The Future of Law Firm Websites - Creating a Lead Nurturing Ecosystem at the LMANE Regional Conference

Tuesday, December 15, 2015

Last November 12th-13th marked the LMA New England Chapter's Annual Conference. This event saw legal marketing professionals gathering to learn from top people in the industry and exchange ideas on how to determine their "WOW!" factor --the theme for the program. Robert Algeri, of Great Jakes Legal Marketing, hosted a panel of three distinguished legal marketing professionals to discuss the "Lead Nurturing Ecosystem," a new way of approaching the use of a law firm website as marketing tool. Mr. Algeri was joined by Melissa Croteau, former Chief Marketing Officer at Nixon Peabody, Linda Pepe, Director of Business Development at Murtha Cullina and Jasmine Trillos-Decarie, Chief Business Development Officer, Stoel Rives LLP.

As Algeri described it, the lead nurturing ecosystem is a constellation of marketing technologies that work together to do two things; development new business, and quantify marketing success. A law firm's website sits at the center of the ecosystem and uses new and powerful technologies to track website visitors by name. The term "lead generation" is widely used throughout many marketing industries, to describe obtaining a lead and gaining an instant "sale". However, the procurement of legal services often doesn't happen in an instant, but rather after some measure of research and consideration. To reflect the "buying" habits of people looking for legal services, it's important to create a nurturing campaign. As Mr. Algeri stated in a follow-up interview, "Lead generation assumes instant gratification, [whereas] the benefits of lead nurturing are assumed over time."

Article By
The National Law Review Editorial Team
Nicole Cudiamat Minnis
The National Law Review / The National Law Forum LLC
Communications, Media & Internet
Law Office Management
All Federal

Four marketing tools are essential for developing a lead nurturing ecosystem: marketing automation technology, CRM, email and thought leadership. A marketing automation platform needs to be integrated into the firm website and is the key component to engaging and tracking prospects by name and identifying which prospects to pursue. This platform should integrate with email so prospects can be contacted, and the firm's CRM so the contact's activities can be automatically recorded for anyone at the firm to track. But the crux of this system is content. Firms that seek to establish a complete lead nurturing ecosystem, but have little to start, should start by creating relevant, worthwhile content that can be easily shared. As Mr. Algeri said, "There is no ecosystem without content." Ms. Pepe also elaborates, in a follow-up interview, that content marketing establishes the attorney as a thought leader in his or her practice area. This in turn helps raise the profile of the attorney and the firm and "goes a long way toward helping to bring new clients in."

A major challenge marketers face in building a lead nurturing system is that it is dependent on content marketing. Marketers at law firms have had some difficulty in getting attorneys to commit to creating content. Ms. Pepe encourages firms to get attorneys excited about content marketing by showing them it works. "Start small," she says, "-get a few attorneys or practice group leaders excited about the idea, encourage them to begin writing, and push it out on a regular basis". Firms should use as many avenues as possible to distribute their content: post it to their website, send it out to clients via email, and post to social media channels. Ms. Pepe also advises partnering with one or more distribution partners (such as The National Law Review, JD Supra, Lexology, Mondaq)

where possible. Such services help distribute content to a much wider audience, and often provide analytics that give insight into the success of your content.

In the past, Ms. Pepe was able to present data analytics from articles to practice groups, demonstrating that those who did more content marketing were getting more hits on their biographies and also bringing in more business to the firm. Mr. Algeri made the point that having access to lead nurturing tools will tell marketers the exact person who is visiting particular attorney biographies and articles. Marketing departments can use the data to help them make the case for why certain marketing initiatives are more valuable than others.

One challenge to building the ecosystem is overcoming the spook-factor of being able to track a prospect's movements on your site in detail. At one point during the presentation, Mr. Algeri asked the audience, who would be excited and who would be scared at the prospect of using sophisticated tracking tools. A vast majority agreed that the technology excites them, but a few raised the issue of client's finding out they were tracked while they were prospects and attorneys feeling like the tracking is intrusive. In truth, this type of cookie tracking is used in many other types of industries, from publications to retail sites.

Ms. Croteau suggests framing the use of the technology as a firm strategy discussion --"It's a technology discussion, but not a technology argument." If the conversation turns toward the technology itself, then it turns into an IT department issue. When speaking to lawyers about the technology, it's important to discuss using these tracking tools in the context of a business case: how can the technology help grow revenue. To build a business case, Ms. Pepe recommends getting firm leadership on board. If the discussion about lead nurturing and tracking is approached too quickly, attorneys will be hesitant to support it and less willing to "subject" their clients to it. First, show them the value behind the information that is collected from tracking tools on the website, email and through content distribution. Then, discuss how using marketing automation will increase the data available to the firm, and how they can use the additional data. Using case studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of such a system helps leadership understand the great value that their tracking efforts will provide.

There are a number of progressive firms that are dipping their toes in the water when it comes to creating a lead nurturing website, Mr. Algeri says. However, he's not aware of any firms that would say they have successfully set up a full blown lead nurturing site. He does find it encouraging that there are law firms that are experimenting with the system. The promise that there is a great deal of information that can come from these marketing tools is what has started to shift the way law firms think about their websites. Law firm websites are poised to evolve into proactive business development tools whose success can be measured and optimized. Lead nurturing websites are the key to turning legal marketing from an art into a science.

For more information on lead nurturing websites, download the white paper written by Mr. Algeri and his colleagues at Great Jakes Legal Marketing.

Source URL: https://www.natlawreview.com/article/future-law-firm-websites-creating-lead-nurturing-ecosystem-lmane-regional-conference