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SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION PRIMER FOR SMALL LAW FIRMS

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In today's world, a simple web search yields thousands of results. Search engine optimization (SEO) helps your law firm's website stand out among the cacophony of search results. Search engine optimization means creating tailored content, such as service descriptions, client testimonials, articles, blogs, and staff biographies, as well as associated images and videos, that organically (*i.e.*, naturally or without buying ads from the search engine provider) drives search engines and users to your firm's website. When someone searches the web for the name of your law firm, you want your law firm to be among the first listed, a "top hit" in search engine lingo. Taking steps to ensure your law firm's website is SEO friendly can increase traffic to your website, making it easier for people to find you on their Search Engine Results Page (SERP). Below are steps your firm should take to ensure an SEO friendly website.

QUALITY CONTENT

Filling your website with useful, reliable, and credible content is the surest way to build an effective and valuable web presence. Your law firm's website should include content that your clients want to see and that aligns with the values of your firm. If you're unsure of where to start, make use of a free AI tool like ChatGPT. For example, if you operate an estate planning practice, ask ChatGPT, "What are the top 10 questions people have when creating a will." Or "Pretend I'm 10 years old and explain how a trust works." Use its response as the starting point for a webpage addressing those concerns for your target client population.

Anything you publish on the site should be easy to read, and each web page should be well-organized. If users or search engines have a tough time navigating your website, it will be harder for it to show up as a top result in search engines.

THE EEAT ACRONYM
When evaluating a website's ranking to a given question, search engines gauge the site's experience, expertise, authoritativeness, and trust (EEAT). The EEAT acronym is often used to describe the elements of a quality website.

EXPERIENCE
The website's creator should have **experience** with the legal field and be able to reflect their experience through the website's content.

- People are more likely to trust someone who has experience in their field versus someone who has no credentials or knowledge.

- Your website's content should reflect experience in a legal setting. An example would be a lawyer writing an article about their personal experiences working on management strategies for their firm. This would demonstrate experience in the legal field.

- If you decide to hire a marketing company to help with your website's SEO, you'll find many offer to write articles or blogs for your site. These marketing companies often highlight how their writers have experience in the legal field. People with experience in legal fields are more likely to use phrases and

terms of art correctly, which boosts site credibility in the "eyes" of a search engine looking for proxies for experience.

EXPERTISE

The website should also reflect your firm's **expertise** in the field.

- Think about what knowledge and skills the lawyers in your firm have and how this can be portrayed on a website.

- You can leave the in-depth expertise to client conversations, but make sure clients and search engines can tell you have legal knowledge when they visit your website.

- Like with the experience example, you can demonstrate expertise by including content of a member of your firm talking about their experience and knowledge in the legal field.

AUTHORITATIVENESS

Authoritativeness is also important to consider, as this component assesses if a website is the go-to source for a topic.

- For example, if someone types in "law firms," they are likely to get search engine results of law firms near them.

- You want your law firm to come up among the top results because it's the most reliable and dependable firm around. Your site should be known as a "go-to" site for legal advice.

- For authoritativeness, depth beats breadth. You're better off selecting one or two practices areas, and even better niches within practice areas. Focus your website on those topics. You don't do family law; you do divorce mediations focused on men's rights. You don't do estate planning; you do estate plans for high-net-worth individuals with blended families. If you have an "ideal client" profile, use that to guide to the service descriptions, articles, testimonials, and other website content.

TRUST

Finally, **trust** is considered the most critical component of EEAT.

- Trustworthiness works closely with experience, expertise, and authoritativeness.

- Cite your sources and make sure all website content is accurate.

- Inaccurate information hurts SEO rankings and is not helpful for users.

KEYWORDS

Another important SEO component is keyword use. Think of a keyword as a term or phrase that a potential client would type in when looking for a law firm or for legal advice. In fact, "law firm" itself is an example of a keyword. You can conduct your own keyword search relevant to your legal practice to decide which words are the most important to use. There are many free and paid tools available online that help you analyze and choose keywords that will best help your law firm grow and attract prospective clients.

Where you put these keywords on your website also matters. You want to make these words visible to users and search engines by putting keywords in the title of your website and other places like the homepage. Making these keywords visible helps search engines and users find them. Another good place for keywords is in the "alt text." Alt text is a phrase or short explanation that appears either with or instead of an image. Alt text describes the image to those with screen readers or visual impairments and includes a description relevant to

the image. Search engines can read this alt text for context and determine what is in the accompanying photo. Alt text is a great place for keywords because it will tell users and search engines that the content in the photo is relevant to your firm's website. For example, if you include a photo of a lawyer on your website and integrate the keyword, "lawyer," in the alt text for that image, you are telling search engines that "lawyer" is relevant to that image and therefore relevant to your entire website.

CRAWLING AND LINKS

As we touched on earlier, it is important to make sure your website is well-organized. Not only should your website be well-organized, but so should your hyperlinks. Hyperlinks are embedded in a word, phrase, or image in a document and can lead to another page on your site or to an external website. For words or phrases, the text often appears blue or underlined when you hover a mouse pointer over it.

A well-organized website makes it easier for search engines to "crawl" the site, including your hyperlinks. Crawling a website means that a search engine is processing and analyzing information and resources on all site pages. Your website must be crawlable before it can be indexed by search engines.

After making sure your site is crawlable, it can be indexed by search engines, meaning your website can be ranked among other search results on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP). An unindexed website will not appear in a search engine's results. Improving your firm's SEO strategy can help boost your website's ranking on the SERP over time.

You may be wondering how to make your website crawlable. To create a crawlable hyperlink, you want to use the <a tag with href attribute before your raw link.

For example, a crawlable link for Lawyerist would look like this:

> Lawyerist

Links that do not follow these attributes may not be understood by search engines. The <a defines the link as a hyperlink. The href attribute allows users to create both internal (*e.g.*, another page on your website) and external (*e.g.*, another website) hyperlinks and are the most used attributes for hyperlinks. "Href" stands for "hypertext reference" and points toward the link destination. Including links between site pages (internal hyperlinks) can boost engagement on your website and therefore boost SEO. Many SEO experts also say that linking to reputable external websites from your site can increase your SEO.

If you are not tech savvy, there are simple ways you can check for crawlability.

One way is with the URL Inspection Tool in the Google Search Console.

- Enter the URL you want to check.

- Check "crawl" under "page indexing."

- Run a live test if you want the most recent results.

- Crawlability with be checked in seconds.

There are a lot of third-party websites like Semrush that offer crawlability checkers. Many such services offer both free and paid options, and some services only let you check a certain number of links.

Another option is to run a Rich Results Page Test. Plug your URL into the free website, and it will tell you if your site is crawlable in seconds.

IMAGES

High-quality content includes high-resolution images and videos. Search engines can more easily interpret images that are of higher quality. Plus, such images and are visually pleasing for viewers. As mentioned earlier, alt text is also important to include beside images, so users and search engines know what the image contains and how it is relevant to your website. Search engines can understand images themselves, but alt text written by humans further guides them in the right direction.

VIDEOS

Videos are an optimal way to boost SEO on your firm's website because they add variety to a site otherwise full of written content, in an industry full of written content. Videos must be optimized on your firm's website. Each video on your website should be on a public web page with crawlable links. It's also important to give each video on your website its own standalone page, where the video is the main content of the page. Search engines won't crawl videos they can't find, and it's easier for them to find videos that live on their own web page. Add a relevant title and description to accompany each video as a way to tell search engines and users the topic of each video.

Should your videos live on your website or be embedded in YouTube links? As lawyers often say, it depends.

Hosting videos on your firm's website allows all web traffic from the videos to reach your site. It also allows you to embed video links in other spots on your website that lead directly back to your site's video page, boosting your website engagement.

Embedding video links to YouTube gives YouTube control over your video content, which is not a bad thing if you also have a YouTube channel for your law firm. If you already have a YouTube channel linked to your law firm, and especially if that channel gets consistent engagement, then embedding video links to your YouTube channel would further benefit your law practice by leveraging an existing audience hub or destination. Not only would you drive traffic from your website to YouTube, but YouTube could also drive traffic to your website. YouTube is also a perfect option if your small firm is just getting started. Keep the capacity of your website in mind, and that videos take up a lot of space and can slow down the loading time of your site. Embedding links to YouTube could keep space free on your website for other content.

LEARN MORE

SEO takes time and practice to perfect and is an ongoing process. You will never stop updating your firm's website to make it SEO friendly, but this also means you do not have to tackle every form of SEO at once.

To learn more about creating an effective, well-organized website, check out our articles about website design and marketing strategy. Both resources offer comprehensive guides on designing and marketing a website that works for your firm.

While there are countless ways to curate a website, to see examples of outstanding law firm websites, check out our Best Law Firm Websites 2024 article.

Are you still unsure of where to start with SEO? Check out our product matcher, which pairs your law firm with the best SEO package for your firm's budget and goals.