

ONLINE SECRET SHOPPING MY LAW FIRM

(wear your client's shoes)

THE PROBLEM

Long gone are the days when law firm communications took place exclusively via telephone and fax. Nowadays, clients, former clients, prospective new clients (PNCs), opposing counsel, and vendors contact your law firm via phone, email, the web (Contact Us), text, chat, etc. And as we approach 2021, third parties more often than not prefer electronic communications.

Law firm owners might mistakenly assume that external parties experience excellent customer service during their digital interactions, but that is a foolish assumption. In particular, many firms overestimate their competency with digital communications, and some firms literally have no understanding of the PNC experience. Without evaluating the firm's digital communications from the point of view of a PNC, law firms might unknowingly lose opportunities and revenue.

THE SOLUTION

Want to truly experience your firm's proficiency with digital communications? Try Online Secret Shopping and experience engagement with your firm in the shoes of a PNC.

QUICK STEPS

1. ONLINE ALIAS

Create a new, free personal email account that cannot be easily identified as your own, i.e., do not include your name in the email address. Make up a name as well, e.g., the Author uses a fictitious name and a personal email address created specifically for the purpose of online secret shopping. Use this fictitious name and email address while engaging in secret shopping online.

2. CONTACT US

Visit your firm's web site and complete the Contact Us form. Phone number and email address should both be required fields (increases the chances of future contact in case the PNC goes missing in action). The email response from the firm should be either automatic (auto reply) or super quick, in order to hopefully interrupt the process of shopping around. Most importantly, did the email response add value, provide relevant information, or help push forward the process? For practice areas with potentially time sensitive matters (e.g., criminal law & family law), the timing of electronic communications can be critical. As such, make note of response times, and as a test, try completing the Contact Us form after hours and on a weekend. And for a final test, simply ignore the firm's response (whether by phone, email, or both), and record how long it takes the firm to follow up with this "Unresponsive PNC."

3. WEB SITE

Pick one or two legal issues and visit your web site as a PNC. The web site is your "Director of First Impressions" online, and it should be a reflection of your firm. Is the web site focused on the firm, legal services, helping clients, legal education, or some combination? Is the site easy to navigate and find information on solving your legal problem? Finally, cruise your law firm's web site on a large monitor, laptop, mobile, and tablet, and ensure the site is optimized for all devices. Note: headlines, important information and calls to action should be conspicuously displayed at the top of the page because mobile visitors might not scroll down a bunch of screens!

4. GOOGLE SEO & PPC

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) are two hot topics that may generate some confusion. However, SEO and PPC are important channels to drive PNCs to your firm's web site.

Put simply, when a PNC searches Google for a term or phrase (e.g., "Austin criminal law attorney"), Google will display two types of results. Results labelled as "Ad" (appearing at the top of the page and elsewhere) signify that those law firms or

similar entities are engaged in PPC (paid ads based on keywords). And the results that are not labelled as “Ad” are called organic search results (free), which are a direct function of SEO on your law firm’s web site.

Regardless of whether your firm relies on PPC, SEO, or a combination of both, PNCs will most likely only see your firm’s information (and possibly click) if your firm makes an appearance on the first page or so of results. Solid SEO means your firm is listed on the first page or two of results (increasing the chances of a click/visit to your web site), and effective PPC means the same thing (but for a paid Ad). Google the legal issue as a PNC in your city or town, and carefully examine the search results.

5. EMAIL

First, take note whether actual email addresses appear on your firm’s web site (should be a deliberate choice made by the firm). If so, are those email addresses “clickable” ... meaning the emails are actual links that automatically open a new email message for the visitor (making the email process quick & efficient)? Regardless, assume that quick response times increase chances for ultimate conversion into a client; therefore, all emails from PNCs should receive responses (via email or phone, or both) as quickly as possible. As such, make note of response times, and as a test, email your firm after hours and on a weekend. And as a final test, simply ignore the firm’s response (whether by email or phone, or both), and record how long it takes the firm to follow up with the “Unresponsive PNC.”

6. ONLINE REVIEWS

Assume the role of a PNC who is interested in the law firm. As a next step, conduct a Google search to determine reviews, opinions, etc. available online (for example, “review or opinion Austin texas the leitner law firm.” Take some time to read the reviews on all the various sites (legal and non-legal); if the reviews are not generally positive and/or if there are few reviews, the firm should ask satisfied clients to post positive reviews and/or determine the appropriate response to the negative review (if that is an option).

PRO TIPS

- ✓ Check with your State Bar to ensure compliance with permitted responses to any negative online reviews.
- ✓ Many services provide alerts when visitors surf your web site, and some allow real time chat requests or other pop-up messages after a defined period of time on the site, or after a certain number of pages have been viewed.
- ✓ Ensure Google Analytics is installed on your firm's web site – you will then have data regarding number of visitors, time spent on visited pages, point of exit, etc., and the firm can make adjustments (and test) as needed to increase conversions.
- ✓ If your firm has an active PPC campaign, ensure that an appropriate staff member is dedicated to reviewing monthly reports, examining the effectiveness and cost of PPC, and making monthly adjustments to keywords, phrases, and ads, as appropriate.
- ✓ SEO is never “one and done.” Test monthly in the shoes of a PNC, and ensure your SEO Manager (usually outsourced in small law firms) edits and adjusts the site as needed for better visibility. However, it is incumbent upon the law firm to notify the SEO Manager of changes in local laws and codes, or new topics and keywords, so the web site SEO is revised accordingly.
- ✓ Consider offering online self service appointments ... PNCs can choose appointments from your calendar, online payments via credit card can be collected (as appropriate), and the entire process is efficient and quick.

MORE SUPPORT

- ✓ Have questions about any of the material presented above?
- ✓ Any questions about law firm technology in general?
- ✓ Craving to see archived copies of the entire Tech Tuesday series?
- ✓ Care to share these lessons with your staff, colleagues, and buddies from law school?

Click [HERE](#) to access the Tech Tuesday Home Page and make all your tech dreams come true.

SPREAD THE WORD!

- ✓ Share these practical tips with colleagues, staff, family and friends.
- ✓ Show you care and share the knowledge.
- ✓ Click [here](#) to add recipients to HTM's Tech Tuesdays.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

Have question, hit a roadblock or figured something out that you want to share? Join the discussion forum [here](#)!

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

ROB



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