

Search Engine Optimization: What Really Works for Law Firms?

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Boy oh boy, is this a hotly debated topic - and we happened to attend a very illuminating presentation by Mark Jacobsen, the Senior Director of Strategic Development and Thought Leadership for FindLaw (long position title!). While I am normally somewhat skeptical of FindLaw (after all, they are in the business of selling websites/SEO), Mark did a great job of presenting a study done by FindLaw in a "teaching" rather than a "selling" way.

His presentation was entitled "The Futility of Chasing Silver Bullets: An Analysis of Aggregate Search Performance for Law Firm Websites." They apparently like long titles at FindLaw. You can download the 2013 study [here](#) so long as you don't mind giving up contact information. You will probably be contacted - we were. ☺

Here are some of the highlights:

Branded searches account for 38% of all searches for law firm websites. In other words, they already know your firm, someone in it or some other aspect of its brand. Any competent SEO provider should be able to get you traffic for branded search.

But 62% of searches are non-branded. This is where the fight for results gets bloody. Most lawyers suffer from the misconception that "head-term phrases" (such as divorce attorney Los Angeles) is key to success and they waste a lot of money trying to get those phrases to come up on the search engine results (SERPs).

People also search for research reasons and for what are called "long tail searches with lawyer intent." An example might be "lawyer in Virginia who specializes in appealing school decisions about student discipline." Because of the sheer volume of those doing research, even though the click rate is very low, they will result in 66.9% of non-branded visits to your site. Long-tail searches will end up visiting your site 31.8% of the time and head-term searches will visit just 1.3% of the time.

The contact rates (what you care about most) are 0.8% for research queries, 4.6% for head-term/intent to find a lawyer queries, and 4.6% for long-tails searches with intent to find a lawyer.

By combining website traffic level and contact rates, the study determined the percentage breakdown of contacts generated by non-branded queries types. The percentages were: Research 26%, Long-tail with intent 71% and head-term with intent 3%.

Clearly, the lesson is this. For non-branded queries, research queries are high in volume but it is less likely that they will result in contacting the firm. Long-tailed queries with lawyer intent deliver the most contacts to the firm. Head-term queries with lawyer intent result in the least contact to the firm.

So for those of you who have been trying to deliver first page results for "geography plus area of practice" queries, you are probably spending too much money chasing too few results. Good SEO experts have known for years that the best results for unbranded searches come from long-tail searches. So rethink how you spend your SEO monies!

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