3 Simple Tools to Help Optimize Your Law Firm’s Website in 2016

Creating a great website that speaks to your audience, is easy to use, and encourages interaction with your brand is no small feat. However, many companies and law firms may not realize that it’s only half the battle due to shifting Google search optimization guidelines and the continued migration from desktop to smaller devices. I liken it to a musician keeping a prized musical instrument in tune.

Here are several things I recommend to keep your website in tune and performing well amid the changing landscape:

1) **Test your site’s loading speed, and optimize until you’re blue in the face.**

Reducing your average page loading time from 5-10+ seconds to under 2 seconds is a giant leap forward for any website. According to research by gomez.com and akamai.com, 40% of people abandon a website that takes more than 3 seconds to load. Yikes...what a wake up call.

A quick loading speed clearly means that less people become frustrated and leave, improving your bounce rate and the average number of pages viewed per visit. Providing a better experience for users is meaningful, but also note that Google’s algorithm has been counting site speed as a ranking factor for nearly six years.
When I’m optimizing a webpage, one of my go-to tools is GTmetrix (https://gtmetrix.com) — it provides a full diagnosis of a site’s current level of optimization, and a nice breakdown for a tech person to get started with. The biggest “offender” is typically images that haven’t been optimized, which is a relatively quick fix — an hour or two at most. Just last week a website homepage I optimized went from loading 7 megabytes of data to about 1.5 megabytes — all from large unoptimized images that were optimized. This fix alone shaved off 3 seconds of loading time.

There are a variety of ways to improve a website’s loading speed, some very technical and some (as above) are fairly non-technical. As a professional web developer, it’s important to me to let you know that there’s no magic to it. Just some research and hard work, like anything else.

2) Make sure your website still looks great and functions well on new devices and browser versions.

According a survey by Pew Research Center in Spring 2015, 72% of US adults reported owning a smartphone. Sometime soon, it’s well within reason to expect that number to climb to nearly 80%.

Giving 4 out of 5 adults a great experience on your website is not only the right thing to do, it’s still a competitive advantage as not every firm has upgraded its website to perform well on mobile and tablet devices. Assuming your firm has, but it was done years ago, it’s important to make sure that it still works well on the latest browsers and devices.

A free and easy way to check how your website looks on several devices is Browsershots (http://browsershots.org/). There are premium services (I use one called Browserstack) that offer even more options and devices to test with.

As with site loading speed, mobile-friendliness is now a ranking factor in Google, too. Few firms realize this, so pushing the optimization envelope in this area remains very beneficial.

3) Improve your site’s security and retain search ranking by performing regular updates and site checks.

If your site is built on WordPress, Drupal, Joomla, or any of the popular CMS platforms, it is imperative that updates are run frequently to keep all the plugins up-to-date. Hackers frequently target websites with old, vulnerable versions of plugins and exploit them, injecting bad code (malware) into the site.

Getting hacked is obviously bad news for your brand. If a hack goes undetected (and unfixed), this often incurs a ranking penalty from Google along with “stop sign” warnings to people visiting your site. The good news is that by making the updates above on a regular basis, and following the suggestions below, you or your web team can pro-actively minimize vulnerabilities.

A good, free security check I recommend is available from Sucuri
(https://sitecheck.sucuri.net/), a company that also provides premium security monitoring. Here’s a quick checklist of other ways to keep your site secure:

- Use strong, unique passwords for all logins (https://strongpasswordgenerator.com/)
- Change passwords every 60 days
- Don’t allow your domain name to expire!
- Know whether you’re on shared or dedicated hosting (another topic for another time)

Here’s to making your website fast, mobile-friendly, and secure this year!

*Andrew Figgins is the author of this article.*

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