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12 Website Essentials
For Law Firms

Overview.

Research conducted by BIA/Kelsey indicates that 97% of consumers research local products and services online before purchasing. Furthermore, the research showed that 19% of respondents made an online appointment in the previous 6 months. These are key reasons why you need to get your law firm website right.

The statistics are staggering and emphasises just how important and powerful your law firm website is in a customer's "path-to-purchase" and why a significant portion of your marketing budget should be allocated to your online presence.

Your law firm website is just as important, if not more so, as your physical location and speaks volumes about your legal practice. If designed correctly, your website is a powerful marketing tool that offers a channel of communication (share valuable information with your clients and create engagement), a branding tool (represent your law firm's personality through your content), a sales channel (promote your services and generate leads) and an education tool (provide answers to your clients' questions).

Here we identify 12 essential elements you need to consider, to not only build your website, but to have it operate like a lead generator and an unpaid fee earner.

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1. SSL certificates.

It's critical to understand the importance of securing your law firm website with an SSL certificate (SSL means Secure Sockets Layer).

Google recently increased its protection of website visitors by identifying websites that are not encrypted with HTTPS as being not secure, alerting visitors to potential security risks associated with providing personal information when using these websites as this data could be intercepted by hackers.

Whilst you may not be aware of this, you should assume your clients, potential clients and website visitors know it. Consider what impression having a 'not secure' website creates about your firm if your firm falls short. Certainly, it's not a good look when you say you're cutting edge, modern and are commercially savvy.

Google took this action because cyber risk is currently greater than ever as hackers become more sophisticated and more tenacious. Estimates suggest that cybercrime will cost global industries $10.5 trillion annually by 2025.

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Having an encrypted website means that the sensitive information sent from your customer's browser to your web server is encrypted. This instils confidence in your visitors knowing that the connection they have to your website is secure and any information they share with you is protected from hackers attempting to intercept it. This builds credibility and trust with your customers as they can see your law firm takes their privacy seriously.

Having a secure website will not only retain your existing customers, but will attract new customers who are fleeing from competitors whose sites are not secure.

A secure website has SEO benefits too, as Google rewards encrypted HTTPS websites with better rankings in search results.

HTTPS uses an improved internet protocol called HTTPS/2 allowing websites to load a lot faster – which significantly enhances user experience and further boosts your search engine ranking.

2. Page loading speed.

The load speed of your website plays a critical role in your visitors' experience and in search engine results. The faster each page of your website opens, the better your search engine results and the happier your visitors.

Your website host should have a specialised environment fine-tuned for optimising WordPress for the best performance and should provide a content delivery network helping make the website faster and more scalable.

Whilst your law firm website should have aesthetic appeal, it shouldn't be at the expense of load speed. Your visitors care more about how quickly your website opens rather than its visual appearance.

Did you know

that a 1 second delay means page views decrease by 11%? That means over 1/10 visitors will just turn away for every second your site is still loading!

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Search engines are also placing more and more importance on page loading times, thereby impacting your rankings. According to surveys done by Akamai and Gomez.com, 40% of web users expect a website to load within 2 seconds and Yoast, the leading provider of SEO plugins for WordPress says **"Google has said time and again that a fast site helps you to rank better."** No pressure but if you're not achieving this, you are unwittingly directing most of your customers to your competitors.

If a website loads slowly it is quite likely that the website visitor will not wait around to engage with the content. One of the key factors that determines the speed of your website is the infrastructure provided by your hosting company. Most law firms have never had to consider where to host their websites as they will be using the hosting company recommended by their website developer or the website hosting provided by their domain name registrar. Is your page loading speed good enough?
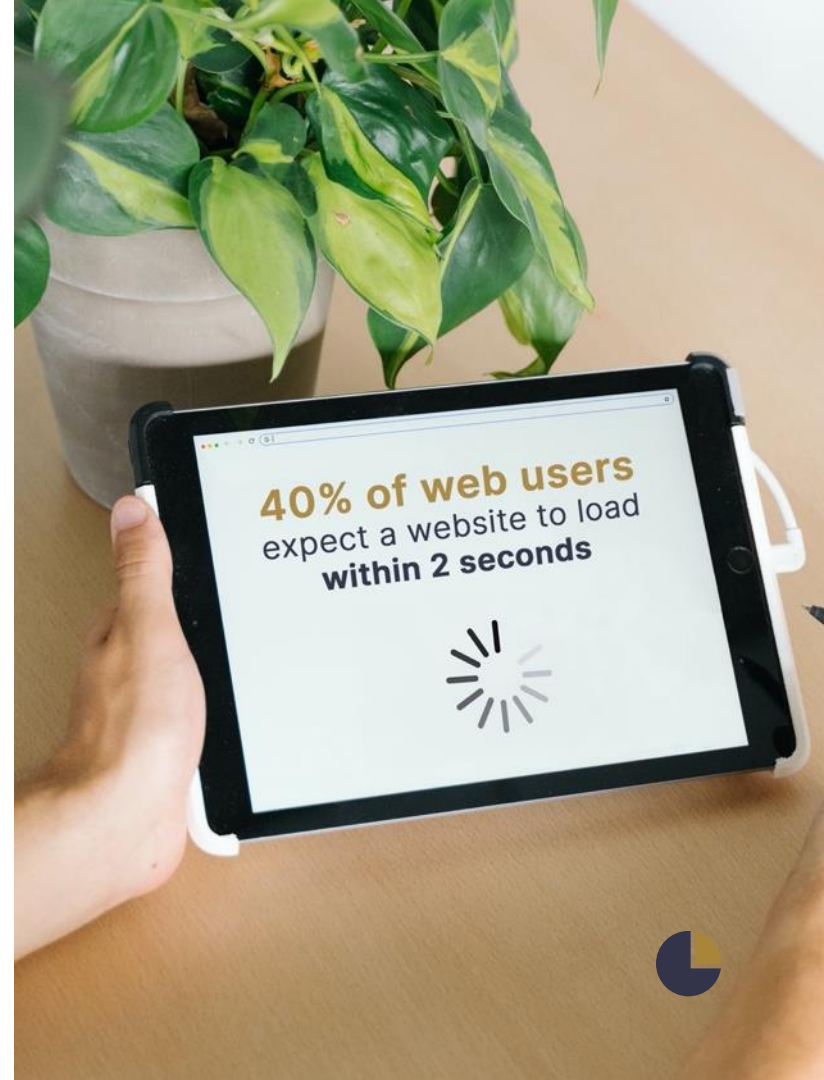
3. Is your website responsive design?

A couple of years ago, Google announced a plan to release a new search ranking algorithm designed to reward responsive design web pages. A responsive design website adapts to various orientations or sizes, regardless of the device that is used.

The benefits of having a responsive design website are that the users will have a much easier time navigating through your website, and overall have a good user experience. Google also rewards websites for being responsive design, thereby helping you rank better.

When deciding how to rank a website after a user types in a search query Google takes into account multiple factors. They use a sophisticated search algorithm to sort and rank these factors to provide the best search result based on what they believe the user is looking for.

The new algorithm is a responsive design ranking algorithm that's designed to give a boost to responsive pages in Google's search results.

Make sure your website isn't affected by checking that it works on mobile screens and other devices. If you have a website that you continually need to resize on a mobile device, then the chances are it is not responsive design.

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L4. Reveal your firm's DNA.

Visitors to your law firm website are looking for information. They want to know who you are and how you can help them, so it is logical that they look to the About Us, Our Team or Our People page to find some of this information. Did you know that typically the About Us page is one of the most visited pages on a law firm website?

Generally, not enough consideration is given to the content on the About Us page and it is often treated simply as a page for staff biographies or for telling visitors how "client focussed" , "relationship driven" or "innovative" the firm is.

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The About Us page is an opportunity to connect with your visitors and to tell them something about you and your firm that is unique to you and the way you provide your services.

The About Us page should explain to visitors why your law firm is in business and how you can help people solve their legal problems. Most law firms just talk about what they do.

Instead, your About Us page should talk about why you're involved in providing legal services. What is your philosophy about delivering services to your clients, why do you want to help them and how do you go about doing it?

In addition to the "Why" you also need to explain what your law firm does but keep it brief. Instead of writing a lot of

"What" information, link to other pages on your website where you provide details on the services you provide and the experience you have in those areas.

In addition, outline your values, what the firm stands for, or the philosophy the firm is built on. Every law firm says that they are experienced and dedicated to client service. Firms often use words like experienced, premium, specialised, transparent, caring, expert, and client focused.

Show how your firm is experienced, innovative or client focused. Back up these phrases with facts. Instead of telling visitors that you focus on personal service show them how you have taken personal service to another level by using examples or showing awards that you have won.

Also, be clear about what sets your firm apart? What do you offer that your competitors do not? What makes you different? Some examples that might make a firm different include, we visit you; multi-disciplinary or specialist skills; fee arrangements that are unique; proprietary technology; media attention; or awards & recognition.

5. Good navigation.

A website's navigation is listed as one of the most important aspects that determines the success of a website. Make it easy for your visitors to find the information they require in as few clicks as possible.

Ensure your navigation is positioned where visitors expect it to be and that the top-level navigation labels are informative and not generic (tip - use keywords where possible for your navigation labels).

Navigation is extremely powerful in influencing a user's experience and thus impacts upon bounce rate, time spent on the site and the number of pages per visit - all of which are critical elements affecting your search engine rankings.

Websites that aren't reviewed regularly often fall-out-offavour with visitors as they become cumbersome to use. Navigation may not work as effectively as it should, images are often out-of-date and no longer depict a modern-world environment, page load speeds are incredibly slow, and the overall functionality of the website is no longer as smooth as it should be.

You only have a few seconds to impress your visitors so it's important that your law firm's website maximises this opportunity by providing an experience worthy of their time.

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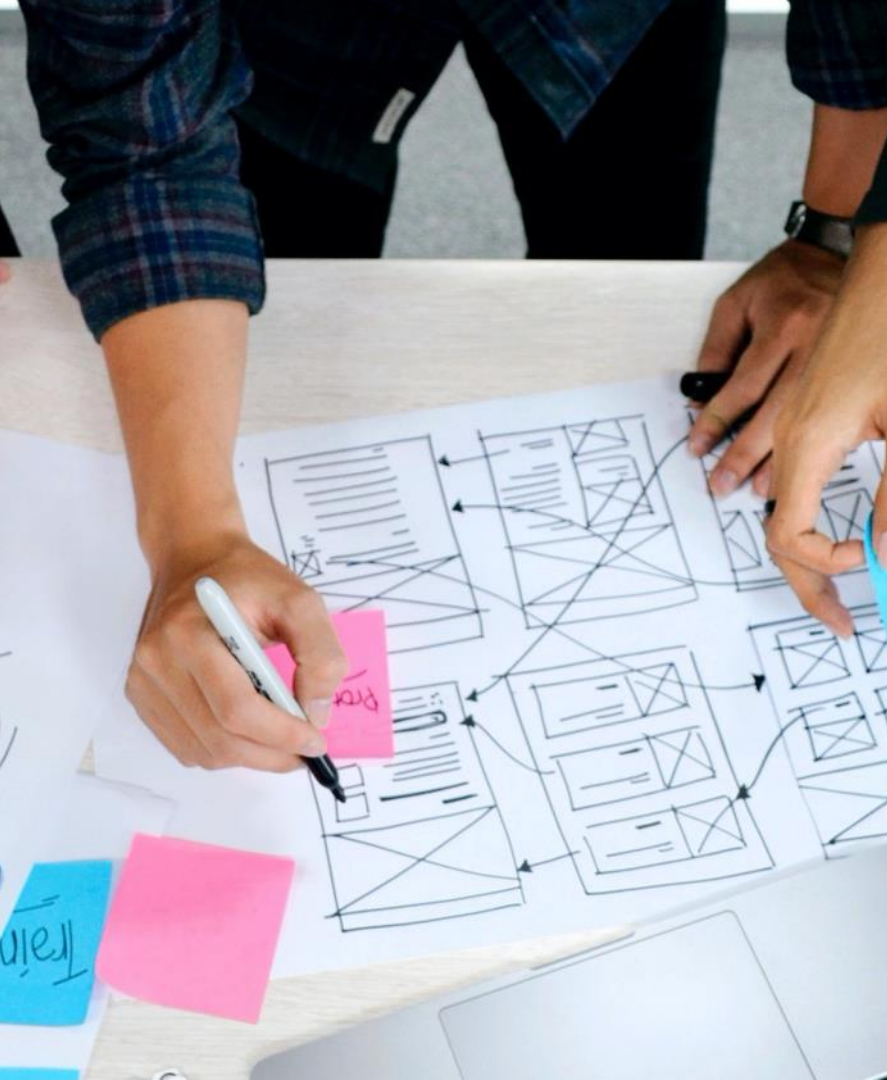
When building a website, your web developer should ask where you want the visitor to go on every page of the website. In most websites we review, there is no such plan that is apparent. When reviewing your site check to see if you have too many forms on too many pages.

To access the form, it is often ideal to have a button appear in your footer, so it is visible at the bottom of every page. What is not recommended and yet often seen, are forms on multiple pages simply wasting space and not assisting the user experience.

6. The labelling of your services.

So many law firm websites we see confuse website viewers about the legal services they provide. This seems ridiculous but it is in fact quite common, in fact we estimate that 4 out of 5 websites we see have fallen into this trap.

There is a nest of issues we see, but essentially it comes down to the labelling. **Common examples of mistakes we see include:**

- The messaging here needs to be simple and clear.
- Confusion usually exists between what is an area of law and what is a sub topic of that area. That then raises the question as to whether that sub topic should be mentioned.
- Many websites provide a list of areas or services that is way too comprehensive, with too many broad or obscure areas mentioned along with narrow and specific areas. Certainly, you may have an expertise in relation to a narrow field but take care about mentioning it.
- We suspect that some lawyers believe there will be an SEO benefit if they mention every area in some dot point. It won't.

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We believe this confusion comes about because website developers have no clue about areas of law and so simply accept the instructions without question. The reality is that you need to have a deep discussion about this and better still, it is beneficial to work with web developers that were practicing lawyers to be able to immediately advise if something looks wrong or needs amendments.

7. Rich & compelling content.

Fresh new content on your law firm website will attract more visitors. More website visitors means more phone calls and online enquiries. It's that simple.

Internet users are savvier now than ever before. The more users turn to the internet to solve their problems and queries, the greater their demands become for information-rich, up-to-date content.

With the avalanche of information freely available and competing for their attention, simply owning a law firm website with an attractive theme, high-quality images and static content no longer cuts the grade and visitors identify these websites immediately... and leave!

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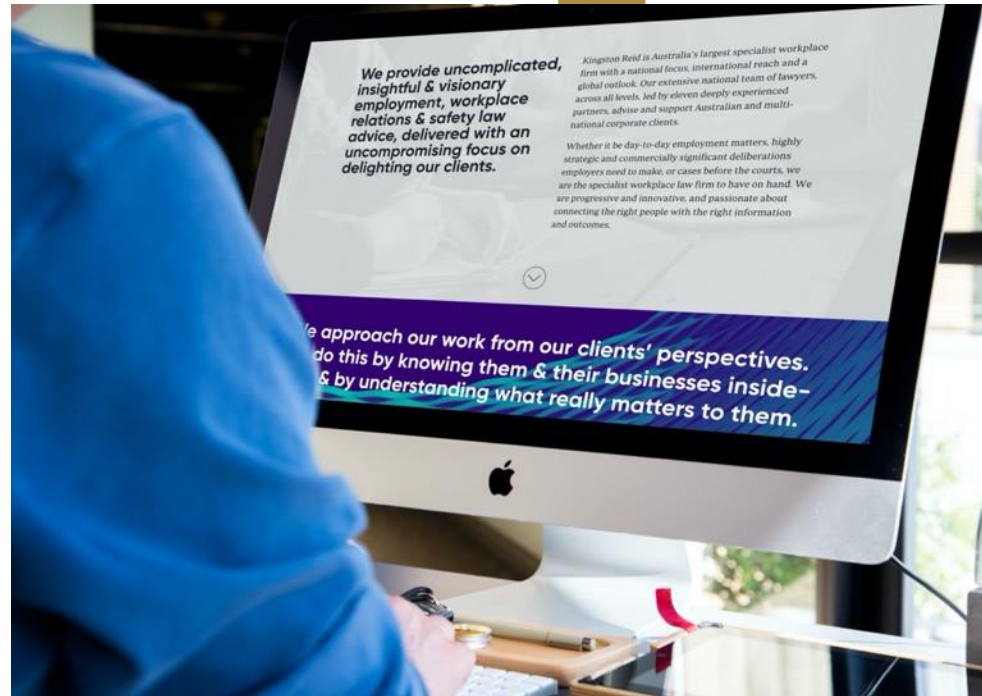
Keeping your visitors interested and enticing them to regularly return to your website or request additional information, requires interest-piquing content that is current, adds value to their knowledge and justifies their time in reading your content.

Search engines love fresh, updated websites and consider those with recent content to be more relevant to users, and as a result, rewards them accordingly. With every new piece of content you publish on your website, you attract search engine bots to crawl your website, index the new pages and recalculate your search engine rankings. Each indexed page is an opportunity to be found in the search results for keywords your customers are searching for.

Just because you might be good at the legal work you do or have wonderful staff that can genuinely help people with legal issues, doesn't mean that visitors will contact you.

Saying you are good at an area of law (or every area you do) doesn't help at all, and this we see time and again on law firm websites. Most law firm websites provide zero valuable content for the reader who is left with content filled with self-serving statements about how good the firm is. Lawyers are slow to realise that nobody wants to read this, and readers can see it for what it is.

Your website must be filled with fresh and valuable content, so the visitor is compelled to contact you. Fresh content on your law firm website means you will get more website visitors. Invest in the necessary resources to keep your website up to date - benefiting your website readers, your clients and your law firm too.

8. Use Google tools – Analytics & maps.

You need to ensure your web developer includes these Google tools into your new or upgraded website:

Install Google Analytics

The insight provided by the analytics reports is invaluable and should definitely form part of your SEO strategy. By using the data in the various reports, you can track how many visitors you are attracting to your website, how they got there, which pages they visited, how long they stayed on your website, which page they exited your website from, bounce rate etc.

Essentially, this information allows you to map your visitor's journey on your law firm website, enabling decisions for further website optimisation.

Utilise Google Search Console

Google's Search Console (previously called Webmaster Tools) allows you to submit your sitemap to Google to assist with the indexing of your website. These tools also allow webmasters to optimise the visibility of websites - for example it identifies pages which Google had difficulty crawling so they can be fixed, provides lists of broken links for amendment, identifies missing page titles, lists keywords for which your website is achieving search engine results (great value for your marketing team), identifies any security issues etc.

If used correctly, these webmaster tools are very powerful and go a long way to assisting your SEO efforts.

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9. Benefits of a Wordpress website.

In our experience, lawyers are not well informed about what makes websites work and what goes on behind them. Here we provide some brief details that all lawyers should consider.

WordPress is the world's largest website platform with an astonishing estimate of 34% of the world's websites, if you only count sites using content management systems the figure grows to an unbelievable 60%.

The advantages in being with a powerful provider are numerous but for law firms we highlight just two that we believe are most relevant:

1   From a law firm's perspective, it is easier to get staff who can help with small day to day website amendments or small tasks that need to be done because so many people have WordPress skills or can learn them quickly; and

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2 From a hosting and security perspective, it is a much safer platform to host a website. You need the security of knowing that a large company will have staff permanently providing updates, patches and plug-ins to help keep your site secure, before you are aware of these issues.

For law firm websites that we host and maintain, we perform daily secure database backups, network monitoring, routine critical updates and regular updates of plugins and programs. This keeps a firm's website up to date with the latest protection and security measures.

Written monthly reporting.

Until recently the issue around website hosting and security has basically been ignored by lawyers. Treated as an intangible service, never front of mind or even considered by lawyers other than when their website was built, and it needed to be hosted. Problem solved, or so it was thought.

To make this issue more tangible, we can provide all clients whose websites we manage with a monthly written Maintenance Report, indicating what we have done over the preceding month including daily secure backups, network monitoring, routine critical updates and regular updates of plugins and programs. We do this to make the intangible, tangible. Will lawyers read it? Probably not, but that's not the point, because at least they can check if they want to, or if they need to.

To increase security and performance we recommend you use industry leading website infrastructure which provides advanced, simple, fast and secure hosting and service availability of 99.95% up-time, calculated on a monthly basis. This is the measure by which we run our hosting.

10. Staff profile & staff images.

In the offline business world, trust evolves as people interact in person. But in the online context, a prospective customer generally relies on the online experience as presented by the company's website. A deeper emotional connection is formed when trusting relationships are forged before meeting in person, hence the importance of including staff photos on your law firm website as they play an instrumental role in laying the foundation for trusting relationships.

This is further supported by research conducted by Bright Local on the importance of staff images for small business websites. They concluded that more trust (46%) is inspired in customers by local businesses who display staff photos on their websites.

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Firms often make the mistake talking about themselves for the entire website and writing little on the bio where it really matters. You need to do the opposite. The bio is the part of the firm's website where you need to talk about yourself, setting out the scope and breadth of your experience. Sell without selling!

Talk about what you can do for your clients and potential clients in your website, however, in the bio park, talk about you. Not boastfully, but you need to sell the fact that you should be the solution to their legal problem.

Staff photos shouldn't be considered a beauty contest but rather a 'splash of personality' that brings your website to life. It's not about how you look, but rather about who you are – having a face to a name.

Pay attention to the photos you select. Whilst it's important to portray character, it's just as important to remember that each staff member represents your law firm's brand and thus each photo reflects your image. So, err on the side of professionalism rather than photos of a leisurely nature. That said, stay away from the typical background of a bookcase full of law books or your law firm's name. We suggest you opt for a plain background that isn't reflective.

Pictures speak a thousand words and add an emotional dimension to your law firm's website. As a business that involves face to face customer interaction, the people behind your legal practice are the people your customers are 'buying'.

So, including staff photos on your website is of paramount importance in portraying your practices' personality, and in building trust and a professional relationship ahead of meeting your clients in person.

11. No news is not good news.

Receive Search Engine love! Search engines love fresh, updated websites and consider those with recent content to be more relevant to users, and as a result, rewards them accordingly.

With every new piece of content, you publish on your website, you attract search engine bots to crawl your website, index the new pages and recalculate your search engine rankings. Each indexed page is an opportunity to be found in the search results for keywords your customers are searching for. Your SEO receives a free boost every time you upload content, such as an e-newsletter, to your website.

The wonder of technology means that your firm newsletter can now be electronic. Gone are the days of printing and posting hundreds of paper newsletters. Instead, modern technology enables you to send regular enewsletters to clients and referrers with ease.

An e-newsletter for law firms is an effective way for your firm to be kept top of mind by your clients and referrers. An e-newsletter should be one of the central elements of your law firm's marketing strategy, second only to your law firm website. It is a simple and cost effective means of marketing to the people most likely to consider your firm – the people who already know and trust you.

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This is why newsletter articles or blogs are relevant to websites. Any article or blog you write in a newsletter should be in your website. So, when you email your eNewsletter the recipient then sees a two or three line preview of the content, and when clicked on to read more, they are immediately taken to the full article that appears within your website.

Failing to add new content such as an up to date newsletter sends out the message that the law firm is drab. We write law firm newsletters for lawyers because it's so hard for lawyers to do it in-house on a regular and ongoing basis. And we know this because we were lawyers who had the very job of trying to do just this!

Did you know

it's 6 to 10 times cheaper to appeal to your existing clients than advertise to people who don't already know you? If you don't have an e-newsletter, you need one and it needs to be in your website. It helps to demonstrate you know your work and helps compel a visitor to call you. Moreover, it will help your SEO.

12. Bad images are a bad look.

Some lawyers deal with images by not having any on their website. This is a big mistake. Overall, images add vibrancy and dynamism to your website. Most law firm websites we see could most certainly benefit from a visual lift.

Just because a friend tells you the photo of you with a beer in one hand and a shotgun in the other brings great memories of a weekend you will never forget, doesn't mean that your clients and referrers will view the photo the same way. They may gain a wrong impression by the image projected, particularly if they don't know you at all. Use of dated and stereotypical images can project the image of your firm louder than anything you might say, and it could do so negatively.

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This can undo all the perfect content you might have amassed. For example, if you are promoting your firm on the basis that you are modern and tech savvy and with it and then display images are old fashioned and from a different era what do you think the audience will do?

Even if you are promoting your firm as stable and established, the use of images like the scales of justice or a gavel look old fashioned and behind the times - it isn't a good look. If you have these images on your website now (and there are plenty of firms out there with them), consider a website upgrade now - even if your site is newly constructed.

There is nothing wrong with using stock images generally, but you need to consider what the images are saying about your firm and you.

For example, if you are a female sole practitioner then it's ridiculous to have images of a male appearing to be the decisionmaker in the business. Take care if the images suggest you might be practicing in another part of the world. If possible, professional photography is a good option for real life imagery.
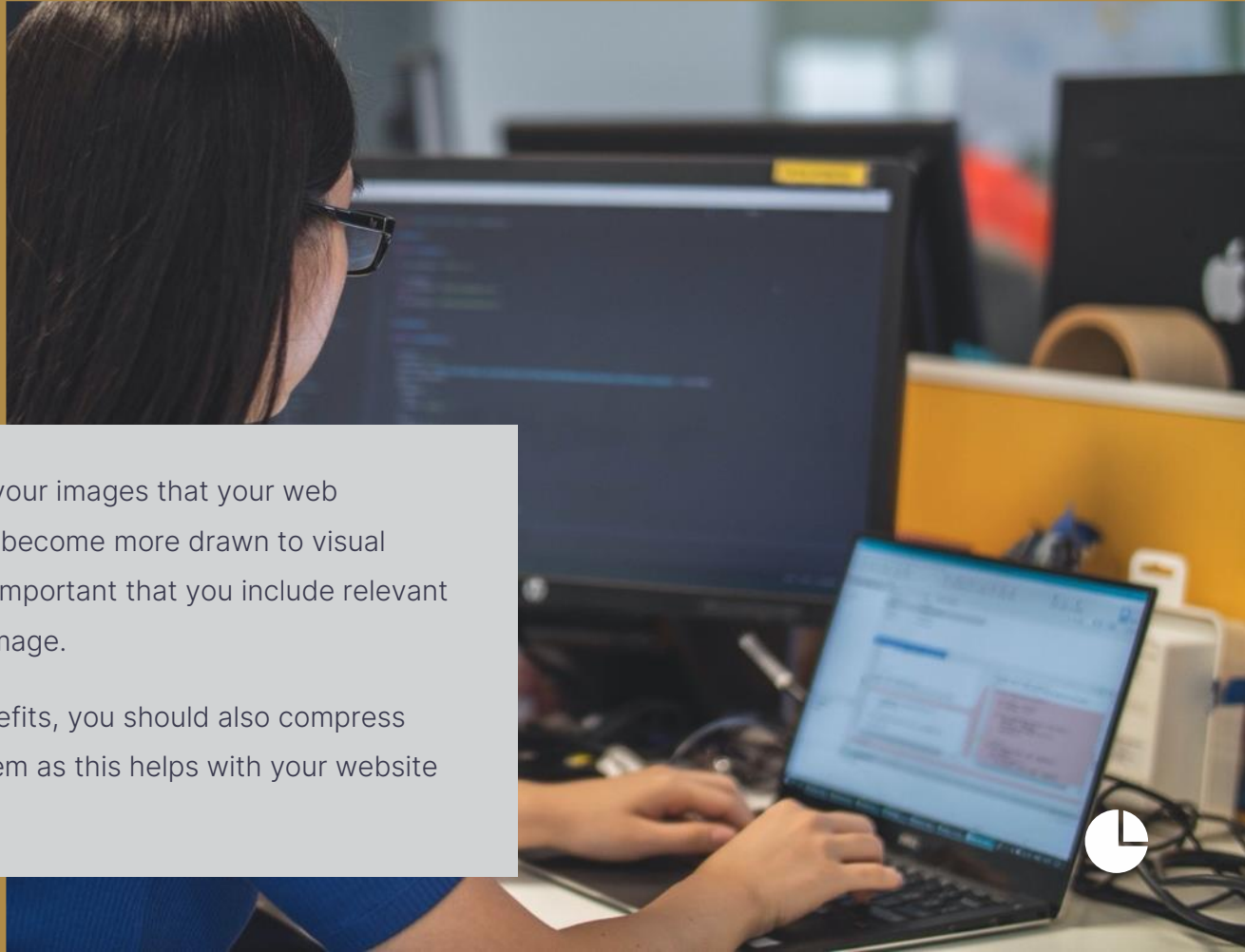
Finally, a technical point about all your images that your web developer must observe. As users become more drawn to visual content, it's becoming even more important that you include relevant keywords in the ALT tag of each image.

To further maximise your SEO benefits, you should also compress your images before you upload them as this helps with your website loading speed.

Where to from here?

We see so many examples of "finished" law firm websites, using poor imagery, lack of content, or shortfall on various other elements as identified in this e-book. This problem is compounded when the lawyer invests money in AdWords and SEO and the website really isn't converting leads or is simply underperforming. The bottom line is, when your website is professionally designed and developed by a law firm marketing specialist, it will become a lead magnet and drive better work to your firm.

Law firm marketing is all we do which is why so many lawyers trust our advice. We're the leaders in the industry and we understand how law firms work. Lift Legal Marketing was founded by two former lawyers who have the industry knowledge, backed by technical expertise and a team of experienced marketers, web designers, and developers, who know how to develop income producing websites and marketing strategies that increase revenue.

Your law firm website is your own online marketing channel and should epitomise a top-performing salesperson and act as an unpaid fee earner – well presented, knowledgeable, value-adding information, an expert in the legal field and readily available to answer questions.
If you get this right, why would a customer choose to go anywhere else?

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Peter Heazlewood.

Peter draws on his experience as a practicing lawyer of over 25 years and for much of that time as Managing Partner. He is one of the founding directors of Lift Legal Marketing, the most experienced law firm website hosting provider globally and a market leader in providing gold-standard marketing strategies that grow your business.

To speak to Peter about your website or marketing,
email peter@liftlegalmarketing.co.uk

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