

Create Your Own Website on a Small Budget

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Introduction: In this session, you will learn tips and tricks as well what tools are available for creating your own website. We will discuss the process of creating a website from planning to rollout. You will also see the different options for managing the content on your website once it is online and basic search engine optimization to help people find the site you have created. We will also discuss techniques to make a law firm website a true marketing tool to generate new clients, rather than just an online resume.

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What Makes a Successful Law Firm Website?

Who Are You Trying to Impress?

There is an old saying that women don't dress to impress men. They dress to impress other women. Think about that when reviewing law firm websites. Too many attorneys post what is essentially an online resume. They graduated from this school in this year. They were president of this and a member of that. This sort of information probably means something to other attorneys – and perhaps you are looking for business from other attorneys. The question is how much it means to a prospective client who is not an attorney.

What is a Prospective Client Looking for in a Law Firm Website?

Your prospective clients hope to learn three things from a visit to your website:

- Do you understand their problem?
- Do you recognize their concern over the current controversy in their life?
- Can you protect them and return their lives to normal?

Would Your Website Persuade This Client to Contact You?

Imagine a grandmother whose grandchild was arrested last night. She visits 5 law firm websites. Four of them contain the typical resume style information. Your site contains some content that speaks directly to her about her concern. This could be text or even a short video. Either way, she learns what typically happens in this kind of case. What her next step should be and what is likely to happen after that. The news may not be good, but at least **you** helped her understand what is happening and that gives her some peace of mind. Your site could go on to explain how your firm handles this sort of case all the time, but she already assumes you must be an expert because your site is the only one that taught her something. You could go on to promise that you will be responsive to her needs and do a really good job, but if you do it right, you have already started a conversation with her. She already trusts you because you have given her some peace of mind. Really all that remains to do at this point is for her to call and hire you to help her grandchild.

What Does Your Site Say About You?

Take a look at your own site if you have one. Also look at the sites of your local competitors. If you were not an attorney - if you were dealing with a disaster in your life - if you were scared – which firm would you hire – the attorney who was president of some club, or the attorney whose site did a little bit to put your mind at ease?

Your Online Presence

Is your email address lawyer1873@yahoo.com? Today, a professional web presence is a must and that includes a firm specific domain. Web domains are going fast and the one you really want may already be taken. Waiting won't make it easier to find one.

I'm Working on a Shoestring Budget

The Problem

Once upon a time, when the Internet was in its infancy, a homemade site was fine. It was impressive that a law firm had a site – period. Today, the Internet is something that everyone is familiar with and, frankly, they know a good site when they see one. This also means that they know a bad site when they see one. Can you create a site completely on your own that looks good enough?

100% Do It Yourself

You went to law school to practice law but, if you really want to create your own website from scratch, here are some of the things you will need.

- **Domain** – The dot.com address of your new site
- **Web Host** – A company that maintains the servers where your domain will reside
- **Web Design Program** – A program used to create a website. (e.g. Dreamweaver or Joomla)
- **Content Management System** – A tool used to maintain and update your website (e.g. Joomla or Drupal)
- **Professional Graphics** – You will need access to or be able to produce professional photographs, buttons and other graphics for your site
- **Programming Skills** – Even the best web design program will require some HTML programming skills.
- **Time** – If you overcome all of these hurdles, you will still find that creating your own website from scratch is a huge time commitment.

Total Cost: Up to \$500.00 for software, \$10/month for hosting, and lots of time.

WordPress – A Low Cost, Mostly Do It Yourself Alternative

WordPress (<http://wordpress.org>) is free software that you can use to create a website or blog. With WordPress, all you have to do is find a web host and install WordPress. Many hosting sites will offer WordPress hosting that is pre-installed. Once installed, WordPress has thousands of templates and themes that you can use to create your site or blog. Most of these themes require only that you insert a few graphics and type your content in. Once your site is up and running, WordPress also functions as your content management system.

Total Cost: \$10/month for hosting and some time.

Advantages to WordPress

WordPress is free. It is relatively easy to use, especially for content management. You can easily add new content including photos and other media. With WordPress most people can have a minimal site up and running within just a few hours.

Disadvantages to WordPress

WordPress was designed for blogging. This means that a website created with WordPress will look and feel like a blog. Also, while the software is easy to use, some advanced features may still require some programming skill. For example, adding a contact form or a graphics.

Demo of WordPress

At this point, we will see a very brief demo of <http://www.krausepm.com/blog>.

I Am Willing to Spend Some Money for a Better Result

GoDaddy Hosting

GoDaddy.com offers the ability to create your own website. All include hosting and the ability to choose from over 1500 templates and 8000 graphics. There are three plans to choose from:

- Economy - \$4.99/month, 5 pages, 50MB, 1GB Bandwidth, 1 Email Account
- Deluxe - \$8.99/month, 10 pages, 2GB, 100 GB Bandwidth, 500 Email Accounts
- Premium - \$12.99/month, 999 pages, 4GB, 200 GB Bandwidth, 1000 Email Accounts

Details at www.godaddy.com

Intuit Hosting

Intuit (the makers of QuickBooks) offers a similar service. All of their plans offer 2000 templates and 250,000 graphic images. Once again, there are three plans to choose from:

- Personal - \$4.99/month, 25MB, 5 pages, 5 GB Bandwidth, No email accounts and no unique domain
- Business - \$23.99/month, 100 pages, 5 GB, 100GB Bandwidth, 5 email addresses, custom domain name

- Professional - \$49.99/month, unlimited pages, 10GB, 500 GB Bandwidth, 50 email addresses, custom domain

Details at <http://www.intuit.com/website-building-software/>

Automated Site Builder Tools – Pros/Cons

- Easy to setup a very simple site
- Limited features
- Limited customization options

Upgrade to a basic canned consulting package

If you don't want to create your own website using the tools provided by Intuit or GoDaddy, you can have their web designers create one for you. The exact cost of this service will vary depending on the number of pages on your site and the number of revisions. Intuit's basic consulting package is \$599 for 5 pages and one cycle of revisions. Their deluxe package includes 10 pages and one revision cycle plus 30 days of updates. GoDaddy charges \$49.99 per month and their plan includes monthly updates.

Level Three – How a Custom Site Could Generate More New Clients

Hiring a Web Design Consultant

These days, there are a lot of “wannabe” web designers. While it is true that many people have basic web skills, creating an original, professional looking website takes combination of an artistic eye, programming skills and experience. Not everyone has this. Your nephew might be able to upload pictures to his Facebook page and even use the tools provided on that site to customize his page. Does that really qualify him to create a website for your law firm? Many graphic artists are also branching into web design. They have a great artistic eye but do they have the programming skills and experience? Before you choose a web designer, take a look at several (more than one) of their previous designs. They should be willing to show you a portfolio of their work.

Unless you have a very good reason, follow your web designer's recommendations for a place to host your site. Most experienced designers have a preference based on features offered and their experience with technical support.

Static HTML – ‘The old way...’

Most websites are written in a programming language called HTML and some web designers still program sites the old fashioned way – by typing HTML code. If your site is written this way, only your web designer will be able to make updates and add new content. Choose a web designer who works this way if you are willing to put their kids through college. Interesting and frequently updated content is the key to getting visitors to your site as well as search engine ranking. If you have to pay someone every time you want to update your site, one of two things will happen. Either you will go broke paying for updates or you will not update it.

CMS – Content Management System “The new way...”

Because updating your content is the key to bringing visitors to your site and increasing your search engine ranking, you have to be able to update your site. For this reason, you need what is known as a content management system. A content management system provides you with a convenient and easy way to update your own site. There are a number of content management tools that are as easy as a word processor. Among these are Adobe Contribute and Joomla. Ask your web designer to make your site compatible with a content management tool.

Demonstrations of Adobe Contribute and Joomla.

Contact Us Forms

A “Contact Us” form is essential to your website. Visitors complete a short form and you are provided with an email that includes their contact information. However, if you are not careful, you could receive more SPAM than real inquiries. Spammers use applications that automatically complete contact forms and submit junk to you. Avoid this through the

use of a CAPTCHA application. A CAPTCHA form requires the submitting person to type a random key sequence when submitting the form. This eliminates most of the SPAM generated by Contact Us forms.

Blogs

Whether integrated into your site or written separately, a blog is a great marketing tool. A blog can showcase your expertise and allows you to post new content as often as you want. As you post more content, you generate a following interested in hearing what you have to say. Those followers tell others about your blog and those others tell even more people. Frequently updated blogs are best but even one that is updated once or twice per month can have a significant impact. Just make sure that your posts are interesting and, whenever possible, link back to content on your main website.

Getting People to Your Site

The Three Ways People Visit Your Site

How many ads have you seen or heard promising to get your site at the top of Google and other search engines? In reality, there are three ways that visitors get to your site, direct traffic, referring sites and search engines. Too many people focus all of their efforts on search engine rankings while ignoring other sources of traffic.

Direct Traffic

Direct traffic comes from visitors who type your website address right into their browser, click a link in an email, or otherwise directly access your site. You increase this type of traffic by making sure that as many people as possible know your website address. Make sure your address is included in every aspect of your firm marketing. It should be on your business card, firm stationery and every other place that people might find your contact information.

Referring Sites

A visitor from a referring site is someone who clicked a link to your site on a different non-search engine site. Having a link to your site on almost any other site is a good thing. First, the link means that there is at least a chance someone will click through to your site. Second, links on other sites make your site look more important to search engines. How do you increase the number of sites linking to yours? The best way is to fill your site with interesting and relevant content. If that doesn't work, just ask. Many sites are willing to link to you, especially if you return the favor.

Search Engines and SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

The Free Way

A visitor from a search engine is someone who searched on Google, Yahoo!, Bing or a similar site. The exact algorithms used by these sites are known only to them but there are clearly things that you can do to improve your ranking. By far, the best way to improve your ranking is to fill your site with as much **relevant content** as you possibly can. Relevant content means that searches will find your site more often because of the important words in the content. Great content is also important for the second most important component of search engine optimization, **relevant links**. The more quality, similar sites that link to you, the higher your ranking will be with search engines. Concentrating on relevant content and links are very effective and entirely free ways to increase your ranking with search engines.

Advertising Links and Pay-Per-Click

You can pay to bring people to your site. Google AdWords allows you to bid on keywords and write short ads that display when people search for those keywords. The more you bid, the more likely your ad will display when the keywords are searched for. In addition, the more you bid, the more it will cost if someone actually clicks on your ad link. An entire industry has grown up around helping businesses bid on keywords and write advertisements, thereby increasing website traffic. The problem with trying to buy keywords is that you are probably not the only one wanting to buy those keywords. For this reason, pay-per-click can get expensive.

Social Networking

Social networking websites are among the busiest sites on Internet. In fact, last year, Facebook surpassed Google as the most visited site on the Internet. You need to take advantage of social networking. While you may not be interested in using these sites to tell your clients where you are eating lunch today, social networking sites can be a great way to get the word out about your website. Use Twitter and LinkedIn to announce new content and drive visitors to your site. Create a Facebook fan page for your business to announce events, post news and drive even more visitors.

Video

The use of video on your website can help you make a personal connection. Whether the video is of a happy client or of you explaining a particular area of the law, it provides interesting content for your visitors. Most content management tools make it really easy to post video. YouTube lets you easily post video directly from some cameras. It is very simple to embed that YouTube video on a page of your site. Just watch your quality.

Demonstration of video on a Joomla site.