

How to Choose a Good SEO Company for Your Law Firm

By Gyi Tsakalakis

Selecting the right search engine optimization (SEO) company can seem daunting. Many lawyers simply don't know enough about SEO to make an informed decision. Inspired by Rand Fishkin's blog post,¹ I am sharing some advice about how I would go about choosing an SEO company if it were my law firm.

In the interest of full disclosure, I'm the founder of a company that provides SEO services to lawyers. You can give my opinions as much or as little weight as you see fit. In fact, don't give them any weight. Send this article to others and ask them what they think.

Should I search for an SEO company on Google?

Fishkin suggests that using Google as your filter is a mistake. Generally, I agree with him. Just because an SEO company ranks in Google results for your search term doesn't mean the company will do a good job for you. Further, it's important

to understand why it's ranking. Is the company gaming Google? If so, it may employ the same tactics to get your firm's website to rank. While these tactics might help you rank in the short term, you may eventually find yourself facing a manual action that hurts your visibility in search results.

On the other hand, if you use Google to learn about SEO, and a company has posted useful information that helps inform you, perhaps take that into consideration in building your list of potential candidates. But don't rely solely on those rankings to form your final conclusion.

Should I hire an SEO company from a "Top SEO" list?

To me, this depends entirely on the list. Did the companies pay to be on the list? Are they kicking back commissions to the list owner? How can you tell? If you have reason to believe the list is reliable, then maybe those companies warrant consideration. How can you tell if the list is reliable? Here are a few questions to answer:

- Who created the list?
- Do you trust the list owner?
- How was the list created?

Without pointing fingers at any particular list, know this: most "Top SEO" lists

that appear prominently in Google results are pay-to-play. Not all, but most. Read the fine print.

Should I hire an SEO company based on its secret system?

Everyone wishes there were a magic bullet to get pages to rank that would result in the perfect clients. There aren't any magic bullets. But even if there were (and there aren't), think about the risks involved with someone doing secret stuff online on your behalf. Ask yourself whether it makes sense to hire a company to market your practice online with tactics it isn't willing to share with you. Is the company familiar with your professional ethical obligations?

The truth is, there are no secrets. To turn people who are using search engines into clients takes time and effort. It involves creating fast, technically sound, useful web pages that people link to, share, and otherwise publicize online.

Any SEO company should be willing to share specifically what actions it intends to take on your behalf and the reasons behind its suggested actions. Require prior approval!

Otherwise, you will eventually say "uh-oh."²

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Should I hire an SEO company based on its awards?

Similar to the “Top SEO” lists, some SEO companies pitch their services based on awards they’ve won. I have nothing against awards generally. The question is, what does the award represent? Who are the judges? Who were the contestants? Hiring an SEO company because it has won awards for building pretty websites³ is a mistake. These awards are not likely to be good indicators of success as measured by return on investment.

Should I hire an SEO company because my competitor uses it?

Some lawyers will search Google for keywords used by law firms that are currently ranking. They’ll click through to competitor law firms’ websites and scroll to the bottom to look for the link that says “Powered by XYZ Law Firm SEO Company.”

Their reasoning is that if the SEO company was able to get a competitor’s website to rank, the company will likely be able to get their own site to rank. Huge mistake.

First, there’s an inherent conflict of interest. For any given search query, there can be only one firm in the top position. In other words, the SEO company can’t have your best interests and your competitor’s best interests in mind. When you ask what it will take to beat the competitor’s site, guess what it will suggest? Hint: it rhymes with “honey” but starts with an “m.”

Second, just because the company appears to be having success with your competitor’s site doesn’t mean it will have success with yours. Hundreds of factors determine which sites rank. It’s likely that the company won’t be able to replicate the signal pattern across multiple sites.

Third, the real reasons SEO and web design companies do this is (1) they want to work with your competitors⁴ and (2) they want lawyers to use Google to search for SEO companies, and they’re using your site to help themselves.

Don’t hire your competitor’s SEO company!

Should I hire an SEO company that guarantees rankings?

No one can guarantee a top ranking on Google.⁵ Those that make this guarantee are lying to you. It’s that simple. Even if a company gets your site to rank number one for a keyword, ask the following questions:

- What is the value of the keyword in terms of client fees?
- Is anyone actually searching for that keyword?
- What tactics did the company use to achieve that ranking?
- How long will this position last?

Guaranteed rankings⁶ might make you feel all warm and fuzzy. They’re typically a scam. If you want a guarantee, ask for a guarantee that the company will be completely transparent about what it’s doing on your behalf. Define what meaningful success looks like in advance.

Should I hire an in-house SEO person for my firm?

Maybe. I have seen many instances where having someone in house who is knowledgeable about SEO and Internet marketing is greatly beneficial. Usually, for firms that want to compete in competitive practice areas and geographies, a single in-house person isn’t enough. That’s not always the case, but in my experience, the best situations are a combination of experienced in-house marketing people and an external agency. Agencies are able to allocate resources from a variety of disciplines. Typically, replicating an agency’s capabilities would require an in-house team. Usually, it’s more expensive to build a dedicated in-house team than to work with an agency. Again, that’s not always true, but that’s been my experience.

How I would choose an SEO company for my law firm

I would do many of the things Fishkin recommends.⁷ Definitely define your goals

DENTAL MALPRACTICE CASES CALL FOR SPECIAL EXPERTISE

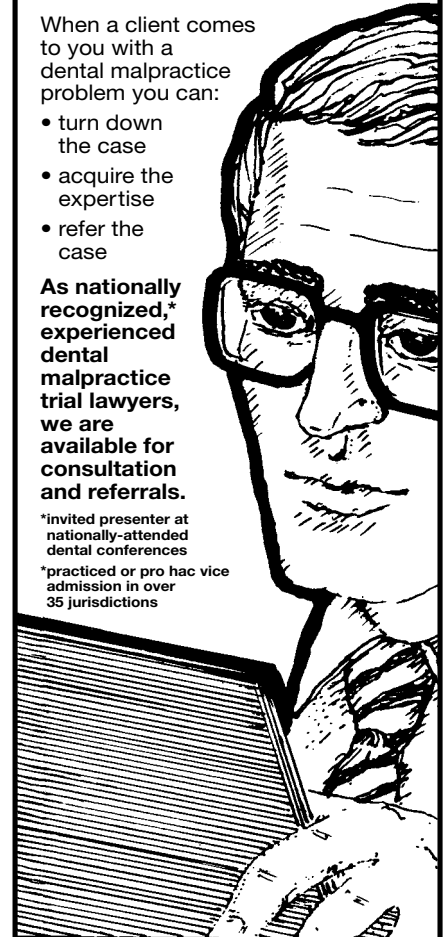
When a client comes to you with a dental malpractice problem you can:

- turn down the case
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As nationally recognized,* experienced dental malpractice trial lawyers, we are available for consultation and referrals.

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Once you've chosen an SEO company for your law firm, hold it accountable. Make sure the company is doing what it said it would do. If not, move on.

in advance. Ultimately, these goals should tie back to a business metric at your firm. Here are a few suggestions:

- Increase the number of phone calls our firm receives from qualified potential clients from the organic search channel.
- Grow the number of people on our firm's e-mail lists from the organic search channel.
- Increase the number of potential client inquiries we receive from our Google My Business listing.
- Increase the number of potential client inquiries we get via live chat from the organic search channel.

Whatever your goals, they should relate to the organic search channel. Anything else simply isn't SEO.

Definitely ask people you trust for SEO recommendations. Ask other lawyers who aren't directly competing with you. Ask other business owners who have organizations similar to yours. Maybe you know other local professional service providers like doctors, accountants, dentists, and financial planners. Find out what and who has been working well for them.

See what other lawyers are saying about SEO companies online. Ask their competitors what they think of them.

I'd also suggest that you look for companies that have experience with law firms. SEO for law firms presents unique challenges that don't exist with other businesses.

Ask SEO companies you are considering what they would do on your behalf. Request examples of specific law-firm campaigns they've executed in the past. Ask for

references. Closely review their contracts, terms, and pricing structures. Specifically:

- Make sure that you own your domain, hosting account, content management system, and content.
- Make sure your site is built on WordPress. Reasonable people might disagree about this, but it's rare that I'm persuaded otherwise.
- Don't sign a long-term agreement with no way to terminate. I recommend month-to-month; six months is reasonable. A year is probably as long as I'd commit to at one time.
- Require approval and rationale for actions the company will take on your behalf.
- Get the company to commit on what will be included in reports. Make sure tangible outcomes are included (e.g., phone calls and form fills specifically from organic search).
- Ask the company for its opinion of Google's webmaster guidelines.
- Ask the company how and from where it will build links.
- Ask if the company offers additional online marketing services to complement SEO activities. Don't put all your eggs in the SEO basket.
- Ask the company about its communication processes. What will the workflow look like? How will you be able to keep in touch?

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This article was originally published as a blog post at <https://www.attorneysync.com/>.



As an attorney (licensed in Michigan, not practicing), Gyi Tsakalakis is familiar with the unique considerations of marketing a law practice both effectively and ethically. In 2008, he founded

*AttorneySync, an online legal marketing agency, to help lawyers earn meaningful attention online because that's where clients are looking. He tends to write about legal marketing technology. You can see some of what Gyi has been up to at GyiTsakalakis.com, *Avvo's Lawyernomics blog*, *Lawyerist*, and *Attorney at Work*.*

ENDNOTES

1. Rand Fishkin, Moz Blog, *How to Choose a Good SEO Company for Your Business or Website—Whiteboard Friday* <<https://moz.com/blog/how-to-choose-seo-company-whiteboard-friday>> (posted January 27, 2017). All websites cited in this article were accessed July 19, 2017.
2. Gyi Tsakalakis, LinkedIn, *Lawyer SEO "Uh-Ohs"* <<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/lawyer-seo-uh-ohs-gyi-tsakalakis>> (posted April 2, 2015).
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4. Gyi Tsakalakis, AttorneySync, *Web Design Footer Links* <<https://www.attorneysync.com/blog/web-design-footer-links/>>.
5. Gyi Tsakalakis, AttorneySync, *Once More on Guaranteed Law Firm SEO Rankings* <<https://www.attorneysync.com/blog/guaranteed-law-firm-seo-rankings/>>.
6. Gyi Tsakalakis, In Marketing, *Guaranteed Rankings!* <<http://gyitsakalakis.com/marketing/guaranteed-rankings/>> (posted March 19, 2014).
7. Rand Fishkin, Moz Blog, *How to Choose a Good SEO Company for Your Business or Website—Whiteboard Friday* <<https://moz.com/blog/how-to-choose-seo-company-whiteboard-friday>> (posted January 27, 2017).