# Information for Law Firms On Websites

# USING A WEBSITE TO PROMOTE YOUR FIRM

A website is a communication and marketing tool that takes advantage of internet technology. While the internet and websites are central to how some businesses operate, for other businesses, including most legal firms, they are simply an additional way of advertising services or products.

Most legal firms that put a website in place do not find that it directly results in a lot of new clients and work that they would not have secured otherwise. However, having an impressive/effective website sends out a positive message to clients and prospective clients, and helps to reassure people who are thinking of using your firm.

The general consensus is that having a website will not win you much new business – but not having one can lose you business...

A website can help you to get new clients by:
▪ Engaging with people who are surfing the internet for legal information services.
▪ Encouraging potential clients to make contact with your firm and/or take up some incentive that your firm is offering.

A website can help you increase work from existing clients by:
▪ Informing them about the firm's services.
▪ Maintaining an open dialogue with clients.
▪ Creating new opportunities for delivering additional new services to clients.

It is vital that, before beginning to put together your website, you decide exactly what you want the website to do - and what you want to gain from it.


**What Websites Should Contain**

Websites vary enormously but the following features are common to most:
▪ A unique address – usually ending with the suffix '.ie' or '.com'.
▪ A design/style that complements the firm's stationery, brochures and logo.
▪ Information about the firm relevant, in particular, to prospective clients.
▪ Photographs and illustrations that give a sense of what the firm is about.
▪ Profiles on individual people involved in the business.
▪ At least one easy way to make contact with the firm – by email or telephone. ▪ A requirement for ongoing management and updating.

# INVESTIGATING WEBSITE OPTIONS

A good way to start thinking about what kind of website will suit your firm is to look at what others have done – while at the same time thinking through the following matters:

- Why do you want a website?
- What can a website do for your firm?
- How can a website benefit your clients and prospective clients?
- Will a website bring revenue into your firm and, if it will, how will this happen?

Look at how other solicitors have approached their internet sites, what their sales pitch is and what services are they offering online.

As you surf, note down contact details of any solicitors whose sites offer particular services that you could offer and whose sites are impressive. It would be especially useful if you could ask other solicitors, with a site similar to the one you are planning, questions such as:

- How did their clients react?
- What has worked well and what hasn't?
- Have they had a resulting increase in revenue?
- What sort of response have they had from any interactive areas of their website, e.g. forms, quotation services and enquiries?

Consider telephoning colleagues in a different geographical location to you, so that there is no conflict of interest. You might also ask them about:

- Costs incurred in putting the site together.
- Costs and time required in ongoing management of the developed site.

A good place to access a wide array of law firm websites is: www.venables.co.uk. This site provides links to the websites of most Irish law firms and also British ones.

**Reviewing Websites**

As you review other solicitors' websites, make best use of time online by focusing primarily on how the site looks, on its content and on ease of navigation.

How does the site look?
- Is your first impression positive - do you get the impression of professionalism, efficiency, trustworthiness?
- Do the visuals look balanced on the screen and is the subject appropriate?
- Do the visuals take a long time to appear as you move through the site?
- Are the visuals consistent and logical throughout the site?
- Do the visuals add to the content or detract from it?
- Is the site, in your opinion, appropriate for a solicitor's firm?
- Is the screen free of clutter and is it easy to find your area of interest?

What is the content?
- Is the information easy to read?
- Is the content written in a short and concise style?
- Is there balance between information about law and details about the firm? ▪ Does the content invite visitors to enquire further?

How easy is the site to navigate?
- Is the site easy to find your way around?
- Are the menus logical and helpful?
- Do the different pages download quickly and easily?

## Useful Form for Assessing Websites

Name of Firm: _____

Website Address: _____

| Element | Score 1 – 10 | Comments | Consider for our site - Yes/No |
|---|---|---|---|
| How Site Looks | | | |
| Content | | | |
| Navigating Ease | | | |
| Prompts Action | | | |
| Up To Date | | | |
| Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) | | | |
| Other Comments | | | |

# Ensuring You Comply With Advertising Regulations

Following the commencement of section 218(1)(2) and (4)-(8) of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 the Advertising Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 644 of 2020) came into operation.

The Legal Services Regulatory Authority (LSRA) now regulates the advertising of all legal practitioners, including solicitors.

As the Law Society no longer enforces advertising regulations, all information provided in this section is for guidance purposes only and should not be taken as a definitive statement of law.

- Scope of the Advertising Regulations
- Prohibitions
- Legal information and testimonials
- Electronic advertisements and websites
- Investigations by the LSRA

**Please visit How the LSRA regulates legal services advertising for more information - (www.lsra.ie/for-consumers/advertising-by-lawyers)**

# GETTING ORGANISED

There are four main tasks involved in the development of a website:
- Deciding what should be on the site and how it should be organised.
- Specifying design/style including page structure, colour schemes, graphics, etc.
- Copywriting all content that will feature on the site.
- Programming content through HTML or other code to make it internet accessible.

## Co-ordinating Work to be Done

Quite different skills are required for each of the above tasks and it is unlikely that your firm will be able to employ one person/one service that will be able to successfully handle all four tasks. A good deal of coordination is usually required to ensure that tasks are successfully and appropriately finished by each party involved and passed on in time to another.

You are likely to talk to many different people as you make plans to develop a site and will then choose who you are going to work with from a range of players including:
- People who currently handle the design/production of your firm's stationery.
- Other graphic designers - including designers who just focus on websites.
- Copywriters who are skilled in writing copy that works well on websites.
- Website technical people - who programme content.
- An internet service provider – about how your site will be hosted.

There is a wide range of companies and individuals who will take on the whole project and undertake to deliver a working site – and many law firms very successfully proceed in this way. However, you need to be careful that someone senior in your firm stays centrally involved in deciding about content and site structure. Likewise, irrespective of how the site is developed, it must complement the firm's existing design and communication strategy.

There are also decisions on technical matters that need to be taken. Someone with at least a decent understanding about websites should be involved in deliberations about these technical matters that include:
- Should a content management system be used to facilitate regular site updates?
- How important is search engine optimisation (SEO) and how can it be facilitated?
- How can the site link in with other internet facilities such as a blog and Linkedin?
  - What can be incorporated to encourage visitors to return?

Another important thing to be organised is registration of a name for your website. There are agencies on the internet such as www.irishdomains.com that you can use to research and to register your name. Simply, go to the agency's website and run a search on the name and suffix you want. It will then tell you whether the name is available.

It is worth checking out prices on a couple of sites as they can vary. There are two approaches to registering a name; you might want to register the firm's name, for instance, www.murphyryan.ie - or you might want to register a business name, for instance, www.lawservices.ie.

**Deciding On Content and How It Should Be Organised**

Having looked at sites that law firms and other businesses have developed, you should have some idea of why you want a website and what you want to do with it. The next step is to decide about the content that you want incorporated into your site.

As a basic guide, a website should include:
- Information about the firm and people involved.
- Information about the different areas of law that your firm is involved in. ▪ Contact details.

Other elements you should consider featuring include:
- Newsletters and fact sheets that can be downloaded.
- A news section.
- Useful email addresses and contacts of other relevant organisations.
- A forum where customers can ask questions and discuss issues.
- An on-line quoting system or an enquiry form.
- An e-commerce section.
- Restricted entry areas.

Outlined below are guidelines regarding content and how it should be organised.

**The Fundamentals**

You should tell visitors about your firm and the services you offer. You should profile the people involved in the firm and ideally provide pictures of them. Pictures break down the barriers and make your firm seem more approachable. Seek to keep information clear, concise and accurate. Ensure the site is easy to understand and to navigate around.

**Content That Works Best**

Provide descriptive and useful information. Generally, it is a good idea to deal more with legal matters and challenges prospective clients face than to overly focus on the firm and its history.

**Facilitate Visitors to Make Contact**

You should always incorporate ways a visitor can contact people in the firm. You may have individual email links or a central enquiries form. As well as email you should ensure that all addresses, telephone numbers and other contact details are included.

**Facilitate Visitors to Download Information**

Visitors often want to print off the information published on a website. To get maximum value out of information on your site, consider providing it also on downloadable fact sheets – that are branded with your firm's logo and contact details. You might also provide the firm's brochures and newsletters in a PDF format.

**Feature Latest News**

A section containing recent news and press releases issued keeps your site looking fresh and up-to-date. News items may include pieces about your firm in the papers, summaries of new legislation or news about issues that affect your clients.

**Specifying Design/Style**

You should give the designer as much background information as possible about the content you foresee on the website. You may decide to write the copy yourself and ask the copywriter to edit and rewrite it in an appropriate style for the website.

The designer and copywriter will use this information to determine how the website will be put together, how the menus will work, how many words to a page, etc.

Your creative brief should include:
- A background to the firm.
- A background of the people working in the firm.
- An outline of the specific services that the firm provides.
- A page plan if you have produced one.
- An outline, with examples, of the firm's logo and other advertising or brochures produced in the past.
- Any mission statements.
- An outline of the target audience/client base.
- Technical information such as any programmes and online services you want.
- An indication of how eye-catching you would like the website to be.
- A list of descriptive words indicating the image and impression you would like the website to give, i.e. business-like, fun, professional, young, trustworthy, etc.
- An idea of the sort of budget that you have in mind – you may choose not to give a figure but to ask a number of firms to quote for comparison.

**Copywriting**

Websites should be written in a very direct manner using "we" or "I", rather than repeating the firm's name, and because the copy will be read on screen it should be direct, short, sharp and concise.

Information should be set out in single pages with links between other pages containing further information. It is like a layering process: you provide a layer of information where the visitors can then stop, go back or forward another layer to find out more.

A good way of producing copy for a website is to write it in Microsoft Word and use 'hyperlinks' and 'bookmarks' so that you can see how the pages and copy will flow. These links let you move between pages and files in the same way as you would on a website.

The information put on a website should tie in with your other marketing materials. Once the copy is agreed, you need to give it to the designer.

Copy should be checked to ensure that facts are accurate and make sense. However, do not over agonise on this as there will be time to change copy on the website before it goes live on the internet.

# MANAGING THE PROJECT

Having decided what you want your website to do and which elements you would like to incorporate you are generally advised to put together an outline of the information you want included and how you envisage this information being presented to viewers.

**Creating a Map/Site Plan**

This is a fairly straight forward process. Simply create a list of subject areas and subheadings of information within them. Each heading could be another page, or the information could all be listed on one page with a clickable list taking the reader to the relevant area of that page.

A good way of bringing information together is to produce a table, that shows how information on your site will be broken down and what information will be included.

As you look through you will see that there may be repetition of some of the headings and opportunities to link different pages to a shared link. Sometimes you may need to just copy and marginally change pages - such as, "When you are buying" instead of "When you are selling" in the information about "Our Services".

| | L 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 | Level 6 | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcome Page | Intro | - Site map | | | | | |
| About the Firm | Intro | - People in firm | | | | | Hyperlinks to take visitors to other parts of the website |
| Conveyancing | Intro | - Contact details<br><br>Conveyancing Process (Overview) | Buying a property | Facts about Buying | - Costs involved | - Stamp duty<br>- Reg. Costs<br>- Firm's fees | |
| | | | | | - Mortgages<br>- Firm's service - Purchasing checklist - Other sites - Downloadable factsheets | (Other relevant pages for each of the headings) | |
| | | | Selling a property | Facts about Selling | - Costs involved | - Estate agent - CGT<br>- Firm's fees | |
| | | | | | - Firm's service<br>- Selling<br>- checklist<br>- Download<br>   Fact sheets | (Other relevant pages for each of the headings) | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| Wills & Probate | Intro | How to make a Will (Overview) | Facts about Wills | -       Costs<br>-       Service<br>- Download literature | | |
| | | The Probate Process (explain process) | Facts about Probate | -       Costs<br>-       Service<br>- Download literature | | |

## Budgeting For the Project

Having planned the elements and information you want to include in your website you need to find out how much it is going to cost you to produce. If you phone owners of sites you like, they might give you an idea of their costs.

There is enormous variation in the amount you can spend on having a website created, anything between hundreds and tens of thousands of euros. Cost depends on what you include in your site and what the agency charges.

As well as the initial investment in your site, there is likely to be ongoing costs thereafter. The site will need to be updated and you will probably need to pay to be hosted on a server. The management and care of your site may also involve the firm's personnel giving it a good deal of time. This too, will have cost implications.

As with any other promotion, when deciding how much to invest, you should bear in mind the return you expect.  A website needs to pay for itself, in some way.

Because of the variation in the amount of money you might be charged, it is a good idea to discuss your requirements and to get quotes from two to three different site producers. Their input and ideas will also help you distill what you want to do with your site and the cost implications of including different elements.

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<u>Website Design Costs</u>
For a typical informational or small business website:
8 to 16 pages, Custom graphics, stock photos, forms directed to email accounts
Project duration: 30 to 60 days; Development cost range: €1,000 to €4,000

Other Costs:
Domain name annual registration charge - €50 to €100 a year
Website hosting cost - €100 to €200 a year
Updates and Maintenance to site – typically €1,000 to €1,500 a year

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The majority of designers have some Internet capability and will be able to point you in the right direction. A good start would be to approach the person who designed and produced any brochures you have. In addition, you could go to a company that produced another solicitor's website that you like.

Website production companies frequently put their details on the sites that they have produced, so it is worth noting the details on a site that you like. If they have already produced one solicitor's site, they will be in a good position to do a second one. You may even be able to buy some of the programmes from them, i.e. an on-line quotation programme.

You may choose to produce your own website using one of several software packages on the market. However, it is recommended that you enlist at least the support of a graphic designer - so that the site, when finished, will look professional and will work well.

**Working with Consultants**

Work to be done with service providers on a website is best undertaken step by step.

**Prepare a Creative Brief**

The brief is the key to your website achieving what you want it to do and ensuring that the finished website correctly reflects your firm and the image you want to give existing and potential clients. What should be contained in this document has already been covered in Section 4.

**Work on Site Look and Content**

Next, the designer and copywriter should produce a proposed design and a page plan – laying out how the site will look and fit together. As with the production of brochures you may need to discuss these with colleagues and seek their agreement.

It is a good idea to look at the page design(s) on a computer screen as this will show you how the site will look when finished. The page plan will identify the contents of the website and how the pages will flow together. This needs to be agreed before the copy is produced.

**Agree and Finalise Copy**

Once you have decided on the design and page plan, the copy needs to be written and agreed with relevant people in the firm.

**Test Drive the Site**

Once the copy and design have been brought together, it is suggested that the site is made available to everyone in the firm to try it out. You can do this by having the site put up but not entered into any search engines. Ask everyone to search through the site and see how easy they find it to understand and to navigate. Enquire whether there is any missing information. This is a good time to check that all the links and programmes work.

**Register Your Site with Search Engines**

Your website should now be registered with different search engines so that people will find it when searching the internet. Key words need to be identified so that different searches will find your site. Your website producer will be able to help you register your site or you can do it yourself through agencies on the internet. To find these agencies simply search for 'register sites' on Google.

**Launch Your Website**

When you are happy that the site works, looks good, gives information and has all the features you want, the time has come to launch it to your clients and the media.
There are a number of activities you might want to include in your launch plan:
▪ Prepare and send out a press release to the media.
▪ Send an email to clients with a link to your website enclosed.
▪ Advertise the presence of your site.
▪ Encourage visitors to your site with a competition for those who sign in.

# MANAGING YOUR WEBSITE

All websites need ongoing management and updating on a regular basis after being launched - especially if you have elements such as question forms, a quotation service, a bulletin board, etc.

It is important that this work takes place regularly and consistently, as old information or information that is no longer current will undermine the quality and trustworthiness of the information presented. Even if you have create a tip of the week and put it up it shows that the website is constantly under review.

A good way of managing your website is to appoint a webmaster. The webmaster makes sure that the site is up to date and that any changes are actioned. Their job will also be to evaluate the site and liaise with the production team (designer, copywriter, programmers, etc.) and keep the page plan up-to-date.

If you are looking at ways of reducing costs, it may be worthwhile sending someone in your firm (perhaps the webmaster) on a course so that they can amend the site inhouse without having to go to a specialist each time which would cost money.

You should ensure that each time the site is changed or updated, the page plan is changed to reflect this.  This is a busy hands-on role and therefore needs somebody who can give it time and who has enthusiasm to do it.

# EVALUATING YOUR WEBSITE

As with all other promotional methods, you should evaluate your website in order to establish what exactly it is doing for your firm. Most evaluation efforts should focus on trying to learn what are the views of visitors to your site and about how they used it.

**Visitor Numbers**

You can obtain information on the number of visitors who view your website over a period of time. The company hosting your site can normally provide basic data and other more detailed analysis can be obtained from Google.

You should also keep a record or account of enquiries, requests for information and a note of how many of these are later converted into chargeable work.

**Testing the Look and Content of Your Site**

There are a number of ways that you can find out what visitors think of your site. You can attach a questionnaire to the site asking relevant questions, or you could send a questionnaire to clients asking them to visit your site and to complete the questionnaire.

If you ask clients or visitors to your site to respond to a questionnaire, it is a good idea to give them an incentive such as a draw.

**Formalised Research**

You can organise a focus group and, taking participants through your site, ask them what they think of different areas. In these circumstances, you should also ask them what they would like to see and how they think you could improve the site.

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR WEBSITE

Having created a website you should seek to develop it further over time to build a channel for interfacing with clients and for developing new business opportunities.

**Inform People**

Make sure that all headed paper, business cards, leaflets, advertisements and brochures have the website address on them.

**Link With Other Websites**

Research appropriate sites, contact owners and ask for a link to your site from theirs. Seek links with local authorities, local estate agents, advice centres, etc.

**Get Ranked On Search Engines**

If your website is not registered with search engines it will be difficult for people to locate it. Register with as many search engines as possible. This is a free facility.

**Follow Up Inquiries**

Always follow up any leads from your site. If someone requests a quotation, follow this up quickly and email them offering your services.

**Keep Content Up-To-Date**

New matters posted regularly provide a better visitor experience and improve results with search engines. 'Latest News' sections are useful in this regard.

**Seek to Further Develop**

Treat your website as an ongoing work-in-progress and, all the time, be aiming to improve information available and site facilities.

**Link to Other Applications Such as to a Blog**

A blog is one of several interesting things you can do online; another is to establish a profile on [www.linkedin.com](www.linkedin.com). These should all be linked up with your website.

**Consider Smart Phone Applications**

More and more people are accessing the web through iPhone and other such devices. Consider developing an 'app' that provides better access to phone users.

**Consider Video**

Visitors, especially casual visitors, respond very well to a video message introducing them to what a firm is about or maybe providing a brief explanation about something.

**Use Your Website to Promote Your Firm**

Your website provides ongoing opportunities to promote your firm. For instance, as you add information to the site, you can send out press releases and email clients.