Legal Marketing and SEO Trends for 2020 Part 2: Dwell Time, EAT and Law Firm Branding

Article By
Jennifer Schaller
The National Law Review / The National Law Forum LLC

- Law Office Management
- Communications, Media & Internet
- Corporate & Business Organizations
- All Federal

Thursday, January 9, 2020

John McDougall discussed creating Deep Content, LSI (Latent Semantic Indexing) and topic clusters with us yesterday, detailing how these SEO concepts present great opportunities for law firms who are looking to position their attorneys as subject matter experts. John explained how Google’s recent algorithm changes such as BERT, which is designed to help users find true topic experts, provide a bounty of opportunities for legal marketers who properly position their lawyers’ expertise to achieve top search results. Today John is going into more detail on the concepts of webpage dwell time, expertise, authority and trustworthiness (EAT), and law firm branding.

NLR: In your book, you talk about the intersection of “dwell time” and the idea of the “long click” as ways Google is using AI (Artificial Intelligence) to try to figure out the relationship between the search term and the webpage that term led the user to. Do you see any other areas AI will impact SEO on the horizon?

JM: Google has been modifying its search engine, to improve its ability to understand complex queries for some time.
Hummingbird in 2013 was a rebuild of their main “engine” partially in response to there being more searches via voice.

RankBrain in 2015 added more machine learning to improve Hummingbird even further (for searches they had never seen before and complex long-tail queries). They said it was the 3rd most important factor with content and links.

Now with BERT in 2019/2020, they can already understand the intent of a search much better.

Considering they keep increasing the ability to provide relevant results that match the searcher's intent, I would assume it will change SEO, yet again...

I would expect writing tools to get much more robust. This might be based on “big data” from social profiles, and through analyzing massive volumes of the world's information written by experts that can be given to a writer/attorney on a silver platter. That might help in one part of SEO.

It is exciting to watch as long as you can stay nimble, follow the “algorithm weather channel” and adjust quickly when new updates are released.

**NLR:** Another core theme of your book is the role of brands, and the idea of EAT, or expertise, authority, and trustworthiness. How do these ideas enter into a keyword strategy for law firms?

**JM:** As an expert in a particular field of law, you should be associated with certain keywords which show you are a thought leader in that topical area. With SEO being MUCH more competitive and complex than ever, you may need to be more realistic and pick keywords that better match what you can write about comprehensively.

This can also affect the design of law firm websites and brand positioning. If you have fifty practice areas on your home page, you might consider featuring ones where you will be doing extensive writing and SEO work.

**NLR:** Can you explain the idea behind the Eric Schmidt quote: “Brands are how you sort out the cesspool,” which you discuss in your book?

**JM:** There are “black hat” SEO people that are the cesspool. They do sketchy things to try and trick Google into “liking” websites. Those tactics used to work on small law firm’s websites that did not deserve rankings. Thankfully, using brand signals like how many times people search for your brand and mention/link to your brand, Google is better able to rank sites that have a real-world value beyond SEO tactics. The book, *Content Marketing and SEO for Law Firms*, offers several examples of brand signals and how they apply in a law firm context.

**NLR:** What audience did you write your book for and who do you think will be the best audience for your January 15th webinar?

**JM:** Anyone trying to improve their law firm website and marketing will benefit greatly from Content Marketing and SEO for Law Firms, but firms that take action on it will get the most out of it. These content and SEO actions can be small to start but the key is to be consistent.
The content marketing and SEO guide is primarily written for law firm marketers, but it’s also for attorneys because they need to have an idea of how marketing strategy can directly affect the growth of their firm. The sections the attorneys should consider as “must-reads” are marked with a gavel icon.

This webinar will have enough insight on strategy that both law firm marketers and attorneys/department heads should attend.

Thanks, John for your time and insight. For those who haven’t had the opportunity to hear John speak at various legal marketing events or read his previous publications to gain insight from his 20+ years of experience, the following webinar and his new book are great opportunities to get actionable advice on how to build an SEO roadmap for legal marketers in 2020:


Receive a sample chapter of John’s new book: Content Marketing and SEO for Law Firms.

Copyright ©2020 National Law Forum, LLC