



# A Lawyer's Guide to Online Marketing

A Comprehensive Look at Everything  
Your Firm Needs to Grow

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## Marketing has changed

Marketing your firm is a different beast today than it was 20, 10, or even five years ago. Whereas previously firms were jostling for prime Yellow Pages placement (“AAAA Divorce Attorneys,” anyone?), the internet has revolutionized how clients find and choose legal representation, and with dramatic results.

According to a 2012 study, 76% of adults used online resources to find an attorney in the previous year.<sup>1</sup> The implications of this shift are huge. For example, law firms often have little insight into the word-of-mouth advertising shared by past clients; whereas, the information your potential clients can find online is almost completely within your control.

While digital marketing may seem daunting to a newcomer, the key is to break down the essential elements that ultimately comprise your law firm’s digital

footprint, and we’ve put together a comprehensive resource to get your started. In this guide, we’ll cover the following topics:



**Reputation management**



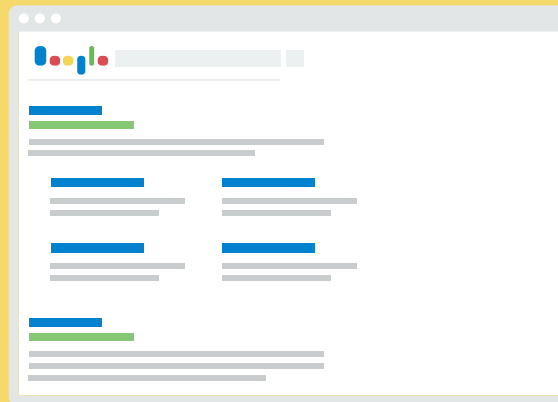
**Blogging**



**Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**



**Social media**



1. Lexis Nexis, Martindale-Hubbell. How Today’s Consumers Really Search for an Attorney. 2012



# Reputation management

Josh King



## The shift to online reviews

As word-of-mouth reviews shift from private offline conversations to a very public online context, lawyers are in the same situation today as hotels were in a decade ago—facing the prospect of widespread online user reviews, with the concern that they could potentially crater their business.

## Facing the inevitable

Hotels—like restaurants and consumer products—have learned to live with, and even leverage, the phenomenon of online reviews. While no system of review is perfect, the now ubiquitous “reputation ecosystem” is a medium that helps consumers and clients crowdsource opinions, ratings, and judgements—allowing them to make more informed decisions on how to spend their money, or in our case, who to trust with their legal needs.

Lawyers would be wise to recognize the inevitability of this trend as an opportunity. Being hyperfocused on the potential for negative and phony reviews can cause paralysis and failure to adapt to this massive change in how clients are researching lawyers.

According to a recent study, two-thirds of consumers are more likely to hire a lawyer with online reviews. For consumers aged 18 to 35, 81% are more likely to rely on lawyers with online reviews.<sup>2</sup> Taken further, other research shows that 88% of people trust online reviews as much as they trust recommendations from personal contacts.<sup>3</sup>

It’s also important to recognize this fact: every attorney—even the best, most attentive, empathetic, and outstanding in our ranks—will receive a negative review one day.

The law is an uncertain business, dealing with stressful matters where success often means achieving the best possible bad outcome. And clients, being human, are sometimes saddled with unreasonable expectations. Over time, and given a sufficient volume of reviews, the

2. FindLaw, Thomson Reuters. Consumers More Likely to Hire Lawyers With Online Reviews. April 19, 2016  
3. BrightLocal. Local Consumer Review Survey 2014. 2014.

overall tenor of the reviews for a practice should paint an accurate picture. But any given review may widely miss the mark. Accepting this reality is the first step in managing your online reputation.

Done well, reputation management strategies can help lawyers get ahead of the potential harm a bad review can cause, and they can often build positive momentum for how potential clients see your firm. With that, there are three primary tactics that attorneys and law firms can use to get ahead of this trend and effectively manage their online reputations.

### 1. Make it a habit to ask for reviews

Smart businesses realize that the surest way to inoculate themselves from a negative review (and to maximize the “free market research” aspect of online reviews) is to ensure that they get a wealth of regular feedback from clients. They make it a habit to ask for reviews. From postpurchase emails, to survey instructions on the bottom of receipts, to cards handed out in a medical clinic waiting room, sellers of goods and services in virtually all industries are proactively seeking out reviews. While it may feel strange to ask, it’s worth making it part of your file-closing procedure to actively ask for feedback.

Avvo and other sites have tools to make it easy to do so. And lest you think that only the cranks want to vent their spleen in online reviews, it’s actually the opposite: Happy customers are more likely to leave feedback. This is particularly true where the services are high-cost or high-stress like legal services.

The only caveat is that most states have rules against offering anything of value in exchange for a good review. Be sure to read up on your state’s advertising rules to make sure your request is compliant.

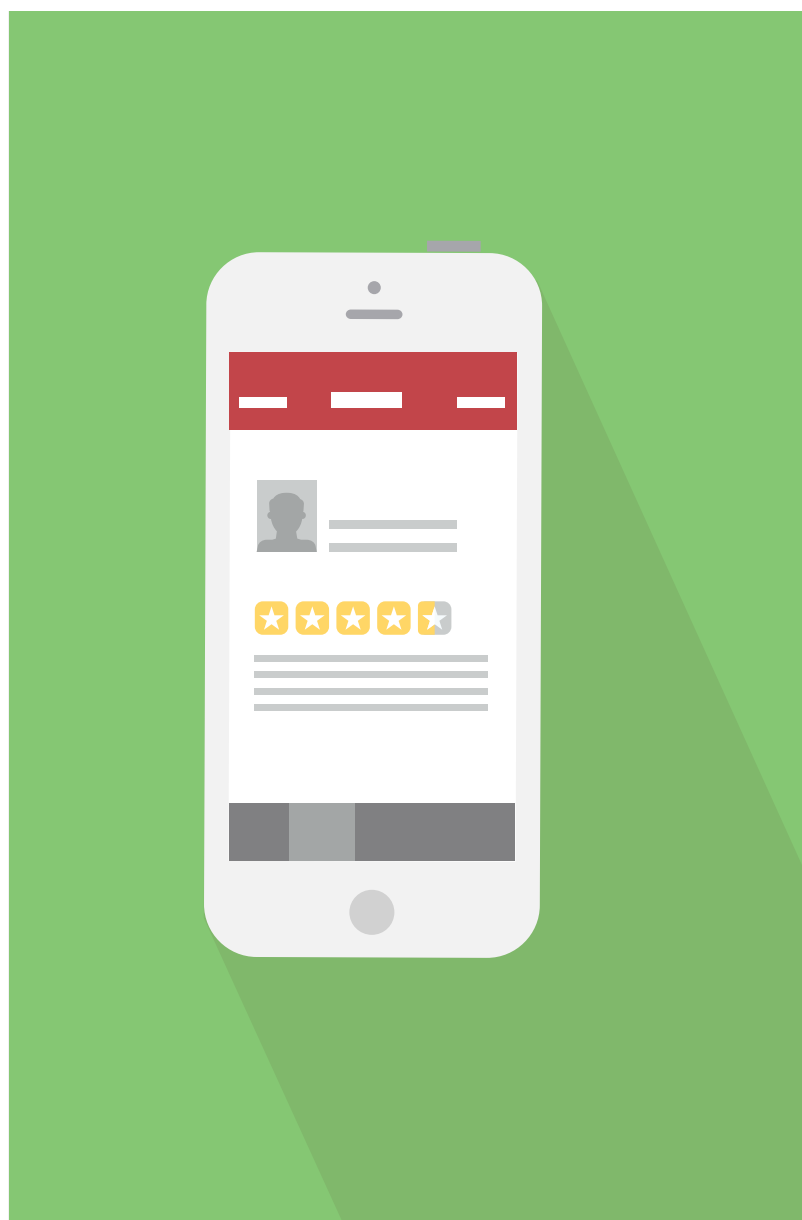
### 2. Build a wall of content

There is an old advertising adage that when it comes to expensive purchases: “long copy sells.”

This concept originated in the “Mad Men” days, but it remains true today. A person who is prepared to spend serious money wants as much information as possible. Such purchasers are far less likely to respond to buzzwords or taglines. Not only can a series of reviews essentially create your long copy for you, your reviewers will often have the best, most credible insight into what makes your services valuable.

Flip this notion on its head, and consider the effect of having no reviews at all. When you research products on Amazon, hotels on TripAdvisor, or restaurants on Yelp, what does an absence of reviews make you think?

Building a wall of content through regular solicitation of reviews, blog posts, articles, online profiles, etc., ensures that any potential client researching your services will have that “long copy”—a wealth of information to rely upon in making their decision to retain you.



### 3. Comment on negative reviews

It may sound counterintuitive, but a negative review can be a golden marketing opportunity.

How? Because you can post a comment in response to the review.

Done correctly, a comment communicates responsiveness, attention to feedback, and strength of character. The trick is to ignore the lawyerly impulse to directly refute the substance of the review. A far more effective approach is to write the response with future readers—potential clients—in mind. Think of what they'd want to hear: that you care about feedback even after you've been paid, that you want to make things right for your customers, that you have compassion for their situations. Then invest adequate time and attention in creating a message that takes the high road.

A poorly-handled response to a negative review is much worse than no response at all. It makes you look thin-skinned and defensive. Worse, if you argue and reveal client confidences (or even potentially harmful non-confidences), you may be subject to discipline.

## Reviews offer insight

By actively using the first two tactics, you will be well on your way to managing your online reputation and inoculating yourself from that inevitable negative review. But keep in mind that client reviews can actually be much more than simply a necessary evil to be managed.

Online feedback is free research into how your practice is perceived by clients. It can validate the things you're doing right, and expose blind spots in your approach to delivering client service. In the past, this opportunity to learn was nonexistent or incredibly expensive to undertake. Rather than just managing it, embrace the window into your practice that regular online feedback can give you.





# Blogging

Kevin O'Keefe

## Build your business online

Lawyers get their best work via strong relationships and positive word-of-mouth reputation, which is a context that hasn't changed much with the advent of the internet. What has changed, however, is that new forms of digital communication have accelerated the means for building a lawyer's relationships and reputation. What may have previously taken a lawyer 15 years to achieve in professional and business development is now being accomplished in two or three via blogging.

Here are some tips to make your blogging worthwhile.

### 1. Develop a blog strategy

In and of itself, starting a blog is not a strategy; it's a tactic. The strategic part comes from the objectives you plan to achieve with the blog, what you include, how you go about it, and what you measure and do with those metrics.

When defining your blog strategy, be sure to consider the following:

- What are you passionate about? Really. Passion means everything in blogging. When you care about your subject matter, it translates to the page—and it will be easier for you to write. Be aspirational, throw your heart over the bar, and let your body follow. If other lawyers are developing local and national reputations as a result of blogging, why can't you?
- What's your niche? Broadly focused blogs are challenging to market because they have much more competition. Niches do not restrict your practice. They open doors. Niches lead to riches. Wisconsin Bad Faith Claims, California Child Custody, and Tennessee Microbrew and Distillery Law are doors unopened. Decide what area you want to excel in and be known for.

- Who's your audience? Clients? Prospective clients? Referral sources? How about the important groups that influence them? Mainstream and trade media, other bloggers, association leaders, publishers, and conference coordinators are all potential readers—and advocates—for you.
- How will you measure success? It's not just about traffic and search engine results. Am I growing my network? Am I becoming a better lawyer? Am I establishing a reputation as a "go-to" lawyer in my niche and/or locale? Am I procuring not only clients, but also high-quality clients?

## 2. Create the right setup

Some lawyers like to tinker, some don't. If you're not the tinkering type, get help and support from a professional. Though WordPress is theoretically free, so is rewiring your house.

When building your blog, you ideally want it to be a key feature to your business website. The reason for this is that the content you write for your blog is what will help build your authority as a legal practitioner—and your authority in the eyes of search engines like Google. We'll get into SEO in more detail later on in this guide, but for now, think of your blog content as the means to which you can engage audiences you wouldn't otherwise be able to find.

That said, while your blog content should be prominent, your business credentials and details of services, including your contact information, should also be readily available. [Read more about setting up your website.](#)

Also, be sure to design and develop for mobile first, desktop second. A mobile-optimized blog, preferably with a responsive design, is critical. In 2016, mobile app usage officially surpassed desktop usage worldwide.<sup>4</sup> People, especially influencers, are consuming and sharing content on tablets and smartphones. A simple and professional design with an eye towards publishing is key.

4. StatCounter GlobalStats. Mobile and tablet internet usage exceeds desktop for first time worldwide. November 1, 2016.



## Blogging quick tips

- Write conversationally and with personality. This is a blog, not a legal alert or article.
- Write on general news and apply it to your niche. If a hurricane is hitting the East Coast, write about how HR professionals treat those missed workdays.
- Avoid long block paragraphs. People scan on the web. Use short paragraphs (one to three sentences) and use bullets where you can.
- Block-quote sources. Use subheads to break up sections. Don't worry about exact word count, but a post as brief as 400 to 500 words can be sufficient.
- Use images for every post. They show personality, and posts with larger images at the top are more likely to be shared on social networks like Facebook or LinkedIn.
- Keep titles short (around 65 characters) but descriptive. Your titles determine how your posts get indexed on Google and how they are displayed in RSS readers. Short and engaging titles get shared most on social media.

### 3. Listen and be proactive

Blogging involves authentic audience engagement that requires you to listen first, talk second.

Set up listening tools to follow influential bloggers, reporters, and news publications. In addition to these sources, follow subjects relevant to your niche. Some listening tools for lawyers to consider are [Feedly](#) and [Flipboard](#).

Reference and share what you have read while providing your own insight and commentary. Joining the conversation and demonstrating that you are tracking developments will help you grow a following. However, reporting on litigation, legislation, regulations, and news stories won't cut it; you need to add value. Readers want to know what's inside your head.

- What's your take?
- What does it mean for them?
- What's coming?

Depending on your niche and firm, be an advocate.

Immigration, food safety, medical malpractice, IP litigation, and divorce lawyers have developed large followings because they take stands. They champion the cause of the people they want to represent.

If you are not going to engage in any other way, at least answer questions from clients and prospective clients. For every person with a question, there are hundreds more asking the same thing. Answering questions shows that you're listening and you care. You'll build trust—and you'll get discovered on Google by people asking those questions in search.

As always, however, be mindful of the type of information you are providing, and implications that could follow. [ABA Formal Opinion 10–457](#) discusses the possibility of creating inadvertent client-lawyer relationships via web communications. In other words, know when it's better to save details for a formal meeting.<sup>5</sup>



5. ABA Standing Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility. Formal Opinion 10–457: Lawyer Websites. August 5, 2010.

Harvey, Christina Vassiliou, Mac R. McCoy, Brook Sneath. "10 Tips for Avoiding Ethical Lapses When Using Social Media." Business Law Today. American Bar Association: January 2014. 6.





If you reach one person, who then shares your insight with others, you've reached a highly targeted audience.

#### 4. Think about your audience

Effective posts are written with an audience in mind, even if it's an audience of one. Make up that one person in your mind when you start to blog. Talk with them as a late night talk radio host might.

Who do you want to know you exist? With whom do you want to build a relationship? What groups or industries do you want an in with? Start a conversation with them. If you reach one person, who then shares your insight with others, you've reached a highly targeted (and potentially influential) audience.

Follow up with a soft touch to the influential bloggers and reporters you reference and cite. "As a courtesy to you, I wanted you to know I shared your post/story on ABC with my readers on the XYZ blog (sharing a link). Keep up the great work."

You'll get a "thank you." You might even get an opportunity to connect on LinkedIn or an opportunity to meet. How many of your competitors are meeting reporters from the local business journal for lunch?

#### 5. Build social media equity

Your blog needs to get published on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. And preferably, not by you.

But before you can expect others to share your content, you need to share the posts and stories of others. This demonstrates that you care about more than just yourself, and it helps establish trust. People will be more receptive to your posts on social networks, and will share your posts for you, if you've made the effort to show an interest in them.

It's also worth noting that the context of social media is different for lawyers. [Get acquainted with what lawyers should—and should not—do.](#)

Blogging is the great equalizer for lawyers who have not had their day in the sun—yet. Do it right, and you'll get there.



# Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Gyi Tsakalakis



## Ensure clients can find you when they need you

We referenced earlier in this guide that 76% of adults used online resources to find an attorney in 2012. And, with technology adoption rates increasing, this number will only continue to grow. The question is, how do potential clients use the internet to find legal services? In most cases, search engines (i.e. Google, Bing, and Yahoo) are the easiest, most accessible means to finding information.

Lawyers who understand how people use search engines to research lawyers, and to find answers to their legal questions, can earn meaningful attention and new clients.

Here are some of the ways that lawyers can optimize their presence in online search results to earn meaningful attention and demonstrate their knowledge, skill, and experience to the people who are searching for them.

## How search engines work

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of how to improve your visibility within search results, let's take a moment to discuss how search engines work.

One of the best places to learn about search engines is to examine how the world's most popular search engine, Google, works. Here's a look at some key search engine terminology, and how they apply to you getting found.

### 1. Crawling

Search engines use software called "crawlers" to find web pages. These crawlers read pages and follow links to find new pages. They go from link to link and log data about those webpages on Google's servers. Whether they be pages on your firm's website, a legal blog, or other online profiles, in order for these pages to appear in search engine results, they must get properly crawled.

## 2. Indexing

Search engines create an index of all the pages they crawl. A search index is similar to a traditional index that you might find in a book. However, search engine indices are much more complex and contain a lot more information than traditional ones. When users type, or speak, a query to Google, the search engine uses its index to return results.

If your pages aren't being properly indexed, they won't be properly served up in search result pages. If this is the case, you can consult [Google](#) to find possible solutions; though, this may be cause to consult a professional.

## 3. Results

If your pages have been properly crawled and indexed, they are eligible to be served in Google's search results. But merely being eligible to appear in these results and actually appearing in results are two very different things. Search engines use many factors to decide which pages should be delivered to satisfy a searcher's query. These factors can be divided into two general buckets:

- On-page factors: Ranking signals that your pages send to search engines.
- Off-page factors: Ranking signals that the rest of the web sends to search engines.

When we look to "optimize" a website for search, we're dealing with issues that fall into one of these categories.

## On-page ranking factors

The on-page factors include all the "stuff" you can do on your pages to help search engines understand what your pages are about. Some of the most important on-page factors include:

- URLs and site architecture: These site elements should help convey a logical semblance as to what your site is about.
- Title tags: These elements should indicate what their associated pages are about, while keeping copy short and concise (65 characters or less).
- Body content: Your page content should present useful, relevant information about the topic discussed.
- Internal linking structure: Ideally, related topics should link to each other, which can help "point" search engines, and users, to the most relevant information for certain topics on your site.
- Page load speed: Ensure users aren't waiting for your site to load. Having to wait encourages users to leave your site, which indicates to Google that people aren't interested in your site.

On-page optimizations are necessary, but not always sufficient, for appearing prominently in search engine results. This is especially true for more competitive search queries. This is where off-page ranking factors come into play.



## Off-page ranking factors

These factors include all of the “stuff” outside of your website that search engines use to evaluate the relevance of your site pages. When we talk about off-page factors, we’re typically looking at the number, type, and quality of hyperlinks, or “backlinks,” your site receives from other websites and social media.

Links to a page are like “votes” for that page in the eyes of search engines. But not all of these link-votes are weighted equally.

Links from sites and pages that are topically relevant and authoritative carry significantly more weight than those that aren’t. For example, a link from the news site [cnn.com](#) is a much stronger link-vote than a link from a recently created Blogger account.

There are seemingly limitless ways to acquire links to your pages. One of the most obvious (and the one you’ll hear most often) is to simply create great content that people actually want to link to. Of course, this is often easier said than done.

However, it’s also worth noting that even the greatest content can benefit from activities geared toward getting that content in front of people who are ready, willing, and able to link to, share, or otherwise publicize it online. Here are some common ways to attract links to your pages:

- Include links from legal profiles to your pages.
- Sponsor a scholarship and publish the application details on your site so that schools can link back to it.
- Contribute articles or get interviewed by local journalists.
- Host relevant informational resources on your site that other webmasters would be interested in linking to (i.e. legal opinions, tools, forms, documents, etc).

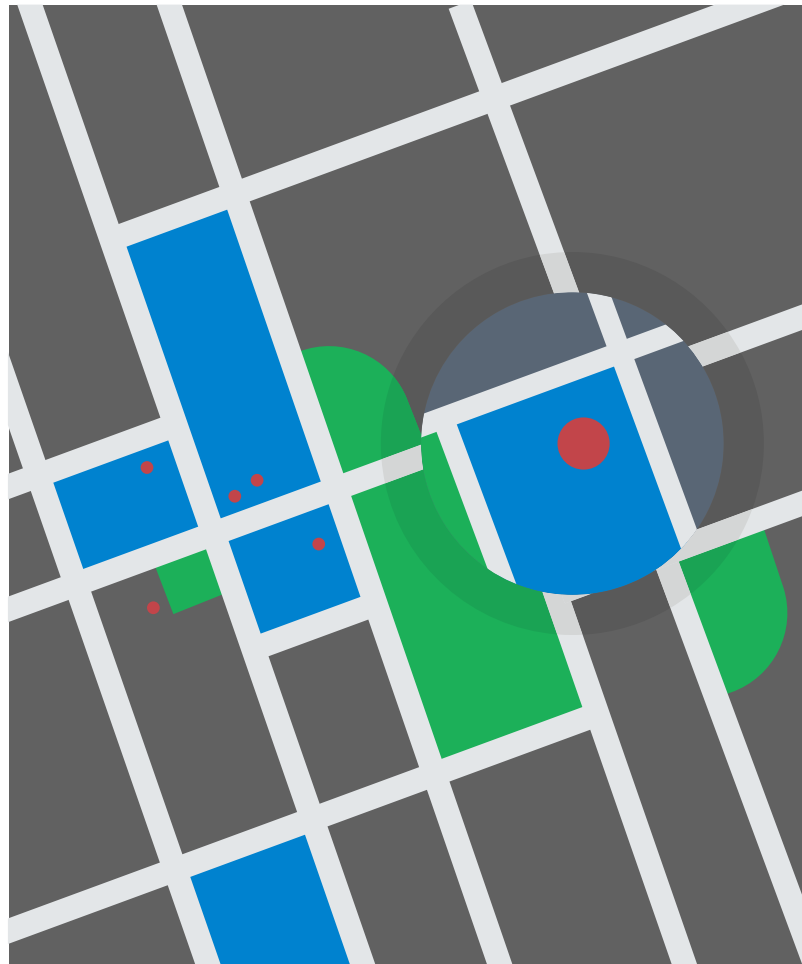
**When earning backlinks, avoid tricky “black hat” techniques, such as purchasing links from farming services, which Google will recognize and penalize you for.**

## Local ranking factors

Local ranking factors are those search signals that improve a business’s visibility in local search and map results.

While there is some overlap between traditional organic ranking factors and local search ranking factors, there are also some important distinctions. One of the most important factors for appearing in local search results is to make sure your firm’s name, address, and phone information is consistent on your site as well as around the web.

You’ll also want to [register your business](#) directly with Google to (a) make sure the information is correct, and (b) ensure no one else falsely claims your business.

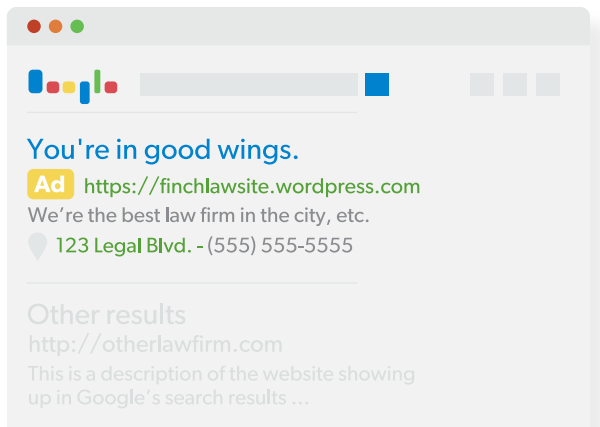


# How lawyers can stand out in search engine results

Outside of traditional on-page and off-page ranking factors, which determine placement in overall search results, there are other components to a search results page that can help make your firm stand out.

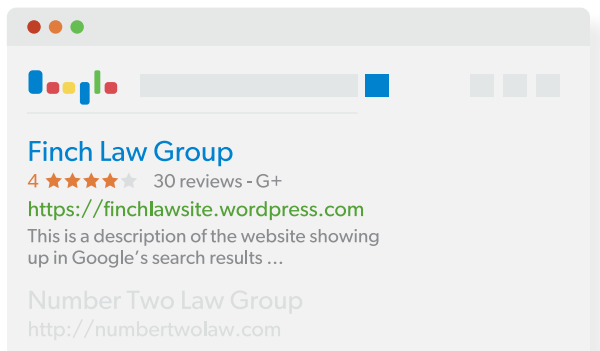
## 1. AdWords paid search ads

While a separate topic from SEO, it's worth noting the distinction between organic search and paid search advertising. AdWords advertising isn't right for everyone. Unless you can dedicate serious resources (read time and money) to managing your account, you probably ought to get some assistance from someone who has experience managing direct response paid search campaigns for law firms.



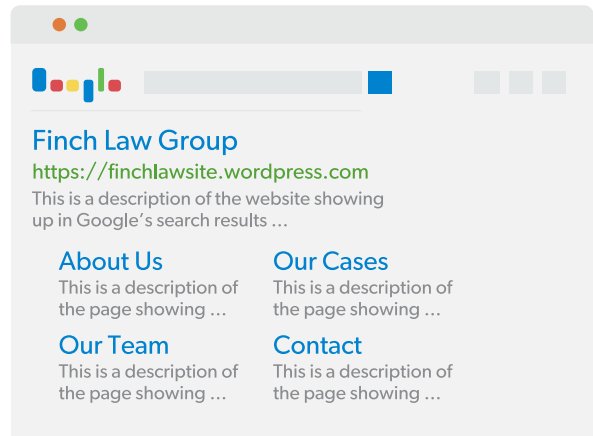
## 2. Review-rich snippets

A fairly technical tactic, this review-rich snippet feature is generated by structured data markup on the lawyer's site. There is a variety of structured data markup tags that lawyers should consider to enhance their appearance in organic results.



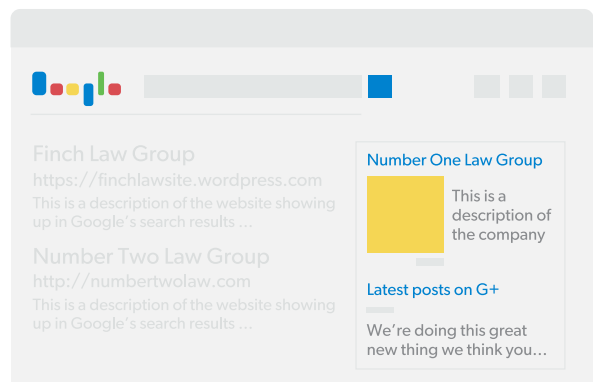
## 3. Sitelinks

Google generates sitelinks to help their users navigate your site, and it only shows sitelinks that its algorithm determines are useful to users. While you can't directly control what links are displayed, ensuring you have relevant pages on your site can help ensure the most valuable information gets displayed.



## 4. Knowledge graphs (brand-specific)

Knowledge graph results are information-based results that appear beside the list of site rankings, and they are given a lot of SERP (an industry acronym standing for "search engine results page,") real estate on Google. They also help users find contact information, reviews, and maps. This becomes especially relevant when users search your brand specifically.

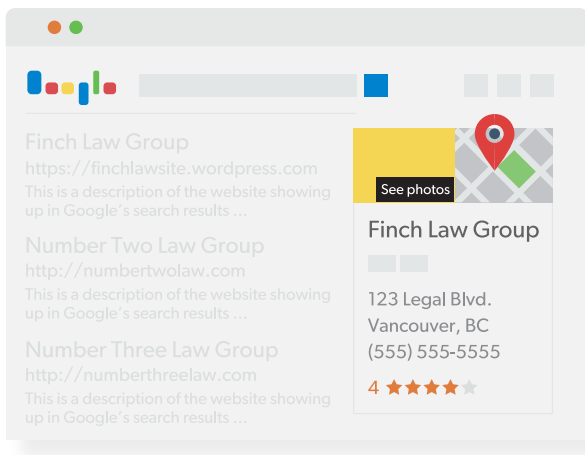




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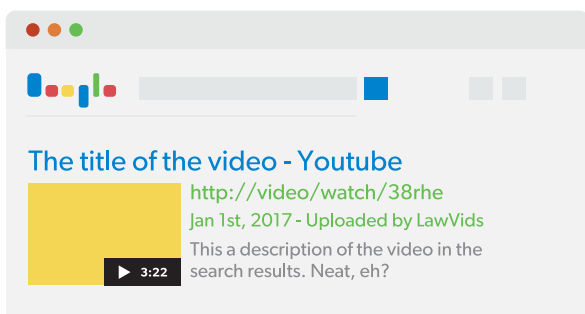
## 5. Map results

Map results are generated when SERPs include pinned listings. Registering your firm as a business with Google will help ensure you appear in map results for relevant queries.



## 6. Video results

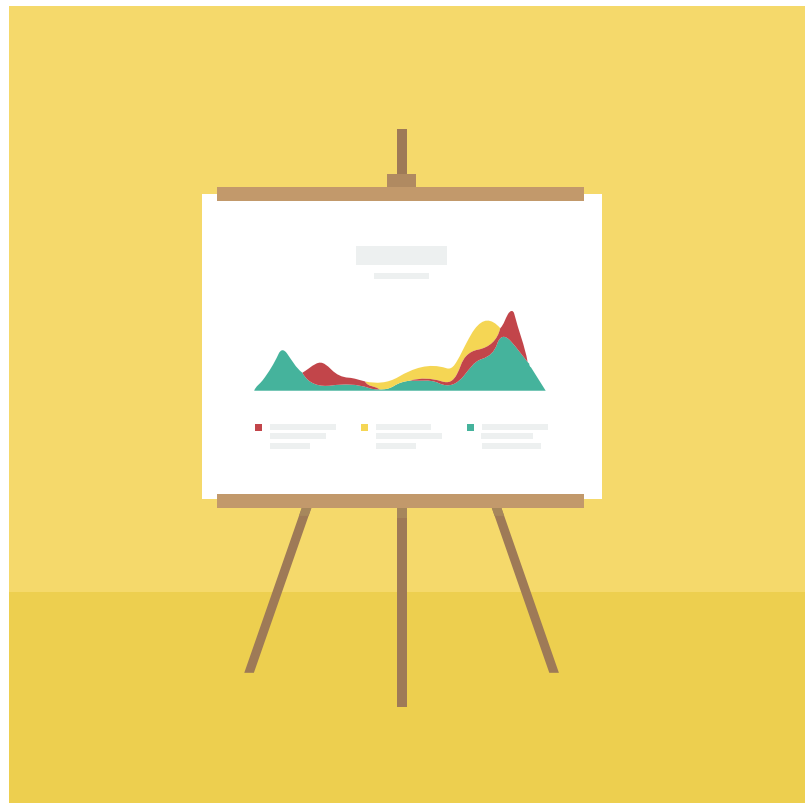
Video can be one of the most effective ways to marshal evidence of your reputation, knowledge, skill, and experience. If you do produce web videos, be sure to mark them up with structured data to produce these attention-grabbing video snippet results.



## 7. Measuring SEO

Ultimately, the effectiveness of your SEO campaigns should be measured in terms of the clients you earn. As a starting point, you should focus on measuring targeted organic search traffic in locations you practice.

If you use Google Analytics to measure your traffic (and you probably should), be sure to distinguish organic traffic from visitor traffic from other sources. Not all traffic has the same meaning to your bottom line. The sooner you realize this, the sooner you'll be able to optimize your SEO campaigns.





# Social media








Joshua Lenon



## Grow your connections

Electronic social media is defined as: “Internet-based electronic social networking sites that require an individual to affirmatively join and accept or reject connections with particular persons” (ABA definition—formal opinion 462). It can be used as an information source in both gaining and transmitting information, as a distribution source for disseminating your own information, and as a networking tool with the ability to connect with other professionals, interested parties, and even potential clients.

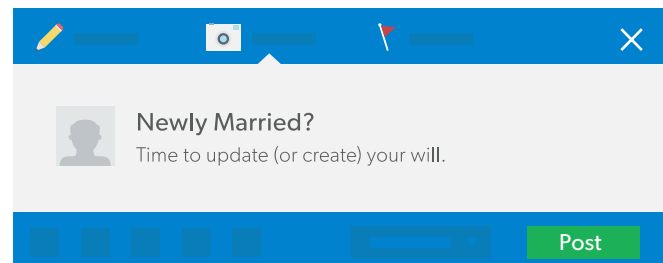
### Where social media lives

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Facebook |  Instagram |
|  Twitter  |  Snapchat  |
|  Google+  |  Quora     |
|  LinkedIn |   |

## Why use social media?

It’s fast. It’s free. It works.

According to a recent study, 54% of consumers say they would be likely to hire an attorney who is active on social media. This number jumps for younger consumers, ages 18 to 44, in which 69% would hire lawyers active on social media. In fact 34% of consumers have already used social media to help select a local service provider.



## Pick a goal and go where the audience resides

While there's a pervasive attitude that businesses need to build and maintain a presence on every platform to be successful, a little strategy goes a long way. Find where your audience is and where your messages will carry the most impact, and focus your efforts there. Your law firm may not need a Pinterest account, but Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are likely important. SlideShare and Quora are also viable channels for a law firm to be part of. Pick a few, post, engage, and measure effectiveness, then limit your involvement to the ones that work best.

## Get friendly with Facebook privacy settings

Facebook provides users with both personal and business pages. As a lawyer, you should be setting your personal profile to "private" with stringent privacy settings. Set up a separate business page, which will be publicly searchable. List your firm information, work, and community involvement. This profile will be where the public can find out more information about you, and it's also where you'll be running any [Facebook Ad campaigns](#) from.

## Avoid bragging or begging

To avoid pitfalls that could put you in trouble with the professional advertising rules that govern lawyers, it's important to avoid bragging about previous case outcomes or actively soliciting business via social media channels.

## Examples of bad messaging

"Case finally over. Unanimous verdict! Celebrating tonight."

"Won a million dollar verdict. Tell your friends and check out my website."

"Won another personal injury case. Call me for a free consultation."

"Another great victory in court today! My client is delighted. Who wants to be next?"

## Examples of good messaging

"Just published an article on wage and hour breaks. Let me know if you'd like a copy."

"New small business tax regulations are coming into effect. Read more on our blog."

"I'll be speaking at the Chamber of Commerce next week on human rights and labor law."

"We're welcoming a new immigration lawyer to our firm. Find out more about our newest expert."



## Discuss general legal content

This is where content marketing can be beneficial for your firm. By providing or curating content that is valuable to potential clients, you can start to engage and build trust with people who will keep your name in mind the next time they require your services.

## Discuss firm activity outside of representation

Remember, you're bound by ethical obligations not to discuss the details of your representation, but you're free to discuss community involvement initiatives that you participate in. Whether you're giving a talk before the local chamber of commerce, sponsoring a softball team, or hosting a booth at the county fair, clients and fellow attorneys will appreciate a glimpse into your firm culture and community involvement. It's another great way to build trust and engagement without running afoul of advertising rules and ethical quandaries.

## Show personality

Don't be afraid to show your true personality online. With millions of users tweeting, Facebooking, blogging, and Instagramming, the only true way to stand out amongst the noise is to develop and use your own distinct voice. In the words of your parents, don't be afraid to be yourself!

“Remember, you're bound by ethical obligations not to discuss the details of your representation, but you're free to discuss community involvement initiatives that you participate in.”



### About Josh King

Josh King is Chief Legal Officer at [Avvo](#). He is responsible for the company's legal affairs and business operations. He is also a frequent writer and speaker on interactive media and professional ethics issues.



### About Gyi Tsakalakis

Gyi Tsakalakis is the Co-founder and Director of Search at [AttorneySync](#), a web marketing agency for law firms. He has been helping lawyers use the internet to get clients since 2008. As a lawyer (not practicing), he is familiar with the unique considerations and challenges of effectively marketing a law practice.



### About Joshua Lenon

Joshua Lenon is Clio's Lawyer-in-Residence. He's been a guest lecturer for movements like legal hacking and legal technology at schools like MIT, Suffolk Law, and Vanderbilt, as well as before organizations like ReInventLaw and the ABA Law Practice Futures Initiative.



### About Clio

[Clio](#) is the most comprehensive cloud-based practice management platform for the legal industry. With the help of the cloud, Clio eases the process of time tracking, billing, administration, and collaboration for law firms of all sizes. Based in Vancouver, B.C., and with a European office in Dublin, Clio is used by legal professionals in over 50 countries. Clio has raised \$27 million from investors including Bessemer Venture Partners.

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### About Kevin O'Keefe

Kevin O'Keefe is CEO and Founder of Seattle-based [LexBlog](#), the leading provider of social media and blogging solutions to law firms. [The LexBlog Network, LXBN](#), empowers over 15,000 lawyers from around the world to network through the internet.