

Five Thoughts on Selecting a Website Designer

By Roberta M. Gubbins

You are a lawyer. You are not a website designer, nor do you desire to be one. And using your sister-in-law's son who knows "everything" about computers is not working. It's time for professional help.

How do you select the best web designer for your needs?

Define goals for your website

Know your goals before you begin the search process. Are you trying to increase brand awareness or are you looking for new leads for your practice? If you're a criminal defense attorney, your website should focus on converting site visitors and building a client base. If you're an insurance defense practitioner, you may be more focused on brand awareness rather than getting new leads.

Check out the competition

Visit the websites of competitors and leaders in your area of practice. Look at the features, navigation, and overall layout of their sites. How do they convert visitors into prospects by getting them to click on the Contact Us button?

After finding some examples you like, look at the bottom line of a site to find its web designer. Go to the designer's site and share some of his or her designs with members of your firm and support staff. Get their opinions on sites they find appealing and easy to use.

Compare the cost with long-term value

You want a website that will last a few years, is easy for you and prospective clients to use, and fits within your budget. Saving money by going with the lowest bidder



may not be beneficial if visitors quickly leave the site without contacting you.

Choose a website developer who works with lawyers

Lawyers sell a service—a solution to a legal problem. A design company that sells widgets will not understand marketing legal services. The services you're marketing are needs based. A prospective client may need a lawyer to draft a will, handle a divorce, or register a patent. Your web designer should also be familiar with ethical rules that place constraints on how you can market your practice.

A website that offers high-quality content and makes it easy for consumers to contact you will lead to new clients. General

information written in plain English keeps consumers coming back and motivates them to refer others to your site.

Select a designer who looks at your complete marketing plan

Your website is just one part of your marketing plan. Your designer should examine all your marketing material, both online and offline, to ensure the message is consistent, the brand is constant, and your marketing approach is reaping dividends.

Just as you educate your clients about the law, your designer should educate you on the strengths and weaknesses of his or her suggested strategies. If your designer is not listening to you or walking you through the process, move to the next name on your list.

Finding the right web designer, much like finding the right lawyer, may take time but pays off with more contacts and more business. ■



Roberta M. Gubbins has served as the editor of the Ingham County Legal News. Since leaving the paper, she provides services as a ghostwriter editing articles, blogs, and e-blasts for lawyers and law firms.

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