What's a Digital Marketing Strategy and How Do I Get One?

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If you don't have a digital marketing strategy and plan, you're simply executing a to-do list of random tasks with no idea of what's working and what's not, no clue if you're meeting your goals and objectives, and no roadmap for what to do next.

Thing is, most small firms don't have a digital marketing strategy, so if you craft one today, you're ahead of the game.

It can all seem a bit overwhelming for a solo or small firm lawyer who has little time to spend on marketing efforts, which would explain why most don't have a written strategy. To address this, we've come up with a 6-step strategy and execution plan.

1. Know your goals
2. Identify your target audience
3. Execute a content, social media, and SEO plan
4. Experiment with paid advertising for quick hits.
5. Review analytics to know what's working and what's not, and how to fix it.
6. Weave branding throughout each step of your marketing strategy.

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Digital Marketing Goals

Your high-level goals are two-fold:

1. Increase revenue
2. Increase brand awareness

In order to set revenue goals, it's helpful to know:

- What is the lifetime value of a client?
- How many new clients per month will you need to meet your revenue goal?
- How many qualified leads will it take to get the desired number of new clients?
- What is the cost per lead?

If you use practice management software, you'll have access to some of these numbers. If not, start with revenue goals and gather data on leads and conversions as you execute your marketing plan. DON'T LET THIS INITIAL EXERCISE BE A BOTTLENECK.

Also, at a high level, in order to increase brand awareness, consider:

- Content – Your target audience needs, optimization, and competitor analysis
- Social Media – Where do my clients and prospects hang out?
- Offline – Although this is all about digital marketing, don't forget critical in-person engagements and relationship building opportunities

Another way to get at your brand awareness goals is to look at Google Analytics to help identify Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

These are not set it and forget it efforts. Review and refine your goals and metrics quarterly as you gather more marketing data. This will also allow you to get more granular and specific with your goals.

Identify Your Target Audience with Buyer Personas

A buyer persona is a representation of your customer based on market research and real data about your existing customers, including their **demographics, behavior patterns, needs, concerns, goals and objectives**.

A law firm may have multiple buyer personas. For example, if your firm is focused on corporate law, you buyer personas may include business owners, entrepreneurs and in-house counsel. Each type of buyer is a different persona with different needs, concerns and goals.

On the other hand, if you run a matrimonial practice, you may have one persona, an individual who is considering or is in the process of a divorce.

Here are some tips to identify and create your buyer personas:

- Look through your **email database or your CRM system** to determine what your clients read on your email newsletters and on your websites.
- When you create **forms on your website**, make sure you capture as much information as possible to easily segment your clients and prospects and deliver the right content to them at the right time.
- **Talk to your existing clients**. Ask them what their top concerns, needs, goals and objectives are.
- **Do some research**. There are many tools including social media networks like LinkedIn and Twitter that can help you figure out what your target audience is interested in and what they are reading.
- **Look at what your competitors are doing**. What kind of content are they publishing? How much engagement are they getting?
- **Talk to prospects**. Set up interviews with some prospects and ask them what they care about: What is important to them and what they are interested in learning more about.

Identifying your buyer personas is critical to help you determine your digital marketing strategy and what kind of content you should be creating for your target audience and to help you develop an editorial calendar.

COPE Content Strategy

Content is the center of your digital marketing strategy. It's how you demonstrate expertise, build your brand, and create relationships with clients, prospects and influencers.

However, creating content takes time and effort. To solve this, adopt a "create once, publish everywhere" (COPE) strategy of repurposing content. This concept was popularized by National Public Radio.

Here are some content formats, platforms, and channels, to consider:

Blogs – This is the epicenter of your COPE content strategy. It can be attached to your website or live on a separate domain.

Infographics – Some of your blog posts can be repurposed into a graphical representation. Images get shared more often and gives readers a quick view of what you're trying to convey.

Ebooks and White Papers – A collection of your blog posts and infographics can now be compiled into a white paper or Ebook. Require an email address for downloads to gather leads.

Webinars – Expand a popular post into a webinar. A wrap-up of the webinar including video and slides then becomes another blog post.

Videos –You can break the webinar recording into bite-sized bits for visitors to your website looking to solve a specific problem.

Slides – Give your slides an extra shelf life online on Slideshare. Embed and expand each slide in a blog post.

Podcasts – Podcasts are exploding in popularity. A 20-minute recording weekly or even monthly is all it takes. Each episode then becomes a blog post.

Email Newsletters – Your weekly or monthly newsletter keeps clients, prospects, and referral sources top of mind. You've already created useful content to share.

Forms database – Build a page on your site with links to helpful forms. Often, that's how potential clients find you.

Press release – This is still a potent tool. You get wide distribution and links back to your site and you can create a blog post with a link to the full press release.

Client memos or client alerts – These are short pieces in response to court cases or regulatory changes that affect your clients. Repurpose, with some editing, as information pieces on your blog.

Guest writing – Write a blog post for another publication. The byline will include a link back to your site. Then create a summary of the post on your own blog with a link to the full text.

Social Media – All of this content becomes part of your social media sharing and curation strategy.

There you have it. Create content once, with your blog as the center, repurpose to other formats, and publish everywhere.

Social Media Strategy Checklist

Social media is a critical part of your digital marketing strategy. To make sure your firm gets going in the right direction, here's a social media strategy checklist.

✓ **Define your audience**. The single most important part of planning your strategy is to know your audience. Everything you do is going to be geared towards nurturing and growing your audience.

✓ **Select your platform(s)**. If you've created a good profile of your ideal audience, you should be able to pick out the social media platforms they are most likely to use. Pick one to three platforms on which to be active. It's much better to do well on one or two than to perform badly on five or six.

✓ **Define clear, realistic goals**. It is important to have clear and specific goals in mind as you're planning your firm's strategy. For example, are you trying to generate more hits to your website, or increase your following on a specific platform? Do you want more subscriptions to your newsletter or are you trying to generate more inbound telephone consultations?

✓ **Create and curate content that speaks to your audience**. Create and share content that aligns with your goals and provides real value. It should be educational or help audience members solve a problem.

✓ **Create policies on how to respond to your audience**. Make sure everyone involved knows what's expected of them. Responses should appear unified and consistent.

✓ **Measure your results**. Track the results you get from social media, including: size and growth of your audience, what types of content create the most engagement, visitors referred to your website, leads generated, and relationships initiated.

You'll most likely come up with a few more statistics to watch depending on the area(s) of law your firm is involved with and what your immediate goals are.

SEO Checklist

Search engine optimization (SEO) is an essential part of your digital marketing strategy. It provides a slow and steady stream of potential clients that will grow over time.

Following is a checklist you can use to make sure you're hitting all the important points as you put SEO techniques to work for your law firm.

✓ **Do your keyword research**. The starting point for your SEO efforts is always going to be keyword research. First, you'll need to pick a few words or phrases that are relevant to your law practice. From there, you can find related terms to consider and make estimates of the traffic these keywords will drive if you rank well in the search results.

✓ **Select a target keyword for each page you create**. Every page of your firm's website should be created with a specific keyword in mind. This basically means each page needs to stay on topic. Discussing more than one topic on a page will dilute your results.

✓ **Build inbound links that include target keywords in their text**. Inbound links are an important part of SEO. Search engines see many inbound links as a testament to the quality of the information on a page. Their logic is that there must be a good reason so many people are linking to the same page. The result is higher ranking in search results.

✓ **Page titles should include the target keywords**. Each page should include the target keyword or phrase in the title, preferably in the first 2 or 3 words, and written in natural language.

✓ **Include target keywords in the meta description.** The meta description will appear immediately after the page title in search results. Like the title, it should contain the target keywords written in natural language, and within the first few words if possible.

✓ **Use sub headers to reinforce ideas on the page**. Usually placed as "H2" tags, sub headers help to break up blocks of text on the page for readers, and, more importantly, help reinforce the ideas behind your content to search engines.

✓ **Include target keywords in "H" (H1, H2, H3, etc.) tags**. Your target keywords should appear in at least one page or paragraph heading. Again, don't force anything. Make sure it appears in naturally written language.

✓ **Create a human-readable URL structure**. Whenever possible, you should try to create URLs that describe the content of the page and include your keywords.

✓ **Create HTML and XML sitemaps**. Sitemaps are basically a list of all the pages that appear on your site; an index. A sitemap allows search engines to quickly and accurately see every page your site has to offer. The result is faster and more accurate inclusion in search results.

✓ **Maintain a robots.txt file**. Most search engines will look for a robots.txt file on your site. Generally, sites use this file to tell web robots (like search engine spiders) to ignore certain files or directories on the site.

✓ **Establish a presence on major social media platforms**. Aside from using social media to engage and share and promote your content and curate useful information, it can help to boost search results. As more people find your site and share your content, your perceived authority will grow.

✓ **Complete your firm's profile on Google Business**. A Google Business listing is especially important for reaching your firm's local audience. Not only will people in nearby geographic areas be more likely to see your listings, they can read and write reviews of your service, get directions to your office and easily find things like contact information and hours of operation.

Google AdWords

Google AdWords is an advertising platform that lets you place ads anywhere they are willing to pay to position them. It enables your firm to gain qualified leads by high placement on the search results page. Unlike SEO strategies that can take months for significant results to be seen, a firm can tell if AdWords is working after about a week.

The platform works on a market principle: you pay is based on what the market will allow – more competitive keywords requires higher bids. Google will give you a Quality Score based on an algorithm that looks at the relevance between the keywords you're bidding on, the ad you wish to show, and the landing page you're trying to send people to. The lower your Quality Score, the more you pay to rank. If you're able to increase your Quality Score, your cost per click will be lower.

The key elements of your Google AdWords campaign

- Ads that reflect your law firm
- Individual landing pages for each ad
- Keywords

Four types of keyword match:

1. Exact match – searcher must type exact key phrase for ad to show in search
2. Phrase match – searcher must type the entire phrase, but can include additional words
3. Modified broad match – searcher can search any of the part of the key phrase in any order and the ad will show up
4. Broad match – searcher can type key phrase in any order and google will determine and allow for substitution words

What are ad extensions and do they make sense for lawyers?
Ad extensions are additional links or information you can include with your ads; this can be hit or miss for lead generation. Whether or not ad extensions are appropriate should be determined on a case by case basis as it may be effective for some law firms and not others.

How do you track conversions?
Tracking is essential in order to understand what is working for your law firm and what isn't. AdWords is exceptional at tracking anything with a page via a cookie-based tracking code.

Paid Social

Advertising on social media gives you an unprecedented ability to finely target your desired audience. Here's an overview of LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube advertising. Twitter, and other social media platforms offer similar options.

LINKEDIN

LinkedIn provides incredible targeting advertising opportunities.

Budgets for LinkedIn Advertising

Like Google Adwords, you can set up your own budget. However, the difference between Google Adwords and paid social, and in particular, paid LinkedIn, is that LinkedIn is much cheaper – as much as half the cost of pay-per-click. Some clients spend $200-$250 per month and are seeing great results. You can set your own budget and based on the results, choose to spend more or less.

Matched Audiences

Matched Audiences is LinkedIn's retargeting platform and lets you serve an advertisement for a piece of content to someone that's already familiar with your brand. Studies have shown that people are much more likely to engage or purchase from a brand they're already familiar with.

FACEBOOK

Among the many options Facebook offers for targeted advertising, the custom audience feature is one of the most precise. It lets you go beyond general groups and demographics to target your law firm's advertising to specific, individual users.

The custom audience functions allow you to build an audience based on four different types of users:

- A list of your law firm's existing or past clients
- People who have visited your law firm's website
- Users who have used a mobile app
- Users who have interacted with your firm's Facebook page

YOUTUBE

YouTube allows you to choose from two basic types of ads: video discovery ads and in-stream ads. The ad type you choose will determine where your video advertisement shows up as viewers browse YouTube.

Video Discovery Ads

YouTube's video discovery ads show up as static listings on the YouTube homepage, in video search results, and in the related videos that are listed on the right side of the screen when watching a video. They work in a similar fashion to the ads you see on the top and bottom of the results when you run a search on Google. When a user clicks one of the advertisement links, they will be taken to your video.

In-Stream Ads

In-stream ads are probably the YouTube advertisements you are most familiar with. These are the video ads you see at the beginning of, and sometimes in the middle of, many YouTube videos. In most cases, you have the option of skipping the ad and continuing to your chosen video after five seconds.

Analytics: Measuring Your Digital Marketing Efforts

The only way to know if your marketing efforts are meeting your goals is, of course, to measure results. Otherwise, there is no way to tell if your campaign is on the right track or running off the rails.

Whether your law firm is just getting started with digital marketing, or looking to revamp current marketing campaigns, there are several key metrics you should be monitoring:

Total Visits

The most obvious and easiest statistic to track is the total number of visits your site is receiving.

If total visits are going down, or suddenly drop from one week or month to the next, you'll want to look at your overall campaign and see if something is not functioning the way it should. At the very least, you'll want your site visits to stay about the same, but ideally this number should be going steadily up, even if only by a small amount.

New Sessions

New sessions show the number of visitors who've never been to your site before. By comparing new sessions with total sessions, you'll get an idea of how many people are returning to your site, and how many are there for the first time.

The optimal numbers here are going to depend on what your overall goals are. If you've been working on site content and nurturing leads, you might expect to see higher return visit numbers. If you just launched a social media blitz to attract new clients, you'll want to see the new sessions number increasing.

Acquisition Channels

You'll find these statistics in Google Analytics under the Acquisition section. Click on "All Traffic" and then on "Channels". The four main channels that should interest you are:

Direct – Visitors who went directly to your site by typing the URL in their browser.

Referral – Visitors sent to your site by clicking a link on another web site.

Social – Visitors sent to your site from links on prominent social media sites.

Organic Search – Visitors who clicked a link in search results to reach your site.

- Bounce Rate

Bounce rate is the percentage of people that visit your site but leave without any other page. For instance, if Google Analytics shows your bounce rate as 65 percent, it means 65 percent of the visitors to your site leave after viewing only one page. You'll want to work on lowering the bounce rate by providing internal linking on posts, pages, and the sidebar, if you have one, and provide better navigation.

Cost Per Lead/Client

Calculating your cost per lead and cost per client will help you to decide which marketing channels are giving your firm the best value for its money.

To come up with your cost per lead, simply divide the total amount you spent on a particular marketing channel for a period such as one month by the number of leads or clients generated by that channel over the same period.

For example, if you spent $500 on Google Adwords advertising last month and gained 10 new leads and two new clients during that same period, your cost per lead for Google Adwords would be $50, and your cost per client would be $250.

Client Value

Client value is determined by calculating the average amount of money earned from each client over the life of the firm's relationship with that client. This number is particularly useful for helping to determine the last item on our list.

Projected Return on Investment (ROI)

To calculate the ROI for a given campaign, you just need to compare the money you are spending over time with the expected value for the number of new clients your firm gains during that time.

So, for example, if your firm spends $500 per month to advertise on Google Adwords and gains two new clients, each with an expected client value of $2000, you would have a projected monthly ROI of $3500, or 700%, on Google Adwords advertising.

The Three P’s of Legal Branding

Finally, don’t forget that your branding should be interwoven throughout each step of your marketing strategy, whether your branding makes a visual appearance during that step, or whether it is important just to keep it in the forefront of your thought process as you go through each step. Use the tips below about the 3 P’s of Legal Branding to help.

Effective branding creates a psychological connection between a “thing” and the people who’ll willingly pay money for that “thing.” In my own branding, I’ve always done what came naturally. I didn’t start out by thinking about rules or processes. Over time, though, I realized that much of what I was doing could be put into a formula — the “three P’s” — to teach others my branding processes.
My formula for branding, based on the processes I’ve used in my own business, is:

Passion + Personality = Persuasion
(where the final goal is to persuade people to give us money to help them).

Passion

The root of it. Your first question should be, “What am I passionate about?” Consider whether you are passionate about a product or providing a service, because there is a difference. You might find that while you thought the product was your passion, it is actually the delivery of services and the experiences that surround it. Your passion does not always have to be directly about the work, either. If you can take a passion for something in your personal life and apply that feeling to the part of your work that resonates with you, your work will reflect that passionate energy.

For example, I do divorce work but my passion is not for *divorces* per se. I don’t wake up and say, “Yay, divorce!” My passion is for delivering a service that is non-intimidating and as stress-free as possible for people who are going through the divorce process.

Personality

Even robots have personalities. Most humans want to do business with other humans, not with robots. (Though if being kind of robotic is part of your brand, then absolutely give your brand some robot personality of its own!) How do you give your brand personality? These tips are so intertwined that they may seem redundant, but together they form the core of establishing your brand personality:

1. **Be human.** Or a robot with personality!
2. **Tell a story.** Stories touch the soul and make real-life connections between people. Share your experiences with others to establish a connection.

3. **Be relatable.** Being human and telling stories makes you more relatable to others and removes some of the intimidation potential clients might feel in contacting you.
4. **Have a unique voice.** Sound like yourself. Instead of trying to use big words and legalese all the time, write and speak as if you were with your friends. Whatever your speaking style is naturally, bring that into your communications.
5. **Be authentic.** It may sound counterintuitive, but you'll need to dig really deep to find the right words, images and stories that best represent the way *you* feel about your work.

For example, stuff I post on social media is not just law related. I include a lot of things I find personally amusing or that show my personality. I post stuff about coffee and things that make me laugh. It shows the world that I have a personality to which people outside the law business can relate.

Persuasion

The goal. Merriam-Webster defines "persuade" as "to cause (someone) to do something by asking, arguing, or giving reasons." Emotion is not part of the definition, yet without an emotional connection, it is impossible to have the same kind of influence. Wanting to persuade someone is not a bad thing. It's natural to want others to think like we do and agree with us, and it should come as no surprise that the way to grow your business is by persuading people to pay you for your services. But how does Passion + Personality translate into persuasion? Passion and personality build trust and rapport.
Storytelling accomplishes it quite nicely. A good, compelling story appeals first to emotion and then to logic. Telling a story that makes you likable or relatable will create an emotional connection with your audience/clients, and will build trust once they like you and know you are human just like they are. They will *want* to do business with you if they trust and like you.

Piece by Piece, Pulling It Together

How does Passion + Personality = Persuasion work in real life? Let's fill in the equation using my examples:

- My **passion** for delivering a non-intimidating, low-stress legal experience appeals to people because (1) everyone wants as little stress as possible, and (2) it shows that I care about the experience, and people want someone to *care* about them.
- This, combined with showing my **personality** online by sharing my sense of humor (and love for coffee) creates an emotional connection (hopefully!) because people feel they can relate to me.
- And, ultimately, because of that emotional connection, they want to do business with me. (I have **persuaded** them.)

In the grand scheme of your business and branding — and all of your interactions — remember that everything falls somewhere into the three P's equation. If a piece is missing, you will find it more difficult to get business. For some people, these tips might come naturally. But if they don't for you, they can definitely be learned and practiced over time.

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