

A CODE-FREE GUIDE TO BUILDING A WEBSITE FOR YOUR LAW FIRM

By: Morgan Germann, Affinity Consulting Group LLC

When you start looking at building a website for your law firm, you have two options: either hire someone or do it yourself.

Perhaps you're tempted to dismiss the second option as too challenging. Why not hire an expert, right? They have the skills and experience to create a professional and unique website for your law firm. They can also integrate features into your site that you lack the technical knowledge to do yourself. This option will save you time, as building and maintaining a website can be time-consuming.

This option has drawbacks, however. It can be expensive and challenging to find a good designer. Oversight is essential as the designer seeks to execute your vision. You may not feel comfortable entrusting such a critical project to someone else. After all, no one knows your firm quite like you do. This is why you should consider creating your firm's website yourself. You may be surprised just how easy building an attractive, professional website is.

DRAFT IDEAS

Before you dive into creating your new website, brainstorm each of your goals as well as your overall vision. Write down what you hope to achieve with your website. Is your website a simple "I'm here" business card? Does it describe services in detail? Will it include ways to contact you, schedule an appointment, or complete an intake questionnaire?

If you need some inspiration, visit the sites of other firms to see what they've done. Consider every page or section that you want to include and what content you want on each one. Here are some pages firms typically include on their website:

ABOUT

This page provides additional information to potential clients to help them understand what makes your firm stand out. Consider adding a mission statement or listing your firm's core strengths and values. Mission statements and core values are often tricky for firms to devise. Look to [Lawyerist's Postali product spotlight](#) to see how a legal-focused marketing firm approaches mission statement and value presentation.

PRACTICE AREAS

Clients look here for a summary of each legal service your firm offers. Each explanation should be no more than one sentence. For firms focused on a single practice area, where a laundry list is unnecessary, this page can highlight client success stories.

OUR TEAM

Showing potential clients the names, faces, and interesting biographical information of your firm's professionals humanizes you and assures them that they're working with experts. Including Client

testimonials enhances the personal side as well. For example, a biography saying that an attorney is a huge Jeopardy fan can be reinforced with a client testimonial about the attorney's ability to have "facts at their fingertips."

NEWS/BLOG

If you want to share the latest happenings at your firm, this is a section to include. Blog articles can feature anything from news about hiring a new partner to pieces that showcase your firm's recent technological integrations. However, remember that news and blog pages may signal how often you update the site. Arriving at a firm's blog and seeing that the last post date is several months or years ago proves detrimental to client recruitment.

CONTACT

This page tells potential clients how to reach you. Typically, it lists your firm's phone number, email address, and physical location. Consider adding a contact form to this page.

While creating your initial draft, comply with your state's legal requirements for attorney websites. Check with your state bar or attorney-governing authority to determine applicable requirements or limitations. Incorporate these necessary elements into your site right from the start.

SELECT A WEBSITE BUILDER

With a website builder like [Wix](#), [Squarespace](#), or [WordPress](#), you can create a fantastic website for your firm, even if you don't have coding or design skills. But, with so many different website builders out there, it can be a daunting task to choose which is best for you. Your decision in this matter will affect many elements of your website, including its price, quality, and potential. Consider the following factors as you search for a website builder:

POPULARITY

With WordPress powering [over 42% of all websites](#), it dominates all other platforms regarding this metric. The more people who use a platform, the more likely you are to find tutorials and plugins to help you customize your website to your liking.

FEATURES

Do some homework to determine what you must do for each web builder to implement your vision. Compare how simple it will be to add your features, whether it will require additional fees, and if it is even possible to add them.

COST

Some website builders are free, but they usually have limitations on storage, bandwidth, functionality, or branding. Others charge a monthly fee, which may include a domain name, hosting, and other benefits. Also, consider the long-term costs of maintaining and updating your website. Some website builders charge extra for renewals, backups, security, or support. Think ahead and integrate the cost of third-party tools or plugins you may use on your firm's site.

USABILITY

A free product with many custom options isn't useful if you can't understand how to use it. Paid products may offer a more user-friendly interface and support when creating your site.

YOUR EXISTING “TECH STACK”

Another factor to consider is Law Practice Management Software (LPMS) integration. Certain LPMS, such as [Clio](#), offer plugins to integrate their services into your website. While you can add a client portal link to your site regardless of your chosen site builder, incorporating features such as intake forms that directly integrate with your LPMS depends on selecting a compatible website builder.

PICK A DOMAIN NAME

One of the first questions that your site builder will ask you after signing up is what you want your domain name to be. If available, choose your firm’s name with a .com extension. If you rely on a free plan for your website builder, you may need to upgrade your plan so that your site doesn’t display as a subdomain of your website builder.¹ It is worth spending a little extra money here, since having your domain name as your firm’s name is a critical element of a professional site.

STEPS IN BUILDING THE SITE

EXPLORE TEMPLATES

Themes or templates are pre-designed layouts you can apply to your website with one click. They save you time and effort while ensuring a professional-looking website. However, not all themes or templates are created equal. Some are more responsive, mobile-friendly, or better optimized for search engines. Some offer more customizable. Some website builders will give template recommendations because you are creating a business website. Scroll through the options and find a layout closest to what you want to see for your site’s homepage. It’s okay if you don’t see a template with everything you want; this is just a starting point.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE AVAILABLE TOOLS

Before building your website, explore your site builder’s capabilities. Look through the options to add different features to your site. Learn how to add links, text, and images. Check out ready-made blocks and patterns. These will help you organize specific types of information on your site. See if you can figure out how to add contact information to your site using a block or pattern. Using a prefabricated design from your site builder helps ensure that your contact information is linked correctly so clients can call your office or pull up directions from your website. Figuring out what features and elements are available and how to add them to your website before you start the design process will save you time and energy. Once you finish experimenting, delete anything you added to your website but don’t want to be on the homepage. You can delete anything you create, so explore and experiment.

SET UP THE HEADER AND FOOTER

The header and footer appear on every page of your website. They help clients navigate your site and may provide basic information about your firm. While most templates will come with these already installed, it’s a good idea to add them if yours doesn’t.

The header is at the top of the page, where your site’s title is located alongside a menu. Usually, your site’s title is your firm’s name and logo. This way, when visitors to your site click on your firm’s logo, it will bring them back to the homepage from any other page on your website. The menu holds links

¹ A domain is smithlawfirm.com, for example. A subdomain is smithlawfirm.wordpress.com, smithlawfirm.squarespace.com, or smithlawfirm.wix.com. For any subdomain, the “top level dotcom” portion is the site builder’s domain name.

to key pages on your site. It can be a single button with options that drop down when you click on it or a list of other page titles already visible when users access your site.

The footer is at the bottom of the page. You can add much more information to the footer than the header since clients don't have to scroll past it to see the information they want. This section typically contains contact information, links to social media accounts associated with your firm, and a sitemap. That said, you can add a contact form or anything else to help your clients use your site and find information faster.

BUILDING THE SITE

COMPLETE THE HOMEPAGE

The homepage is the first page that your website builder will prompt you to design once you choose a template. Since this is also the first page clients will see when they view your site, make sure it's compelling and informative. The purpose of this page is to tell clients a little bit of information about your law firm and to direct them to other pages of your website containing further information.

Many sites have a large image at the top of their homepage. When picking an image for the top of your site, it should be widely appealing and related to your firm in some way. Many lawyers use an aerial photo of the city in which they practice. Don't just choose a picture from Google Images. You must perform due diligence to ensure you're not violating copyright rules on the image.

Incorporating a tagline or brief description of your mission can prove instrumental in swiftly conveying your firm's goals and values to potential clients, sparing them from reading an entire "about" section. If you have Photoshop skills, adding this information to the image at the top of your page could be a visually impactful choice. Alternatively, type the tagline directly below the image, ensuring its prominence and accessibility.

Other elements you might want to add to your homepage are a professional photo, brief testimonials, and content from other pages. Incorporating content from other pages into your home page creates an excellent opportunity to redirect clients to those parts of your site where they can learn more about your firm. While you can't do this until you create the other pages, leave room for it now so that you can return to add this information once you've finished the other pages.

CREATE ADDITIONAL PAGES

Revisit your list of ideas and begin adding more pages to your site. As you add more pages, use the same font and color schemes that you applied on the homepage. Also, check for consistency in tone and style throughout the site. Use a minimal number of fonts and font sizes. Ensure that any changes in font size are readily discernible. Maintain an appropriate and coherent size for your text and a legible typeface. Throughout your website, strive for visual consistency and cohesiveness possible while maintaining a strong visual hierarchy.

ADD PLUGINS

If there's anything you can't add to your website through the website builder, then you will need to use a plugin. Plugins are extensions that expand the functionality of your website, empowering you to go beyond incorporating just text, videos, images, and sound files. Some plugins that may be useful to your law firm include search engine optimization tools, Google Analytics, a booking calendar, advanced sec features, and a chatbot or live chat. These features will help your website live up to its fullest potential.

Before installing any plugin to your website, ensure it won't be a security risk. Only get plugins from official repositories. Read reviews from other users and explore what permissions the plugin will ask for. While plugins offer valuable opportunities to enhance client interactions, you must prioritize website security over your website's components. Don't cut corners and leave your site vulnerable to hackers and malware.

EDIT

Once you've gotten the content onto your website, it's time to go back through and edit. Make sure that your clients get the best possible impression from your website. Before you launch your website, check your spelling and grammar. Obvious mistakes undermine your firm's reputation, driving away potential clients and leaving existing ones doubting your competency. Ensure that the facts you present and the contact information are correct. It is a good idea to have at least one other person at your firm look at and approve your website before launching it, just to ensure you catch everything.

LAUNCH YOUR WEBSITE

Once you're sure that your website is ready, it's time to launch. Your website builder will show you how to do this. Following the launch, update your website frequently. Not only will this help keep the information on the site current, but it will also boost its position in the search results. This will signal to clients and search engines that your site is active and relevant.