Tips to Drive Traffic to Your Web Site

BY STACY WEST CLARK AND JASON P. LISI

Special to the Legal

You have just developed, or revitalized, a now wonderful Web site. You have poured dollars and time into creating an informative and client-friendly site. Or, better still, you have developed a microsite dealing with one specialty area of your practice. Now what? How do you get visitors to come to your site?

Well, there are definite tricks of the trade that need to be applied, which follow.

THE OFFLINE NON-TECHIE IDEAS

• Make sure that every piece of paper with your firm's or your name on it has the Web site address on it. That includes business cards, letterhead, Microsoft PowerPoint slides, articles, client alerts, firm announcements, press releases, seminar handouts, invitations, advertisements, e-mail signatures and more.

• Consider creating a separate business card with the Web site address on it and a few reasons why visitors will benefit from coming to your site. The national business immigration law firm of Klasko Rulon Stock & Seltzer recently created two highly successful microsites on discrete areas of immigration law: Worksite Compliance Resource Center; EB-5 Resource Center and a blog and touted their existence on a stand-alone card that was and will continue to be distributed on registration desks at industry conferences.

• When you speak at a conference and use PowerPoint, make a slide of just your Web site's address and talk about why conference attendees should visit your site. What benefit would they receive?

• Advertise the new or improved site in a stand-alone advertisement that your target audience will read. Again, to avoid the "why should I care" response, address in the ad what is new or of particular value to visitors to the site. For example, are there checklists that will help prevent them from having compliance issues? Are there audits that will ensure they do not run afoul of various rules and regulations, and in the case of Montgomery County, Pa.'s Hamburg Rubin Mullin Maxwell & Lupin, is there a handy list of "Frequently Asked Questions" for those involved in car accidents available for downloading? Create some value on your Web site and tout what it is.

• Enter your site in various law firm Web site contests. If you win, announce it to your entire mailing list of clients, friends and referral sources. Also, if you win, the host association will likely promote your site as well. Take, for example, the "Your Honor Awards" program sponsored by the national Legal Marketing Association. It annually recognizes the best in all aspects of law firm marketing and posts the "winners" including the winning Web sites.

• Be creative and innovative. Send your extensive mailing list an e-blast that is more than just a recitation of the fact that you have a new site or microsite. Clockwork Design Group, a graphic design firm in Massachusetts, created a Flash animated e-blast announcing its new site for the Boston law firm of Sherin & Lodgen. The design costs to create and e-mail out the inventive blast, according to Clockwork's president and creative director, Vanessa Schaefer, were significantly less than a similar printed mailing would have run.

• For those sites with press kits or speakers boards on them, take the opportunity to write a personal letter to targeted reporters and groups who might need a source or a speaker, explaining and then directing them to the exact location of your site that houses this information.

• For those firms who can -- and generally this applies to microsites or law firm networks and consumer law firms -- make sure you have a domain name "that conveys what you do and is easily remembered," said Ellis Mirsky, the general counsel of The Network of Trial Law Firms who secured the domain name of trial.com. As he said, "having done that, nothing much more has been needed." Mirsky also purchased other domain names for his site -- all of which point to trial.com.

• Last, some great ideas from law firm marketing consultant Larry Bodine. He suggested: "Spend some money and have a postcard made up depicting the home page and a tagline saying, 'Now appearing at www.---- ----.'" Include a giveaway for visitors. For example, if they visit the site within the next five days, they'll be able to download a special white paper you've created on a hot topic. Send it to your entire mailing list.

AND NOW THE ONLINE, TECHIE IDEAS

• Create your site for humans, not search engines. Content, in the game of attracting the attention of Web site visitors and search engines, is king. Plan your site for your target audience. This involves thinking about those often-asked marketing questions such as, "To whom is this Web site speaking?" and "What do I want the visitor to learn when he comes to the Web site?" Here's why: Google, Yahoo and the new Bing (formerly MSN) create their search engines with the goal of mimicking the

thought process of human beings. Having good content on the site -- content that would appeal to a human visitor -- works well with this search engine methodology.

• While you should be thinking about the human reaction to your Web site, make sure it ''plays nice'' with the search engines. In order to be found in the search engines, the Web site should be search engine optimized, meaning that the site is built with knowledge of how the search engines work. Some background: When a search engine is aware of a Web site, it will send a software robot called a crawler to the site to gather text from each page it can access. The crawler deposits the collected text into the search engine index, or database. When someone performs a Google search, for example, he is, in fact, searching the database, and the search results have links to the crawled Web sites. The more pages of your site included in the database, the greater the chance of a searcher finding your site from the billions of other sites on the Internet.

A site is search engine optimized when it allows the crawlers to do their work and read as many pages of the site as possible. Some tips: Logically plan the Web site, create appropriate file names for pages and have many links between pages. Make sure most of the site's content is visible to the search engine crawlers, meaning the text is not stored in graphics or Flash technology. Have a site map page -- one that lists every page in a table-of-contents format, with links to each page -- accessible from every other page.

• Make sure you tell the search engines that your site exists by registering it. This will alert the search engines so they will know to crawl your site. Google, Yahoo and Bing have agreed on a set of standards where webmasters and Web site owners may alert the search engines of the existence of a site and the pages of interesting content. A Web site owner interested in getting Google's attention, for example, should set up a webmaster tools account (go to www.google.com/webmasters/) and register the Web site. Once established, a webmaster tools account will allow you to tell the search engine, via a specially formatted file called a sitemap.xml file, what pages are in the site.

• As mentioned above, your e-mail signature should contain your Web site address. Just as you would never send a physical letter without a signature or a return address, your e-mails should have the same elements -- and this can draw people to your Web site. E-mail signatures usually appear at the bottom of the message you are composing and give the recipient a quick way to find your telephone number and other information. Simply adding a clickable link containing your new Web site's address will increase the likelihood one of your correspondents will click it to see your site. Simply add the full Web site address to your signature (for example http://www.yourfirm.com/) and most e-mail programs will convert it into a clickable link.

• Ask other Web sites to link to yours. While having a well-organized, content-rich Web site that is fully search engine optimized is a great start, it would also help to have links to your site from other relevant Web sites. These are called in-bound links and they have the dual benefit of creating more ways for Internet users to learn about your site and search engines, particularly Google, put a high value -- and therefore rank highly -- sites that are linked to by other Web sites. How do you get a link on another site to point to yours? You ask the owner of the site to place your link on the Web site. The owner will probably ask for something in return, such as a fee or, more likely, a link back, called a reciprocal link. You can place the reciprocal link somewhere on your site, such as a resources page, but it is not necessary that the link be prominently displayed.

• Finally, you could pay to bring people to your firm's Web site. The Google AdWords system (Yahoo and Bing have similar systems) allow a Web site owner to advertise a link to a Web site in exchange for a per-click fee. These ads typically appear at the top and to the right of search engine result pages and have several lines of ad copy followed by a link to the Web site. Only when the link gets clicked does the advertiser incur a charge. However, this allows for a high level of control over the messages displayed and where the user will go when clicking on an ad's link.

With all these tips in hand, you are ready to go. The light has turned green. Let the traffic come.

Stacy West Clark has been helping Philadelphia lawyers and law firms expand their practices for 20 years. She is a former attorney with Morgan Lewis & Bockius and was its first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC.

Jason P. Lisi founded and runs Legal Internet Solutions Inc., which helps law firms market themselves on the Internet through Web site design and search engine optimization. He is a former practicing attorney in Philadelphia. A client portfolio and other news are at www.LegaLisi.com.