELATED BLOGS AND WEBSITES

Outbound links to related content on third-party blogs and websites help further define the community to which your blog belongs. Linking to quality, topically related pages also builds trust in your domain. For example, if you are publishing an intellectual property law blog, linking to other IP law blogs (subject to competitive considerations), as well as "resources" such as the USPTO website, might be considered. One popular tool for linking to third-party blogs is the blogroll. This is essentially a list of "favorite" blogs that the authors of a blog recommend to their readers. Adding other blogs to

your blogroll can trigger reciprocity — *i.e.*, these blogs will, in turn, add your blog to their blogrolls. This can help build your inbound links as per best practice #5 above.

7. ENCOURAGE READER ENGAGEMENT

Most blogs encourage their readers to submit comments to posts. These comments can (and should) be moderated, and then published. Comments help add "keywords" to your post, and thus further highlight the focus of a post for Google. Comments also help readers feel they are engaged in a dialogue with the blogger, and thus promote greater reader engagement. There are other mechanisms to promote further reader engagement with your firm. For example, in a sidebar, one might include a subscription form for e-mail communications such as alerts and newsletters. Thus, a blog can help promote your e-mail marketing program. Adding an online contact form to the blog helps encourage readers to submit inquiries. Finally, online registration forms can help maximize attendance at firm events.

8. MIX 'SHORT' AND 'LONG' POSTS

It's a rule of thumb that the more frequently one posts to a blog, the greater the likelihood the blog will enjoy higher search-engine rankings for its primary keywords. Of course, the required frequency of posting to obtain high search-engine rankings will depend on the level of competition from other related blogs and websites for the relevant keywords. As such, to achieve high search engine rankings, a blog with a broader focus will need to publish far more frequently than a blog focused on a highly esoteric niche. To maintain publishing frequency, it is completely acceptable to regularly publish "short" posts (even just two-three paragraphs) comment-

ing on developments initially reported by third-party websites (such as mainstream media sites) or other blogs. A good target to aim for is daily posting of "short" posts (or least a few times a week). If you cannot maintain such a pace, consider retaining a blog "ghostwriter" who can compose "short posts" for your review prior to publishing. Complementing more frequent short posts should be longer posts providing more detailed, original, insightful analysis. Such original "long" posts will help build credibility with peers and the media, which generally gravitate toward blogs with meaningful expert analysis.

9. HOST YOUR BLOG AT A CUSTOM DOMAIN

In order to maximize the SEO benefits of a blog, the best practice is to host the blog at its own custom domain (*e.g.*, www.marylandcondolaw.com). This will allow the blog to develop its own ranking within Google's index in connection with a narrow topic instead of getting lost within the broader range of content at the website domain. Hosting a blog and website at separate domains also enables both the blog and website to earn "inbound link" credit with Google by linking to each other.

10. MONITOR SITE TRAFFIC

After your blog launches, it's important to monitor the sources of traffic to your blog (such as search engines or third-party referrals) so you can understand what content and search engine strategies are working, and tweak your blogging strategy accordingly. Key tools for this purpose are Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools. Make sure to activate accounts for each, and then have your developer insert the tracking code provided by Google into your website to begin monitoring.



Hiring Consultants

continued from page 2

you do is negotiate the contract. Some things to keep in mind as you negotiate:

- Retainers vs. hourly or per project fees: Some consultants

only work on a retainer basis. If that's the case with the consultant you want to hire, tell him/her you would like to start with a three- six-month trial program and then review achievements at the end of that time before you commit for a longer relationship. If you can get him

to do an initial discrete project initially that's either billed hourly or as a flat fee, that will provide you with an idea of how efficiently he works.

- Length of the contract: Be careful not to lock yourself

continued on page 8