

Marketing: Self-promotion in the age of Google

Will online marketing make the legal directory obsolete?

By Heather Suttie



For many firms, January signals the start of a new budget. Getting to this point usually entails putting a number of expenditure items on trial for their lives. In the case of marketing, these trials tend to be conducted by fire. There are a myriad of ways firms waste money. The two worst are to drop a match on a pile of cash or appear in legal directories indiscriminately because other firms do.

Let's be clear: Directories are profit-making vehicles. They tend to appeal to egos and afford an opportunity to see one's name or business listed as a person or firm to watch either in print or online.

There are slews of directories. According to U.S.-based Jaffe Associates, in 2008 there were more than 950 surveys and ranking services geared to law firms. These included the usual suspects: Chambers Global, Martindale-Hubbell, Who's Who, Rising Stars lists of all descriptions, and every kind of Super, Best, and Top list imaginable splintered into numerous legal practices to boot.

In Canada, Lexpert publishes a number of directories based on peer surveys that include leading lawyers' names for free and, for a price, can include bios, photos, firm cards and ads. Carswell publishes the less costly Canadian Law List, which is essentially a list of lawyers in Canada. Both supplement their print editions with online versions that offer additional paid opportunities to enhance lawyer and law firm listings.

Some directories have been around for a long time. Chambers Global turns 23 this year while one of its competitors, The Legal 500, is two years older. This represents a whole generation of lawyers accustomed to thumbing through these weighty tomes in print form well before the advent of the online age.

Falling out of favour

Generally speaking, directories have been falling out of favour for years. Looking back to 2007, London and New York-based Acritas surveyed 500 corporate counsel about what sources influenced their decision in hiring external lawyers. At that time, only 5 per cent found directories relevant to their decision and only 3 per cent said they had been influenced significantly by directory information. Instead these corporate lawyers said they relied on referrals from outside law firms, colleagues, personal experience, the reputation of a firm, and publications and articles.

It's taking a while for this reality to sink in but some firms are responding. For example, roughly 30 per cent of AmLaw 100 law firms are no longer listed in Martindale-Hubbell. One of them is Axley Brynelson LLP of Madison, Wisconsin. Managing Partner John Mitby says, "In 2010, we decided to reinvest the \$25,000-plus we usually spent on Martindale-Hubbell in communications channels we did see results from, including social networks, outdoor and video. In just five months, our website traffic increased 20 per cent. We're receiving more quality cold email inquiries and subsequent new clients."

Invest in yourself

Firms that are technologically savvy are ahead of the game. With a firm's website being its number-one marketing vehicle, the content that would have formerly

been included in directories, combined with solid search engine optimization, results in a do-it-yourself directory that features only you.

Also, this is where showcasing client testimonials trumps any directory ever published. That is because the claims of a satisfied client far exceed any laudatory line in a directory that proclaims all its participants to be the best of the best in one way or another. Including client testimonials also helps you mould your profile since this type of online content is controlled solely by you and costs only pennies compared to what can be paid to directories.

As Mitby points out, people aren't searching for lawyers in directories. He says, "They're searching for lawyers via Google or recommendations."

In addition, as Axley Brynelson's results show, firms that employ social media tactics as well as mobile sites, news feeds, blogs, podcasts, and other online components are seeing measurable returns. As Mitby points out, people aren't searching for lawyers in directories. He says, "They're searching for lawyers via Google or recommendations." He's right. Many legal directories began in a pre-Google age. Now Google is the world's directory of everything.

That said, if the day ever comes when instead of being provided with legal directories of "firms to watch" we're offered a directory of "firms to watch out for," well, that would certainly make for a much more helpful and entertaining read. **N**

Heather Suttie is a legal business development and law firm marketing consultant. She consults to a wide range of firms — global, national, mid-size and boutique. Reach her at (416) 964-9607, heather@heathersuttie.ca or www.heathersuttie.ca.



The Canadian Bar Association wishes to thank our corporate partners and preferred suppliers for their support.

CBA CORPORATE PARTNERS



The Canadian Bar Insurance Association (CBIA) arranges for insurance protection of legal professionals, their families and law firm staff.



CBA Financial (CBAF) arranges RRSPs, TFSA's, banking services and financial services for lawyers, their families and law firm staff.

CBA PREFERRED SUPPLIERS



A.R.S. Assessment Rehabilitation Services Inc. is a proud and recognized provider of Absence and Disability Management solutions to employers nationwide including a wide variety of Medical Assessments performed by our specialist partners.



Rent with Avis® or Budget® and enjoy a variety of 100% smoke-free, low mileage vehicles and earn Aeroplan® Miles at Avis® or AIR MILES® reward miles at Budget®!



ERAssure Executor Insurance — tell them about it now . . . before the claim is made.



Rogers Communications is Canada's largest provider of wireless voice and data communications services and one of Canada's leading providers of cable television, high-speed Internet and telephony services.



MBNA is the largest MasterCard issuer in Canada and also provides the CBA credit card.



PGI offers a full suite of audio, video and web conferencing services, as well as streaming services.



Purolator delivers a wide range of convenient and cost effective shipping options, technology that makes tracking and administration easy, and 24/7 customer service you can rely on.



Starwood Preferred Guest lets CBA members access a world of incredible experiences where blackout dates don't exist on free award nights.



Supreme Basics, The New Dye & Durham, is Canada's largest independent office and learning product supplier dedicated to providing high quality products and world-class, local services to the legal community.



Quick, simple and secure ONLINE mortgage processing simplifying the way legal forms and mortgage documents are created, managed and processed.



The Utility Company offers enterprise level technology support and service for a small business budget including services from helpdesk support to virtual servers.