JustLegal

2026 EDITION — REVISED & UPDATED

DIGITAL MARKETING FOR LAWYERS

A GUIDE TO SUCCESS

Websites, Content Marketing, SEO, AI Search Visibility, Google Ads, Social Media, Video, Online Reviews & More

JUSTLEGAL MARKETING

LAW FIRM MARKETING SPECIALISTS

Digital Marketing for Lawyers

A Guide to Success — 2026 Edition, Revised and Updated

by JustLegal Marketing

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CONTENTS

What's Inside

01 Website

02 Audience

03 Content

04 SEO

05 AI Search & Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)

06 Google Ads

07 Content vs. PPC

08 Facebook & Social Media

09 Video

10 Reviews

A NOTE FROM STEPHAN FUTERAL, ESQ.

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Foreword

I've been a lawyer since 1993 and designing websites and marketing for law firms since 1995. As a practicing attorney, I know just how competitive the legal field is — and how technical, time-consuming, and costly it is to build a real digital footprint. Market your firm improperly, and you'll find out just how expensive an uninformed approach can be. Market it well, continuously and with precision, and you'll stay ahead of the firms that don't.

I wrote the first edition of this guide in 2020. Since then, more has changed in legal marketing than in the twenty years before it combined — AI Overviews, ChatGPT and Gemini recommending lawyers by name, Local Services Ads, and short-form video all moved from novelty to necessity. I've rewritten this guide cover to cover to reflect it, while keeping the fundamentals that were true in 2020 and remain true today.

This guide is for do-it-yourselfers sharpening their own marketing, and for lawyers who want to know whether their marketer is actually earning its keep. My hope is that it helps you grow your practice.

Best wishes,

Stephan Futeral, Esq.

01

CHAPTER 1 OF 10

Website

No matter how good your online marketing may be, a poorly designed website will discourage your site's visitors from converting into clients. Here is what you need to know to ensure your website is up to par — including a risk lawyers specifically can't afford to ignore anymore.

Section 1 — Your Marketing Hub

As an online marketing agency for lawyers, the first thing we focus on is the law firm's website. After all, your firm's website is the beating heart of all of your online marketing efforts including search engine optimization (SEO), local SEO, social media marketing, paid digital advertising, and — as we'll cover in Chapter 5 — whether AI tools like ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews mention your firm at all. Unfortunately, too often we find that a law firm's website is a disaster from the standpoints of improper coding, slow site speed, lack of mobile friendliness, and impediments to usability.

Some attorneys try to compensate for their firm's poor website design by throwing money at paid digital advertising. Although this approach may drive traffic to the site (and cost thousands each month), site visitors may quickly bounce out of the site instead of being drawn in further or converting to clients.

We never cease to be amazed at how much "professionals" charge attorneys for their websites, yet these designers don't deliver a professional product. In our experience, there are two primary reasons why these so-called web developers do inferior work: the designer is a novice who knows HTML or WordPress but not how to optimize a site for search, or the designer is lazy and skips steps assuming attorneys won't check behind their work. Before you invest good money into a website that will hurt, not help, your search engine optimization efforts, here's your checklist to ensure you're getting the best website possible for your money.

Page Speed and Core Web Vitals

We all know that folks like instant gratification. We don't like to wait at the DMV, and we sure don't like to wait for a slow website to load. If your site takes too long, potential leads will bounce to a competing law firm's website. Since the first edition of this guide, Google formalized exactly how it measures this into a set of metrics called Core Web Vitals — specifically Largest Contentful Paint (how fast the main content loads), Interaction to Next Paint (how quickly the page responds when someone taps or clicks), and Cumulative Layout Shift (whether the page jumps

around while it loads, which is maddening on mobile). These are now a direct ranking factor for both desktop and mobile, so you need to keep Google happy to improve your ranking and gain more organic traffic.

Before we explain how you can check your Core Web Vitals scores through Google's free PageSpeed Insights tool (pagespeed.web.dev), here are two common problems that still slow down sites in 2026:

1. Server / Hosting — Not all website hosts are created equal. There are many offerings out there from companies such as GoDaddy, Bluehost, and others, and many of these are cheap shared-hosting packages that don't deliver good speeds. If your firm's site is on shared hosting, that's usually the first thing to fix.
2. Image File Size — Many web designers who haven't kept up with the times still upload full-resolution JPEGs and PNGs straight from a camera or stock photo site. Insist that your developer serve modern, compressed formats like WebP or AVIF, and run every image through a lossless compression tool before it goes live. This alone can cut page-load time significantly.

Check Your Law Firm Website's Meta Tags

The <meta> tag provides information about each page on your website. You can't see metadata when you're viewing a web page, but Google and other search engines can. Two meta tags are important. The first is your meta "title" — the text you'll see at the top of your browser tab, which search engines show as the title of your page. The second tag is your meta "description," a short paragraph that describes the content of your page to searchers and lets them know if they've found what they're looking for. Both of these also matter more than they used to: they're frequently what Google's AI Overviews and other AI tools pull from when summarizing your page, so a vague or missing meta description is now a missed opportunity in two search experiences, not just one.

Check Your Website's Schema Markup

Schema is a markup language developed and maintained by the big search engines. Like meta tags, it's hidden from view, and it allows search engines to better understand your website's content. Data marked up using schema appears in the rich snippets of search results — for example, star ratings next to a result are schema at work. There are schemas for a variety of things, and importantly, there's a schema for attorneys and law firms (Attorney, LegalService), which you should confirm your developer has actually implemented.

To check your site's schema, use Google's free Rich Results Test (search.google.com/test/rich-results) — this replaced the old Structured Data Testing Tool, which Google retired years ago, so if your developer is still referencing that old tool, that's a red flag that they haven't kept current. Your results will tell you whether you have any schema at all, or where there's room for improvement.

Check Your Site's Image Alt Tags

The purpose of the image alt attribute is to provide a text description of the image. Alt tags matter for visitors who can't see images in their browsers, such as visually impaired visitors and those using screen readers, and they're also a factor search engines use to understand and rank your images. To check your site's alt tags using Chrome, right-click on an image and select "Inspect." Chrome will reveal the code for that image and highlight it on the page. Look for the line that reads alt="Your Description Here." If there's no description between the quotation marks, ask your web developer to add a relevant one to that image and others throughout your site.

Page speed, meta tags, schema markup, and image alt tags are just a few examples of the things a good web developer should address to build a site optimized for search. We encourage you to take a moment and check your own site to see if your developer gave your firm its money's worth.

Section 2 — Usability & Esthetics

With so many potential clients choosing lawyers by researching online, you can't overlook the appearance of your website. Having said that, we know many great lawyers whose websites are, in a word — awful. Although these lawyers exemplify the meaning of the word "professional," their websites look like they were designed decades ago. Your firm's website shouldn't be a marketing afterthought. It is your digital calling card and, oftentimes, the very first impression a potential client has of your firm.

Navigation — Make It Simple

Your website's navigation is critical, and it has a big impact on your site's success or failure. Recently, we reviewed a personal injury lawyer's website and counted how many clickable areas there were on the homepage. This particular site assaulted its visitors with over 100 navigation choices, multiple calls to action, menus with submenus and sub-submenus. The end result is that visitors' eyes are likely to scan past any important items because the site is overwhelming.

Limit your navigation, particularly your main menu. As for main menus, we recommend no greater than 7 top menu choices. With fewer menu and navigational items, your visitors' eyes are less likely to scan past important items. Also, place your navigational menus where visitors expect to find them, such as horizontal navigation across the top. In the end, better, simpler navigation means a lower bounce rate, more pages per visit, and higher conversions.

Color — Communicate With Your Palette

Color plays an important role in your law firm website's success. When used properly, color is a powerful form of communication that can sway thinking, change actions, and cause reactions. Before you choose a color scheme for your website, consider the following overview of the "meaning" expressed by various colors.

Color	Positive Meaning	Negative Meaning
Red	Energetic, masculine, and exciting.	Defiant, aggressive, and urgent.
Blue	Secure, intelligent, and logical.	Cold, aloof, and unfriendly.
Green	Balanced, peaceful, and wealthy.	Boring, stagnant, and bland.
Yellow	Youthful, optimistic, and creative.	Irrational, fearful, and anxious.
Orange	Aggressive, passionate, and fun.	Frustrating, frivolous, and immature.
Black	Sophisticated, efficient, and glamorous.	Oppressive, cold, and menacing.
White	Pure, sophisticated, and efficient.	Sterile, unfriendly, and elite.
Grey	Neutral, elegant, and formal.	Boring, drab, and depressing.

Typography — Emphasize Readability

Typography isn't just about choosing fonts or making things look pretty. Typography guides your readers through your website, makes your content look attractive, and gives your site a consistent look. At the very least, we recommend the following: (1) Don't overuse fonts — keep your typeface consistent across the site; and (2) keep heading size, font, and attributes consistent — if your headline on one page is bold and blue at 18 points, keep it that way on every page.

Good design is crucial to your website's usability, readability, and overall atmosphere. To ensure your website's success, keep your navigation and content simple, choose colors that convey the right psychological message to your readers, and don't overlook the importance of proper typography.

Section 3 — Accessibility & Legal Risk

This section didn't exist in the first edition of this guide, and it should have. Founded by a practicing attorney, we understand risk better than most marketing agencies — which makes it worth pointing out that your own website may be your firm's single biggest piece of unmanaged legal exposure.

ADA Website Accessibility Lawsuits

Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act has been interpreted by a growing number of courts to apply to websites, not just physical locations. Plaintiffs' firms — some of whom file these suits in volume — have targeted businesses of every kind, including law firms, over websites that aren't usable with a screen reader, that rely on color alone to convey information, or that have no captions on video content. We've seen law firms get hit with a demand letter over their own website, which is more than a little embarrassing when you're in the business of giving other people legal advice.

The practical baseline most firms aim for is WCAG 2.1 Level AA (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) compliance. Ask your developer directly whether your site meets it, and don't accept "probably" as an answer — there are free automated scanners (such as WAVE, at wave.webaim.org) that will flag obvious problems in under a minute, though passing an automated scan isn't a substitute for a real accessibility review if you want to be genuinely protected.

Mobile-First Is No Longer Optional

Google now indexes and ranks the mobile version of your site by default — this used to be worth a whole section of tips in the first edition, and today it's simply the baseline. If your site isn't fully functional and fast on a phone, you are not just losing mobile visitors; you're actively hurting your ranking on desktop searches too.

02

CHAPTER 2 OF 10

Audience

SEO this, keyword ranking that, content marketing yada, yada, yada. Sound familiar? These are just some of the buzzwords surrounding a law firm's online marketing efforts. While all of these concepts play an important role, there is one concept that matters the most — your target audience.

Section 1 — 4 Steps to Define Your Audience

Without a clear definition of your target audience, you might as well be throwing all of your marketing efforts against a proverbial wall to see what sticks. Here are 4 steps for all you "do-it-yourselfers" to get you on the right track to define your law firm's target audience.

Step 1. Create a Demographic Profile

This first step may sound like a no-brainer, but the reality is that some law firms either completely miss the mark in defining the demographics for their target audience, or their website's content isn't tailored to their audience. Let's start with the easy part — determining your audience's age, gender, and location — using a real-world example.

Not long ago, we worked with a solo practitioner who wanted to focus on criminal defense work for college students. In this scenario, the lawyer assumed his demographic profile was: age 18 to 21, male and female, located in the city where the college is located. This profile missed the mark for one major reason — college students didn't hire him for criminal defense work because they couldn't afford him. In reality, his target audience was the parents of the college students. His best demographic profile turned out to be: age 40–55, predominantly female (because the wife or mother made most of the hiring decisions in this case), and located across a combination of the college's city and several other key locations where the college attracted non-resident students.

Once you've defined the age, gender, and location of your target audience, you can further refine your demographic profile by considering occupation, income level, educational level, hobbies and interests, and so on.

Step 2. Determine the Primary Issue or Problem

Like defining your target demographic, determining your audience's primary issue or problem may seem easy. For example, if you're a drunk driving defense attorney, you might assume your audience's primary issue is going to jail or losing their

driving privileges. However, with a little more analysis, you might be surprised that you are missing out on opportunities within your market.

We once helped a lawyer who faced stiff online competition from a large number of other DUI defense attorneys. By redefining his target audience's primary issue and tailoring his marketing message to that audience, he was able to successfully tap into a large number of potential clients he had previously missed out on. Instead of targeting a broad range of DUI-related issues, we focused on commercial vehicle license holders and drivers (predominantly male) whose primary problem was losing their livelihood by losing their license. By zeroing in on that very specific need and refocusing his website's primary message, the lawyer saw a significant increase in website traffic and leads to his firm.

Step 3. Relate the Benefit of Your Services to the Problem

Step 3 is about creating website content that speaks directly to your target audience and encourages your site's visitors to contact you. Your content should: (1) draw in your target audience; (2) clearly and concisely demonstrate why they should hire your firm; and (3) give visitors an easy way to contact your firm. Overall, your website's content should motivate visitors to act by clarifying the benefits of retaining your firm for their specific legal issue, and by giving visitors the sense that their problem will begin to be solved.

Step 4. Discover Where Your Target Audience Gets Their Information

If you don't plan to run any pay-per-click campaigns or targeted ads online, you can probably skip most of Step 4, with one exception: think through which platforms your audience actually spends time on before you commit budget or content effort there. For example, if you're a family lawyer who markets largely to spouses going through a divorce, a visually driven platform aimed at a largely female audience may be a better use of your time than one built for a completely different demographic. The specific platforms shift over time — that's precisely why this step matters more than ever, and why we'll come back to it by name in the social media and video chapters.

One more thing has changed since the first edition of this chapter: a growing share of your audience now does their early research by asking an AI assistant like ChatGPT or Google's AI Overviews a question, before they ever type a traditional search or land on a website. That doesn't change who your audience is — but it does mean the first "impression" of your firm increasingly happens somewhere you don't control directly. We'll show you exactly how to influence that in Chapter 5.

03

CHAPTER 3 OF 10

Content

Some of our clients' best site traffic and referrals come from posts written years ago. In essence, these posts are "evergreen" marketing content that continue to drive clients through the door year after year. What's changed since we first wrote this is who's reading that content before your visitor ever does.

Section 1 — Write Content People Actually Read

Now that we've covered the technical and design aspects of your law firm's website, the next step to successful online marketing is to focus on your website's content. By now, you've probably heard that "content is king" when it comes to a law firm's online marketing strategy. We're not going to preach about content except to say this: content is what draws traffic to your website, and quality content is what converts a site visitor into a firm lead.

Unfortunately, many law firm websites have the worst content for two reasons. First, there's too much content — according to research from the Nielsen Norman Group, a leading user experience consulting group, most people don't actually read content online. Instead, they scan and pick up words and phrases as they go, and will only read a fraction of the text on an average webpage. The bottom line is that you should format your content to make it easy for visitors to scan your site for the most valuable information. Here's how:

- Use engaging headlines and subheadings — most people scan headlines to decide whether to read further. Make strong headlines work for you the same way they do in magazines.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists — lists are easier to read and comprehend than long blocks of text.
- Be concise — make sure your content is both clear and brief.
- Use graphics and video — break up content visually and give your readers a break.

Second, the content is written by a lawyer — for the wrong reasons. The surest way to make sure no one reads your website's content is to use highbrow statements or legalese. Don't talk down to your audience and don't try to make your firm sound important by using lofty expressions. Your website's content should be simple and familiar. Technical words should be the exception, not the rule.

Section 2 — Three Rules for Content That Converts

Rule #1. Don't Write Like a Lawyer

Writing like a lawyer completely defeats the purpose of content marketing. Clients don't want a lawyer who talks over their heads or down to them. Clients don't want to learn the law; they want to understand how it impacts their situation. Consider the difference between a passage written as though it were a legal brief, citing statutes and case law, versus a plain-English passage that answers the same question a worried reader is actually asking. The second version is concise, written in plain English, and will help any reader regardless of their sophistication. The hallmark of a great blog post on the law is one that makes complex concepts simple to understand — and, as we'll cover shortly, that same plain-spoken clarity is now exactly what gets your content quoted by AI search tools too.

Our advice is to have someone who isn't a lawyer read over your content and tell you whether it sounds "lawyerly," and why.

Rule #2. Provide Solutions to Problems

To provide solutions to potential clients' problems, your content must be a resource. There's a big difference between just using content on your website and having content that's genuinely a resource for the reader.

Content	Resource
Provides information	Provides solutions to problems
Addresses any question or topic	Addresses a target audience's specific needs
May be superficial (blogging about a recent accident in the news)	Reasonably comprehensive (exactly what you should do if you're in an accident)
"I'm a lawyer, so listen to what I have to say about legal issues."	"We understand you have a legal problem; let us help you solve it."

The key thing to remember is to focus on solving problems instead of just saying things. By giving your readers value, you'll convert site visitors into actual leads. Start with a common legal issue, explain the issue, and then provide your insights on how to avoid or solve it. For example, if you're a divorce lawyer, write an article on the 5 biggest mistakes you see your clients making and how to avoid them.

Rule #3. Avoid "Thin" Content

Thin content is content that is low value and unoriginal — "cookie cutter" pages and posts. Google will take action against domains that try to rank more highly by showing scraped or other pages that don't add substantial value to users. As an example, many lawyers who relied on third-party vendors to fill their sites with recycled, repackaged content have seen their traffic levels quietly evaporate over time. If you outsource your content marketing, check over examples of the vendor's work to make sure you aren't getting recycled content that's being used on multiple websites.

Section 3 — E-E-A-T: Google Made Our Argument for Us

This section is new since the first edition, and it's our favorite addition to this chapter, because it validates something we've been telling lawyers for years: content written by a real, knowledgeable attorney beats generic, outsourced content every time. Google now has an actual name and a published framework for exactly that idea, called E-E-A-T — Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trust.

Google's own guidance for what it calls "Your Money or Your Life" topics — anything that could affect a person's health, finances, safety, or legal rights — explicitly rewards content that demonstrates the author has real experience and expertise in the subject. Legal advice sits squarely in that category. That means:

- Content should carry a real author byline — ideally an actual attorney at your firm, not "Staff" or no byline at all.
- Author bios should say something real: bar admissions, years practicing, notable case types, and a link to a real attorney profile page on your site.
- Content should reflect firsthand experience with the issue, not a rewritten summary of someone else's article — the exact opposite of the "thin content" problem we described above.

If you've been following Rules #1 through #3 in this chapter, you're already most of the way toward strong E-E-A-T signals. The one thing worth adding on top: make sure your content is visibly, provably written or reviewed by a real lawyer at your firm. That single change does double duty — it helps your traditional Google ranking, and as you'll see in the next chapter, it's also one of the biggest factors in whether AI tools choose to cite your firm at all.

04

CHAPTER 4 OF 10

SEO

SEO is made up of multiple different elements, and knowing what they are and how they work is key to understanding why SEO is so important to your law firm — and why it's now just one half of a bigger picture we'll finish in the next chapter.

Section 1 — Understanding SEO

Because we work in web development and digital marketing, we deal with a lot of acronyms: SEO (search engine optimization), SEM (search engine marketing), SMM (social media marketing), CTR (click-through-rate), CPA (cost-per-acquisition), and SERP (search engine results page), to name a few. If you're trying to follow a conversation with a digital marketer, the jargon is confusing — and regrettably, there are digital marketing companies that prey upon that confusion. Reputable organizations follow best practices (white-hat techniques) that produce measurable results. Others make hollow promises and sometimes make a website's ranking even worse.

SEO is the practice of improving a website's rankings on search engines like Google and Bing. Generally speaking, SEO encompasses (1) making ongoing adjustments to the law firm's website and its content, and (2) influencing whether other websites link to the law firm's website (backlinks). Unlike paid search, where you pay for an ad placement, SEO causes your website to appear organically when someone searches for a keyword related to your practice.

The factors in Google's ranking algorithm fall into two categories. On-page SEO covers everything you control on your own site — technical facets like speed, and content-related facets like structure and quality. Off-page SEO covers activity away from your site that raises your rankings — the most important of which is the number and quality of other sites linking to yours. The more quality, relevant sites that link to your website, the higher your position in Google will be.

Section 2 — Why SEO Is Challenging

SEO is challenging for four reasons: Google constantly changes its search algorithms, Google continually changes how it displays results, Google shows different results to different people in different locations, and SEO for lawyers is remarkably competitive.

1. Google Never Stops Changing Its Algorithm

Google runs thousands of experiments and algorithm updates every year. The point of mentioning this isn't the exact count — it's that SEO is a constant process, not a single event. Techniques that work one month to rank a website highly may not work the next month, or could even cause a site to lose position.

2. Google Keeps Changing How It Displays Results

Since Google launched, the page has gotten more crowded before your organic listing ever appears. Paid ads still occupy the top slots, followed by the local 3-Pack for anything with local intent. Since the first edition of this guide, Google has added another layer above all of that for many searches: AI Overviews, which generate a written answer directly on the results page, often with a short list of cited sources. The practical effect is that ranking #1 organically now means competing for attention below three separate layers of results, not one. We'll cover exactly how to earn a spot inside that AI-generated answer in the next chapter.

3. Google Personalizes Results by User and Location

The same search run by two different people produces two different results. Google has been personalizing search results since 2009 based on your location, search history, and click behavior — regardless of whether you're logged into a Google product. This is why the same "divorce lawyer near me" search shows different local-pack results depending on where the searcher physically is, down to the neighborhood.

4. Lawyer SEO Is Remarkably Competitive

Over 90% of people looking for legal advice use a search engine, and over 70% of consumers visiting a law firm's website go on to take some action. With only ten organic positions on the first page, and the majority of clicks going to the first few results, law firms are financially invested in earning those top spots. A search for

"injury lawyers in new york city" returns tens of millions of possible results — which should give you a sense of why lawyer SEO is so costly and competitive in a major market.

Section 3 — Why SEO Is Important

Law firm SEO is important for three reasons: organic search is a primary source of traffic to a law firm's website, SEO enhances the user's experience, and SEO increases your website's trust factor.

On that last point — users trust search engines, especially Google, to give them the best and most relevant results. By ranking high for the terms your potential clients are searching, your firm builds trust and credibility before a visitor even reaches your site.

How Long Does SEO Take to Work?

The question we get asked most often is some version of "how long until I'm #1?" That question comes from a misconception that SEO is all about keyword rankings. The more meaningful metrics are (1) the volume of site traffic and (2) whether visitors are actually engaging with the site — filling out a contact form, clicking to call, and so on. In our experience, most firms should start to see meaningful results within four to six months, and the results compound over time. Here's roughly what that looks like:

- Month 1 — Website audit, keyword research, and strategy. Technical work begins on the site itself and backlink building starts. This continues month after month, indefinitely.
- Month 2 — Content creation begins: blogging, firm information pages, and so on. You may see early ranking movement, but not yet leads.
- Month 3 — More of the same. You could start to see an increase in rankings, traffic, and lead generation.

- Month 4 — With a growing library of content, you now have something worth sharing on social media, which drives more direct traffic. Leads should be increasing by this point.
- Month 5 and beyond — As your visibility improves, your competitors will notice and respond. SEO is a continuing process to maintain and improve your position indefinitely, not a project with an end date.

Section 4 — Keywords, Semantic Search, and Local SEO

Long-Tail Keywords & Semantic Search

The way people search for lawyers has grown more conversational every year, for two reasons. First, searchers are savvier than they used to be — instead of "drunk driving attorney," someone might search "I need a defense attorney for a DUI charge I got in Phoenix." Second, voice search and AI chat interfaces make it effortless to type or speak a full, specific question instead of two or three keywords.

Long-tail keywords target a specific niche rather than a mass audience — "juvenile justice defense lawyer in Atlanta" instead of just "criminal lawyer," which is far less competitive and attracts a much more qualified visitor. Semantic search is Google's (and now AI search's) attempt to understand the intent and context behind a query, not just match the literal words. The practical implication hasn't changed since the first edition, it's only gotten stronger: creating quality, relevant content that actually answers a specific question matters more than chasing a handful of generic keyword phrases.

Local SEO and Your Google Business Profile

For any firm serving clients in a specific city or region, your free Google Business Profile listing (renamed from "Google My Business" in 2021 — if your marketer still calls it the old name, that's worth a follow-up question) is one of the highest-leverage things you control. It's what determines whether you show up in that local 3-Pack mentioned above. At minimum: claim and fully verify your listing, keep your

practice areas, hours, and service area accurate, add real photos of your office and team, and post updates regularly. We'll cover getting and managing reviews on that profile in Chapter 10, since your review count and rating are one of the biggest local ranking factors there is.

Final Thoughts on SEO for Lawyers

When a digital marketer tries to sell you on the importance of being #1 for a single keyword like "[practice area] lawyer in [your city]," run, don't walk, out of that sales meeting. Keyword ranking is a component of SEO, but it doesn't tell the whole story of which searches actually bring in clients. High rankings look great on a report, but they're only one piece of a much larger puzzle — acquiring relevant visitors and converting them into clients. In the next chapter, we'll show you the newest piece of that puzzle: getting your firm mentioned by name when someone asks an AI tool for legal help instead of, or in addition to, searching Google.

05

CHAPTER 5 OF 10

AI Search & Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)

This entire chapter didn't exist in the first edition of this guide, because the thing it describes barely existed in 2020. It may end up being the most important chapter in this book for the next several years.

Section 1 — The Search Box Isn't the Only Front Door Anymore

For twenty years, "getting found online" meant one thing: ranking well in Google. That's still true, but it's no longer the whole picture. A meaningful and fast-growing share of people now ask an AI assistant — ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Perplexity, or Google's own AI Overviews sitting directly on top of regular search results — a question like "who's a good divorce lawyer in Charleston" or "what should I do after a car accident in South Carolina," and get a written answer with a short list of sources, sometimes without ever visiting a single website.

We want to be clear about what this means and doesn't mean. It doesn't mean SEO is dead, or that everything in the previous chapter stopped mattering — it didn't. What it means is that there's now a second, related game to play alongside SEO, with its own rules. Search engine marketers have started calling it GEO — Generative Engine Optimization — or sometimes AEO, Answer Engine Optimization. We'll use GEO in this chapter, but don't get hung up on the acronym; what matters is the underlying shift.

SEO vs. GEO — What's Actually Different

Traditional SEO optimizes for ranking position — you want to be link #1 on a page of ten blue links, because that's where the clicks go. GEO optimizes for something different: being the source an AI model chooses to cite, quote, or recommend when it synthesizes an answer. There's no "page one" in a conversational answer — there's just whether you're mentioned by name or not. That's a much more binary outcome, and it rewards different things than a ranking algorithm does.

Here's the uncomfortable part for a lot of firms: someone can get a complete, satisfying answer to their legal question without a single click to anyone's website. If your firm isn't part of the source material behind that answer, you don't just rank lower — you're often invisible to that entire interaction. That's exactly why this deserves its own chapter instead of a footnote in the SEO chapter.

Section 2 — What Actually Improves AI Visibility

The good news is that almost everything that makes for strong traditional SEO also helps with GEO — it isn't a separate discipline you're starting from zero on. Here's where we'd focus first.

1. Write Direct, Quotable Answers

AI models are, at their core, very good at finding and lifting out a clear, self-contained answer to a specific question. Content that buries the answer under three paragraphs of throat-clearing is much harder for a model to extract and cite confidently than content that states the answer plainly, then explains it. This is the exact same plain-English discipline described in Chapter 3's "don't write like a lawyer" rule — it turns out that writing for a confused, worried potential client and writing for an AI model that needs a clean answer to quote are nearly the same skill.

2. Lean Even Harder Into E-E-A-T

We introduced E-E-A-T — Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trust — in Chapter 3. It matters just as much here. AI models are tuned to weight authoritative, well-sourced content more heavily precisely because legal advice is a "Your Money or Your Life" topic where getting it wrong has real consequences. A real attorney byline, a credible bio, and content that clearly reflects hands-on experience with the issue all make it more likely a model treats your page as a trustworthy source worth citing.

3. Keep Your Schema Markup Current

We covered schema markup in Chapter 1 as a way to help traditional search engines understand your site. The same structured data — Attorney, LegalService, FAQPage, and Review schema in particular — helps AI systems parse your content correctly too. This is a case where good technical SEO hygiene directly pays off in the GEO world as well.

4. Earn Mentions on Other Authoritative Sites

Backlinks have mattered for traditional SEO for as long as SEO has existed. The same underlying signal — other credible sources mentioning and linking to you — appears to influence whether AI models consider you a legitimate source to reference. Getting quoted in local news, contributing to bar association publications, or being cited on established legal directories all build the same kind of third-party credibility that helps in both worlds.

5. Keep Your Business Information Consistent Everywhere

AI tools frequently pull from aggregated local business data — the same data that powers your Google Business Profile, Yelp listing, and legal directory profiles. If your firm's name, address, phone number, and practice areas are inconsistent across those listings, that's friction for both traditional local SEO and for an AI system trying to confidently recommend you. Keeping these in sync is a boring task with an outsized payoff.

Section 3 — Audit Your Own AI Visibility

Here's a practical exercise we'd encourage every reader to actually do, not just read about. Open ChatGPT, Gemini, and a regular Google search (to see the AI Overview) in three tabs. In each one, ask a handful of questions the way a real potential client would — not "[your firm name] reviews," but the questions a stranger would actually type: "best [your practice area] lawyer in [your city]," "what should I do if [the problem your typical client has]," "how much does a [practice area] lawyer cost in [your state]."

Pay attention to three things: whether your firm is mentioned at all, which competitors are mentioned instead of you, and which sources the AI tool cites for its answer. If a competitor's blog post keeps showing up as a cited source and yours doesn't, that's a very specific, fixable gap — it usually means their content answers that exact question more directly and more authoritatively than yours currently

does. Running this audit every few months, as the models and the competitive landscape both keep changing, is a fast way to see whether your GEO efforts are actually moving the needle.

One last thought to close this chapter: everything in this book still applies. A firm with a fast, accessible, well-designed website (Chapter 1), a clear sense of who it's trying to reach (Chapter 2), genuinely useful content written by a real lawyer (Chapter 3), and solid SEO fundamentals (Chapter 4) already has most of what it takes to show up well in AI search too. GEO isn't a replacement for good marketing — it's what good marketing has started to also earn you, on top of everything it already did.

06

CHAPTER 6 OF 10

Google Ads

If improperly managed, Google Ads can rapidly consume your marketing budget. If managed properly, Google Ads can generate significant, predictable case volume. The tools have changed more than the fundamentals since the first edition of this chapter — both matter.

Section 1 — Avoiding Common Mistakes

Many attorneys outsource their Google Ads campaigns to agencies. Because Google Ads is such a mystery to most people, many lawyers have no way to tell whether their agency is running the campaign well. Here are two ways to check.

Goals of a Law Firm Google Ads Campaign

If you're running Google Ads, you want searchers to take three specific actions: (1) click your ad to reach your website; (2) take a desired action once they land, such as filling out a contact form or calling; and (3) convert into a new client. The first two sound simple — but if a searcher clicks your ad and doesn't take the second action, something in between broke down.

1st Common Mistake — Irrelevant Ads

With Google Ads, you can target with pinpoint precision using geographic restrictions, keywords, and negative keywords (terms you want to exclude from triggering your ad). If your firm's ads aren't well targeted, you'll either get very few clicks, or you'll pay for clicks from searchers who were never interested in your services in the first place. The simplest way to check: run a search for your own location and practice area and see what actually displays. If an ad for dog bite injuries shows up when you search "criminal lawyers" in your city, that campaign is being run carelessly.

2nd Common Mistake — Missing Optimized Landing Pages

Trying to run a successful Google Ads campaign without an optimized landing page is like trying to drive a car without a steering wheel. A landing page is where people end up after they click your ad, and it should exist specifically for that ad — your homepage is not a landing page. When a visitor lands on your homepage, they see a lot of text, images, and links, and no clear direction on what to do next. A good landing page gives the visitor one clear, concise direction: enter your information here, or schedule your free consultation.

Tips for designing a landing page that converts: make your instructions clear and focus on one call to action per page; prove yourself through testimonials, certifications, or credible content; be confident rather than tentative in your language; and keep it simple — mind your use of color and images, and keep the text short and value-dense.

Section 2 — Modern Google Ads: What's Actually Changed

The mechanics of buying search ads have shifted meaningfully since the first edition of this guide. Here's what matters now.

Automated Bidding and Performance Max

Manual, keyword-by-keyword bid management used to be the norm. Google now pushes advertisers hard toward automated "Smart Bidding" strategies, and toward a campaign type called Performance Max, which runs across Search, Display, YouTube, and more from a single campaign, letting Google's own machine-learning system decide where and when to show your ad. Performance Max can work well once it has enough conversion data to learn from, but it also hands over a lot of the visibility and control this chapter has spent so much time telling you to insist on. If your agency runs everything through Performance Max with no visibility into which specific searches actually triggered your ads, you've lost the ability to catch the exact mistakes described in Section 1 above. Ask for granular search-term reporting regardless of which campaign type your agency uses.

Local Services Ads (LSAs)

This is the single biggest addition to this chapter. Local Services Ads are a separate Google product from standard Google Ads, built specifically for local service businesses — including lawyers in many practice areas. LSAs appear above even the paid Search ads, carry a "Google Screened" badge once you pass a background

and license check, and — critically — you pay per qualified lead, not per click. For many solo and small firms, LSAs now generate more consistent, better-qualified case inquiries than traditional Search campaigns, at a more predictable cost.

A few things worth knowing before you start: getting Google Screened requires a background check and license verification, which can take a couple of weeks; you can dispute leads that clearly aren't legitimate (wrong practice area, spam, and so on) and get a credit; and because you're paying per lead rather than per click, the discipline shifts from optimizing ad copy to optimizing how fast and how well your staff actually answers and converts the leads that come in. If nobody picks up the phone, you're still charged for the lead.

Section 3 — Bidding on a Competitor's Name

Using a competitor's name as a keyword to trigger your own Google Ads is a common practice across many industries, including law. From Google's perspective, there's little to no restriction on using a competitor's trademark as a keyword — Google has stated it will not investigate or restrict trademark terms used as keywords, even if it receives a complaint. Google is more restrictive about including a competitor's name in your actual ad text, and may pull an ad or restrict a term if a trademark complaint comes in.

Is It an Effective Strategy?

It depends. On the upside: it can be cheaper (competition on a competitor's exact name is usually lower than on generic terms like "attorney"), and it builds brand awareness through sheer repeated exposure. On the downside: click-through rates tend to be low, since someone searching a specific lawyer's name is usually trying to reach that lawyer, not a competitor — which drags down your Quality Score and makes your other ads more expensive to run. It can also trigger a bidding war, since your competitor is now incentivized to bid on your name right back.

Can You Be Sued Over It?

There isn't a clean, uniform answer, and courts have gone different directions. A Wisconsin court found that bidding on a competitor's name under that state's privacy statute wasn't an "unreasonable" invasion of privacy. A federal appeals court, in Rescuecom Corp. v. Google Inc., held that Google's practice of recommending a trademarked term as a keyword did constitute a "use in commerce" under the Lanham Act — a meaningfully different legal theory (trademark, not privacy).

The case we find most instructive for lawyers specifically is Helmer, Conley & Kasselman v. Hark & Hark, a New Jersey lawsuit in which one law firm accused a competing two-lawyer firm of not just bidding on its name, but of using it directly in the ad copy itself to route confused searchers to the competitor's own site. Beyond the underlying trademark and unfair-competition claims, the complaint also raised a genuinely important point for the legal profession: an allegation that the practice violated New Jersey's Rules of Professional Conduct 7.1 (prohibiting false or misleading communications about a lawyer's services) and 8.4(c) (prohibiting dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation) — rules that track the ABA Model Rules almost word for word, meaning the same reasoning would apply in most states. The New Jersey court granted a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction against the practice early in that case.

Multiple state bars have weighed in since, and where they have, they've generally taken a dim view: Florida's bar has found that purchasing search advertising keyed to another lawyer's name can amount to a false or misleading communication, and North Carolina's bar reached a similar conclusion in a formal ethics opinion. Not every state has addressed it, but the trend is not favorable to the practice.

Our Advice: Don't Bid on Other Attorneys' Names

Nothing good comes from trading on the names of your fellow bar members. Even where it's legally permissible, it's the kind of tactic that risks a bar complaint if it works too well — and it's simply not a fair or straightforward way to compete. Be

selective about which marketing agencies you hire, and make sure whoever runs your campaigns understands the ethical lines lawyers specifically have to walk, because most agencies that work across industries have no idea this line exists.

07

CHAPTER 7 OF 10

Content vs. PPC

Every lawyer wants the most bang for their marketing dollar. Given the choice, the question becomes which marketing tactic is best — content marketing or pay-per-click advertising?

Section 1 — Comparison & Analysis

Many lawyers have asked us what they should do when they think they're not getting enough leads from their website. Should they engage in PPC (pay-per-click) advertising such as Google Ads, or should they focus on content marketing to drive inbound leads? In this section, we'll compare both forms of online marketing and give you our honest take.

Outside In vs. Inside Out

Before comparing them, it helps to understand the fundamental difference. Content marketing is "inside out" — you're encouraging traffic by developing marketing material directly on your own site. PPC is "outside in" — you're creating marketing material on other platforms, like Google Ads, to drive traffic to your site.

The Pros of Content Marketing

- Fuels relationships — content educates and informs your audience while addressing common questions relevant to your practice areas, turning inbound traffic into genuinely qualified leads.
- SEO boost — when your content gets shared and linked to, that signals authority to Google, making your content more visible in search results (and, as covered in Chapter 5, more likely to be cited by AI search tools).
- Evergreen — aside from the time to create it and the cost of hosting your site, there's no ongoing spend. Once it's published, it stays there indefinitely, working for you.

The challenges — we like to think of these as challenges rather than flaws — are real, though. Developing quality content takes time and effort: researching a topic, writing it, proofreading, adding a proper meta title and description, choosing a relevant image, and then distributing it. A good distribution plan matters as much as the writing itself, and tracking performance (search traffic, referral traffic, bounce rate, site flow) takes real familiarity with a tool like Google Analytics. Contrary to a

common misconception, though, well-optimized content doesn't necessarily take weeks or months to get indexed — following good SEO practices, a post can show up in search results within minutes.

The Pros of PPC Advertising

- Instant gratification — a properly set up campaign gets you top placement and leads immediately, and can be created and adjusted rapidly.
- Precise targeting — you can pre-qualify traffic by geography and other factors with real precision.
- Easy to track — you can immediately see which keywords and ads bring in traffic, conversion rates, and ROI, compared to content marketing where results take longer to determine.
- Levels the playing field — even a solo practitioner can compete online against much larger firms.

The challenges here are just as real. Costs can be steep: "attorney" remains one of the single most expensive keywords in all of Google Ads, and we commonly see attorneys paying well into the double or triple digits per click depending on location and practice area. PPC also isn't evergreen — once you turn off the budget, the traffic stops the same day, and it's genuinely hard to reduce a working PPC budget to fund content marketing that may take longer to pay off. And running a good campaign is a skill: we've seen plenty of poorly run campaigns where a criminal lawyer's ad shows up for a family-law search, or a firm's ads run in a city they don't even serve.

Which Wins — Content Marketing or PPC?

Both are winners in their own right, and each has pros and cons unique to it. You can focus solely on content marketing, but be prepared to be patient — the long-term payoff is much greater than PPC, but it takes time. You can focus solely on PPC, but be prepared for an ongoing investment if you don't also build any content. Based on the fundamental difference between "inside out" and "outside in" marketing, we

recommend a one-two combination of both to market your law firm online — and we'd add one more consideration since the first edition of this book: as AI Overviews and chat-based search absorb more of the questions people used to type into Google, some of that organic, no-click content value is compressing. That makes paid channels like PPC and Local Services Ads (see Chapter 6) relatively more valuable for immediate, trackable conversions — while content marketing keeps doing its other job: building the authority and citations that get you mentioned by AI tools in the first place, even on the searches that never generate a click at all.

08

CHAPTER 8 OF 10

Facebook & Social Media

If you aren't advertising on Facebook and Instagram, you may be missing out on the potential to create brand awareness for your firm and to target specific types of cases and clients — though how you use these platforms in 2026 looks different than it did in 2020.

Section 1 — Why Facebook Advertising Still Makes Sense

We've spoken with many lawyers who don't see the value of advertising on Facebook. After reviewing the activity on some of these attorneys' Facebook Pages, we understand why — their posts get a handful of "likes," usually from friends and family, and little to no comments or shares. In other words, rigor mortis has set in on their feed. If that's you, the problem usually isn't Facebook — it's that the page is being run like a bulletin board instead of an advertising channel.

Here's the honest, updated version of the case for Facebook: organic reach for an unpaid business post — how many people actually see something you post without paying to boost it — has dropped substantially compared to years ago, and that decline hasn't reversed. What hasn't changed is that Facebook and its sibling platform Instagram (both owned by Meta) remain some of the largest audiences on earth, and Meta's ad targeting is still genuinely precise. The practical upshot: don't expect free organic posting to do much for you anymore. Do expect a modest, well-targeted ad budget to still work.

Advantages Over Local Television

Compared to television advertising, Meta ads still have real structural advantages. Ad placement is fast — you can launch a campaign in minutes rather than the days or weeks a TV spot takes to book and produce. You have far more control over your budget — you can spend as little or as much as you want and turn campaigns on and off at will, instead of committing to a multi-month TV buy. And you have far more precise targeting than a local TV buy ever offered: location down to the zip code, education level, specific interests relevant to your practice area, purchase behaviors, and whether someone is already connected to your page.

Section 2 — What Actually Works

To illustrate what's worked in practice, here are three campaign goals we've used for law firm clients' Facebook advertising over the years — the specific numbers below are from real campaigns we've run, kept here as an illustration of the kind of results this approach can produce, not as a promise of current-day costs or performance, which shift constantly.

Goal 1 — Building Brand Awareness

To build public awareness of your firm, we recommend a 15 to 30 second video — video ads consistently get more attention and interaction than static image or text ads. In one campaign we ran using this approach, the cost-per-click came in well below what we were typically paying for equivalent Google Ads clicks at the time, and the campaign generated a meaningful number of new client intakes directly attributable to it.

Goal 2 — Promoting Practice Areas With "Soft Sell"

We typically don't run an ad that just says "we do family law" — Facebook users don't interact much with ads like that. A much better approach we call "soft sell / hot topic": find a relevant story trending in local news that fits a practice area you want to promote, share it from your firm's page with a short, genuine comment, and boost the post for a short window while interest in the story is still high. In one campaign, we used a link-shortening tool with a built-in call-to-action to route engaged readers toward a free downloadable guide relevant to the story — which is precisely the kind of gated lead magnet described in the Content chapter, applied through a paid distribution channel instead of organic reach alone.

Goal 3 — Targeting a Specific Case or Client

This is nearly identical to the soft-sell approach, with a twist: you know there's a specific person or family you're trying to reach, but you can't contact them directly due to ethical rules or simply not knowing their identity. We've used this to reach family members connected to a specific, publicly reported incident relevant to the

client's practice area. It won't always produce the exact lead you're fishing for, but it reliably generates adjacent leads from people in a similar situation who see the post.

A Note on Ad Budget and Algorithm Behavior

One thing that hasn't changed: Meta's ad delivery system optimizes around whatever budget and settings you start with, and it takes time to "learn" what's working. If you jack up your budget by more than roughly 5–10% of the original at once, you throw that optimization out of whack and typically see worse performance in the following days. Increase spend gradually and give the algorithm 24 hours or so to adjust before making another change — the same discipline applies to changing your targeting or creative mid-flight.

Section 3 — Instagram

Instagram didn't get its own section in the first edition, and it should have even then — today it's an even bigger omission to leave out. It shares the same Meta Ads Manager and the same precise targeting as Facebook, which means everything in this chapter about setting up campaigns applies directly. The meaningful difference is format and audience: Instagram skews toward a visually driven, often younger audience, and it rewards short-form video (see Chapter 10) even more heavily than Facebook's feed does. For practice areas where visual storytelling or reaching a younger demographic matters — think personal injury awareness content, or family law content aimed at a younger parent — Instagram is often a better first stop than Facebook is today.

09

CHAPTER 9 OF 10

Video

Law firms use video to advertise, to drive traffic to their websites, and to increase conversions. Unfortunately, many law firms don't see a good return on their investment because they're creating ineffective videos — or the wrong format entirely.

Section 1 — Core Concepts for Success

One of the biggest mistakes lawyers make with video marketing is taking an ad-hoc approach to picking topics. To be truly effective, your video strategy should be based on data, not assumptions. Start gathering data about the questions your firm is actually asked most often — phone calls, email inquiries, questions on your site and social pages. The more often you're asked the same question, the easier it is to know exactly what your next video should cover. People rarely search for an ad; they search for an answer, especially early on when they're still educating themselves before they're ready to hire a lawyer.

Tell Stories

We've reviewed countless attorney videos that look and sound the same. What's missing is an emotional connection. Prospective clients are dealing with emotional issues — a divorce, criminal charges, a serious injury. Your videos are an opportunity to build trust in your ability to solve their problem and return their life to normal. Don't just create videos about your firm or your services. Tell stories about the legal issues your clients faced and how you helped resolve them. You're not selling yourself; you're selling a solution.

Keep It Short and Simple

Shorter is almost always better, especially for paid ads — the best-performing ads tend to run 15 to 30 seconds, and rarely longer than 60. If you're creating video for organic social rather than a paid ad, a couple of minutes is a reasonable ceiling, though as we'll cover below, an entire new short-form category has emerged since the first edition of this guide that changes the calculus again.

Include a Call to Action, Avoid the Talking-Head Trap

Every video needs a clear call to action — visiting your website, calling to book a consultation, whatever the next step is. And if you search for lawyer marketing videos, you'll find thousands that look exactly the same: a lawyer talking in front of a plain colored backdrop. If you want to differentiate yourself, choose a setting and

format more engaging than a static talking head, and invest in genuinely good lighting, video, and audio — cheap-looking production is distracting and undercuts your message no matter how good the content is.

Section 2 — Short-Form Video Is No Longer Optional

This is the single biggest change to this chapter since the first edition. In 2020, the video advice in this book assumed a choice between a 15-to-30-second paid ad and a longer piece for organic social. Since then, short vertical video — YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, and TikTok — has become its own dominant category, with its own dedicated, algorithm-driven feed on nearly every platform that has one. Internet video traffic overall has kept climbing year over year, and short-form specifically now accounts for a large and growing share of how people, including your potential clients, discover new content and new local businesses they've never heard of.

The practical implications for a law firm: plan for a native, vertical (9:16) cut of your video content, not just a horizontal one repurposed as an afterthought. The same storytelling and "answer a real question" advice above applies just as strongly here — if anything, short-form audiences have even less patience for a slow, self-promotional opening. And one new reason to care about this beyond reach: video transcripts and captions are searchable and increasingly get pulled into both traditional search results and the AI-generated answers described in Chapter 5, which means a well-captioned video answering a specific legal question can now earn you visibility in more places than the video platform itself.

Section 3 — YouTube

YouTube remains one of the most influential platforms on the internet, and it works differently than a short-form feed — it rewards a library of longer, genuinely useful content that keeps earning views long after you post it. Here are the steps we'd

recommend for effective law firm video marketing on YouTube specifically.

1. Create value, not a promotional reel. A slick video showcasing your office isn't something the average viewer sits through when there's more entertaining content one click away. Answer real questions your audience already has.
2. Be frequent. A couple of videos isn't enough to build momentum — aim for a steady cadence, ideally at least weekly, and keep the mix mostly educational rather than self-promotional; a few promotional videos are fine, but they shouldn't be the majority of what you post.
3. Upload natively to each platform. Don't just share a YouTube link to Facebook — take the original file and upload it directly there too. Every platform's algorithm favors content that was uploaded natively over an outbound link that sends its own users elsewhere.
4. Never skip the call to action. A link to click, a list to subscribe to, or simply an invitation to comment — a clear call to action is also how you measure whether the content is actually working. If you're pointing people to your site and views aren't translating into visits, something needs to change.
5. Consider hiring professionals. You spent your early career learning the law, not marketing — there's no shame in bringing in help for the parts of this that aren't your expertise.

Optimizing Your YouTube Videos

Most lawyers don't optimize their videos, and as a result those videos get buried under everyone else covering the same legal topic. YouTube's own ranking factors include watch time (how long people actually watch), audience retention (what percentage of the video they watch), engagement (likes, comments, shares), and click-through rate on anything you link. To optimize for these: put your primary target keyword in a compelling video title; write a description of 200 words or more that includes your keyword and clearly explains what the video covers; use roughly

5–10 relevant tags including your keyword; and say your keyword out loud in the video itself — YouTube's systems can parse spoken content and use it as another relevance signal for your title, description, and tags.

CHAPTER 10 OF 10

Reviews

"A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is — it is what consumers tell each other it is." — Scott Cook, Founder, Intuit

Section 1 — Your Online Reputation

There's an old distinction worth keeping in mind: character is who you really are, while reputation is merely who others think you are. However, in the business world, the reality is that consumers focus first and foremost on your reputation.

Before the internet, the only way to research and find a lawyer was word of mouth, a listing in a printed legal directory, or the yellow pages. Today, the overwhelming majority of potential clients use online reviews as one of their first steps in choosing a lawyer, and a large share say they'd be willing to travel farther to hire a lawyer with better reviews and ratings. If you're ignoring online reviews for your practice, you are missing out on a significant marketing opportunity — we've long since lost count of how many of our law firm clients have told us new clients came to them because of their positive online reviews.

We can't emphasize enough the need for law firms to pay attention to their online reputation and to practice ongoing online reputation management (ORM). Social media can be a powerful, fast-paced outlet for an upset client to create real chaos for a business, including a law firm — and just as easily, it can be a powerful, fast-paced way to build one up. Warren Buffett put it well: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." The takeaway is simple — don't ignore what's being said about your firm online. Claim your listings so you can see and respond to what's being said, and respond to all of it, positive and negative.

Section 2 — Getting Reviews

Lawyers sometimes ask us the best way to get online reviews. The answer is simple: just ask your clients. Having said that, just asking isn't enough — you need to make it easy by giving specific, easy-to-follow instructions, ideally in an email with direct links to the sites where you'd like them to leave a review. Here's an example of an email template we recommend law firms use with their own clients:

> *Dear Client, I want to thank you for putting your trust in me and my firm to help you. We hope you never have to go through another similar experience, but there are always other people out there who need help and don't know where to turn. That's why I would truly appreciate an online review from you, to let others know that they can trust in us too. Please visit the following sites to leave a review or comment.*

There are many sites where consumers leave reviews for lawyers — some, like Avvo, Lawyers.com, and Super Lawyers, market specifically to lawyers. But if you focus on nothing else, focus on Google, Yelp, and Facebook. Google reviews in particular now carry outsized weight, since they show up directly in your Google Business Profile and the local 3-Pack described in Chapter 4 — and, increasingly, review sentiment is one of the signals AI tools weigh when deciding whether to recommend a business at all, which ties directly back to the AI visibility work in Chapter 5.

Section 3 — Monitoring & Responding

At JustLegal Marketing, we have access to sophisticated tools for social listening and reputation management. For the do-it-yourselfers reading this, there are also good free tools: Google Alerts (sign into your Google account, visit google.com/alerts, and add your firm's name as a search term to get emailed whenever new content matching it appears online), the native review-management features built into your Google Business Profile and Facebook Page dashboards, and Yelp's own business app, which notifies you of new reviews and lets you respond directly. Whatever combination you use, the goal is the same: don't let reviews pile up unanswered because checking five different sites felt like too much friction.

Responding to Positive Reviews

This one's easy. A sample response: "Dear Client, thank you kindly for taking the time to leave our firm a review. We welcome feedback, and it's always nice to hear when we've met a client's expectations. If you or someone you know ever needs a lawyer, we're always here to help."

Responding to Negative Reviews

The best way to avoid a negative review is to give your clients the best service possible. But there are always clients who, no matter what you do, will be dissatisfied — and cases where the outcome, for reasons outside your control, didn't meet expectations. In time, you are bound to get a negative review. When you respond, don't let pride get in the way of a professional response. The worst thing you can do is trade barbs publicly with a current or former client. Keep your response generic, to preserve client confidentiality, and invite the reviewer to contact you privately to address their concerns. A sample response: "Dear Client, we sincerely thank you for leaving your review. As much as we'd like to receive nothing but glowing reviews, we welcome all feedback. Feedback such as yours allows us to take into consideration our clients' concerns and to improve our service. If you'd like to speak with us privately and confidentially about the issues you mentioned, we would definitely like to hear from you directly."

Responding to Fake or "Black Hat" Reviews

Occasionally you'll get a review from someone who was never actually your client — sometimes the opposing party in a case, their friends or family, or in rarer cases, someone hired by a competitor specifically to leave a negative review. Unfortunately, there's not much you can do to stop this, and review platforms aren't always fast or helpful about removing them. If you can't get an illegitimate review taken down, a professional response that flags the discrepancy to other readers, without getting into a public fight, is your best move: "Dear Reviewer, thank you for your review. Although we have no record of you being a former or current client of our firm, we welcome all feedback."

Section 4 — Handling Negative Reviews Thoughtfully

Beyond the sample responses above, two habits matter more than the exact wording you use. First, acknowledge the feeling before you address the facts — whether or not you agree with the reviewer, take a moment to understand and reflect their frustration back to them before responding. Second, where you genuinely can, offer a real solution rather than a form response. A thoughtful, human reply to a negative review is often more persuasive to everyone else reading it than a dozen five-star reviews with no engagement behind them at all.

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Ready to Grow Your Firm?

Everything in this guide is what we do every day for law firms across the country — websites, content, SEO, AI search visibility, Google Ads, social media, video, and online reviews, all working together instead of as scattered tactics.

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