



Working the Web

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How to use your website to differentiate your company

Have you ever searched online for a particular product or service and not been able to tell what makes one offering different or better than another? As we research online for our clients, we notice an unfortunate sameness of website look/feel and messaging within given industries or professions.

Search for “civil litigation attorney,” for example. Click on the first few firms in the results page. The main images in those sites will almost certainly include a shelf of law books, a scales of justice, a tall building or skyline with a bridge (why?), a chunk of an imposing government building like a courthouse, a lawyer or lawyers at a desk. The messaging will speak of personal attention, effective and powerful representation and other ideas that don’t deviate much from one site to the next.

We’re not picking on lawyers here. You can find lack of differentiation in medicine, technology, real estate, financial services – almost any field. But, with only seconds to convince website visitors to stick around and learn more before bouncing off, it’s important to instantly differentiate your firm – both visually and in your content.

This takes some courage as it means stepping out of the comfort zone of industry sameness. But such a risk offers a huge opportunity to stand out in the crowd.

It’s not about you

In both design and messaging, keep your audience first in mind. They’re human beings who prefer to deal with people, not companies. Speak directly to them in understandable language. Lose industry jargon. Stop talking about your business from your own perspective and look at it from theirs.

What is it about your firm that’s more appealing than the competition? Believe it or not, the question “Who are we?” is more important to answer than “What do we do?” Address your audience’s needs and concerns.

Explain how you’ll help.

It takes some upfront research and brainstorming to make the necessary shift in marketing perspective to quickly attract and engage visitors. But it’s well worth the effort.

Make design human, too

Here are some design tips to draw visitors in, help them find what they’re looking for and encourage them to stay.

Use more photos with people, where they seem to be making eye contact with the viewer.

Choose colors that actually appear in nature and are not too “in your face,” i.e. bright red or orange.

If many businesses in your industry are using the same colors – law firms seem to like blue and gold or forest green – choose a more creative color palette or at least a zesty accent color.

Put navigation in logical places and keep it consistent on each page. What if every time you got into your car the controls were in new places?

Avoid difficult-to-read design elements – like white type on a black background.

Match design to the audience. A young, sports-oriented group likes more color, motion and excitement. More conservative audiences prefer things centered and balanced.

You can get out of the mold and still be professional and appropriate. If you're not sure about how a design or message will play, you can always test it with clients and friends before implementing it. Identifying, demonstrating and communicating your business' unique qualities online provides greater value to those you serve and contributes to success.

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