
The Major Differentiator That 97% of Legal Websites Don't Have

And can't afford not to...

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The legal marketplace today is highly competitive making differentiation increasingly difficult. Most marketers try to differentiate their firm from the growing number of competitors through the quality of the firm's work, in-depth industry knowledge, and legal expertise. These things are undeniably important but they won't set you apart from the crowd, and frankly every firm is making similar statements. For prospective clients these things are a given, expected even. So how do you distinguish your law firm when differentiation is imperative to your survival?

Interestingly, it's technology that presents a real opportunity for law firms to set themselves apart from the crowd. Marketers who understand the value of good web content and a good content marketing strategy are often unaware of how to leverage their most valuable content to further increase its value. The way forward lies in presenting website content in a more studied, personalized way. Thanks to advances in web content management systems (CMS), content targeting and personalization offers a real opportunity to deliver exceptional web experiences that get readers attention, build credibility, improve brand loyalty, and drive new business.



The key to success today is to deliver highly personalized content that anticipates a website visitor's needs, whether targeting prospects or current clients. This means delivering relevant content to the right audience at exactly the right moment creating unparalleled web experiences that engage and convert.

Here are a few statistics to consider.

1. 94% of marketers and 90% of agencies agree that personalization of the web experience is critical to current and future success.¹
2. Marketers see an average 20% uplift in sales when using personalized web experiences.²
3. 74% of prospects get frustrated when website content appears that has nothing to do with their interests.³
4. 61% of prospects feel better about a company that delivers custom content, and are more likely to become clients.⁴
5. 78% of prospects believe organizations providing custom content are interested in building good relationships.⁵
6. 90% of prospects find custom content useful.⁶

Common Obstacles

Given these numbers, personalization arguably should be at the top of every legal marketer's website strategy. And yet it isn't.

Only 3% of law firm websites deliver personalized content to site visitors.

So why aren't law firms running to incorporate personalization into their web strategies? Because knowing what needs to be done and actually doing it are two very different things. There are a number of obstacles that stop marketers at the starting gate, including:

1. Old technology—either the CMS used does not support personalization, or the website is homegrown and personalization is seen as too complex, or too labor and time intensive for in-house web developers to undertake.
2. Budget—the cost of replacing old web technology is difficult to absorb billable rates.
3. Complexity—personalized content strategies just sound complex, don't they? For many, this perceived complexity is overwhelming and a non-starter.
4. Knowledge—marketers understand the importance of personalization, but lack the know-how to do it. They don't know where to start, or how to start.

Whatever the reason, it is simply no longer good enough. Marketers can't afford to ignore the opportunity that is staring them in the face—e.g., that 20% uplift in new business mentioned earlier. To continue down the path of least resistance can be considered irresponsible. If the tactics that worked for you last year are no longer expanding your client portfolio at the same rate, the time to incorporate personalization into your marketing strategy is *now*.

How it Works

Imagine an anonymous visitor comes to your website homepage. While there, they download a piece of content. The next time they visit your website, will it be valuable to show that same piece of content again? No. And yet this is what 97% of law firm websites do today.

Content marketing is about creating web content that adds value to a site visitor's experience. Personalization is about presenting the right content at the right moment to make a site visitor's experience more relevant and engaging, and therefore more compelling. Each time you show site visitors the same content is a missed opportunity.

With each website visit, you should offer new content based on what you know about your site visitor—the search term that brought them to your website, pages viewed, content downloaded, or expressed interests—that nurtures them further down the sales funnel.

Here are a few examples of how personalization works for anonymous website visitors, registered website visitors, and authenticated clients.

The Anonymous Website Visitor



The first example we'll look at is how personalization can improve the anonymous visitor's experience. Imagine an unknown visitor searches for 'entertainment industry law firms' on Google and clicks on a link that takes them to your home page. Next the visitor navigates to a Litigation practice page. From these two actions—search term used and page visited—you now know something about your anonymous visitor's interests, so behind the scenes the CMS automatically adds them to both 'entertainment industry' and 'litigation practice' persona groups.

They next visit a profile page for an attorney whose expertise spans multiple practices, most of which are not relevant. Because the visitor is a member of the 'litigation practice' group, they are shown the attorney profile plus a dynamically delivered link to an article summarizing a recently won litigation case. It's a soft sell designed to enrich the website experience by delivering relevant content that anticipates needs, engages, and builds credibility and trust. Still, your visitor hasn't given you their information and leaves your website.

On the next visit to your homepage, they are presumably gathering information. You don't want to present them with the same content they saw last time, so based on the groups they are now associated with—Entertainment and Litigation—you dynamically present them with an invitation to download a helpful 'Litigation Best Practices' eBook, which they do. Because they registered for the eBook, the CMS adds them to a 'litigation ebook' group so they won't be presented with that piece of content again. Instead, because they are also member of the Entertainment group, the CMS will dynamically present an offer to register for an on-demand webinar on '12 ways to successfully navigate Media & Entertainment legal waters'. The more details you learn about your site visitor, the more relevant their web experience becomes increasing the likelihood of converting that site visitor into your next client.

When determining which content to present on your site visitor's journey, think about targeted pages where personalized content will add value. The goal is not to throw any or all relevant content to them at once. Rather you should strategically add value where it makes sense to further the visitor down the sales funnel.

Registered Website Visitors



The second example we'll look at is how personalization can improve the registered site visitor's experience. These are known visitors that have given you their personal information—name, email, etc.—so you can keep them informed on their expressed topics of interest.

In this case, your visitor “Martin Fox” filled out a form on your website registering for updates on several topics, including the Real Estate & Development practice, case news, and events. He also gave his location—Boston, MA. Past the gathering information phase, Martin is now a qualified new business lead. The content you show Martin should reflect his current pipeline status. Your goal now is to get Martin to clearly see the value your firm brings to the table, and pick up the phone and book a consultation. Content that demonstrates thought leadership expertise as well as what it's like working with your firm—e.g., the attorney/client relationship—is what's in order.

When Martin next visits your homepage, he will see some of the same content from his last visit, plus a new and prominently featured thought leadership article on ‘Boston's Real Estate Growth Zones’. If he clicks on the link to read the full article, he will be shown the article content, plus a press release summary for a recently won Real Estate & Development Practice case. And finally, because the goal is now to get Martin to call you, he will also see an offer for a free consultation with a featured Real Estate & Development practice attorney.

Martin's web experience has been completely personalized from the moment he hit your website. You've made it easy for him to find content, including content he may not know even exists. It's relevant. It's credible. And it increases the chances of making him your next client. If Martin goes to your competitor's website, his experience will be completely different. He would be served the same content every time, regardless of his preferences, demographics or geographic location. He will have to work to find the information that is specifically relevant to his interests which can be time consuming given the volume of content featured on many law firm websites. Which firm do you think Martin is going to engage with when he's ready?

Authenticated Clients



The final example we'll look at is how personalization can improve client web experiences to drive satisfaction and loyalty. But first, something to chew on:

60% of clients replace their primary law firm.

This places client experiences center stage. Creating client satisfaction and loyalty has never been more critical. Loyal clients are less price sensitive, more forgiving when issues arise, more apt to give referrals, and most importantly they are immune to competitive bids for their business. Delivering on your promise of exceptional client service is not enough. You have to add value at every customer touch point, including the web if you are to maintain an advantage for your firm. To use your website to create client loyalty, you must anticipate client needs even before they are expressed, and demonstrate that you are invested in advancing their long-term success through thought-leadership content.

In this example, an authenticated customer “Theresa Moss” visits your homepage. Because she is a client, you know a good deal about her. Theresa has been added to a number of persona groups, including the ‘trusts & estates practice’, expressed interests in ‘estate trust administration’, her attorney ‘Tom Mercer’, and also the ‘client’ group. Because she is a member of the ‘client’ group her view of your homepage is very different from what prospects see. The homepage content for clients is presented in a news format and is all about informing and adding value through relevant and engaging content.

Because she is a member of the ‘trusts and estates practice’ group, she is presented with a thought-leadership article on ‘Planning Pointers--New Federal Estate & Gift Tax Laws’.

Additionally, she sees her attorney Tom Mercer’s blog, including his three most recent posts. Like all clients, she will be presented with a company news feed, as well as a social media feed so she can view what’s being said about your firm in real time. This total transparency builds trust and credibility.

There’s more. All law firms require attorneys to cross sell services to each client. Because the CMS knows Theresa is a client and a member of the ‘trusts and estates practice’ group, she has been automatically added to the closely related ‘probate and tax litigation practice’ group which she might also find interesting or helpful. To cross-sell probate and tax litigation practice services, Theresa is presented with a short video entitled ‘A Practical Guide to Preparing Gift Tax Returns’.

As you can see, the homepage dynamically presented to Theresa is 100% targeted to her interests, engaging her and adding value with new ideas and approaches designed to help her succeed—a powerful differentiator indeed.

Summary

Website personalization is meant to deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. It is a major differentiator in the increasingly competitive legal marketplace. Digital marketers from all other industries have been employing personalization successfully for years. And yet, 97% of law firms are failing to leverage these proven marketing strategies—hard to believe when it drives on average a 20% lift in new business. If landing new clients is getting more difficult for you, the time to act is now. Better web experiences increase engagement and will help you improve your chance of winning new clients, and keeping existing ones.

Stay tuned for part two in this three-part series on Law Firm Website Personalization which will focus on how to create a content plan mapped to personalization scenarios. Part three will focus on how to implement personalization using a CMS.

For more information, visit www.compellinglegalwebsites.com.

Sources:

^[1-2] <http://www.monetate.com/blog/the-tipping-point-for-personalized-website-experiences/>

^[3] <http://janrain.com/about/newsroom/press-releases/online-consumers-fed-up-with-irrelevant-content-on-favorite-websites-according-to-janrain-study/>

^[4-6] <http://www.demandmetric.com/content/content-marketing-infographic>