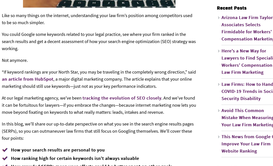
How to Think About Your Law Firm's Rank in Search Results



Like so many things on the Internet, understanding your law firm's position among competitors used to be so much simpler.

You could Google some keywords related to your legal practice, see where your firm ranked in the search results and get a decent assessment of how your search engine optimization (SEO) strategy was working.

Not anymore.

"If keyword rankings are your North Star, you may be traveling in the completely wrong direction," said <u>an article from HubSpot</u>, a major digital marketing company. The article explains that your online marketing should still use keywords—just not as your key performance indicators.

At our legal marketing agency, we've been <u>tracking the evolution of SEO closely</u>. And we've found it can be fictitious for lawyers—if you embrace the changes—because internet marketing now lets you more beyond floating on keywords to what really matters: leads, intakes and revenue.

In this blog, we'll share our up-to-date perspective on what you see in the search engine results pages (SERPs), so you can outmaneuver law firms that still focus on Googling themselves. We'll cover these four points:

- **How your search results are personal to you**
- **How ranking high for certain keywords isn't always valuable**
- **How crowded SERPs mean your efforts could be better spent on other goals**
- **What you can focus on instead to make your law firm prosper online**

No. 1: What You See (in Search Results) Is Not What Your Legal Clients Get

So you want to evaluate how visible your law firm is to potential clients online. It's only natural to start by Googling it. But these days, the results you see can be deceiving.

When search engines like Google started out, they relied heavily on directly matching keywords in searches to keywords on web pages. The same search made by different people would yield the same result.

Now, it's personalized to you.

Different searchers see different results. Beyond the keywords you enter, Google is considering multiple other variables, including:

- **Your location**
- **The device you're using**
- **The time of day**
- **Your search history**
- **An algorithm's interpretation of the underlying intent of your search**
- **What other people with similar demographic profiles as you are searching**

The same search can now produce hundreds, or more, different SERPs.

Searches for lawyers are likely to turn up local law firms near the searcher's location.

Searchers can turn up results that the searcher didn't directly state—but that Google inferred to be relevant based on other information about the searcher (including location and intent).

You could even get different search results yourself when you search the same thing multiple times. Google may conclude you aren't finding what you wanted—which is why you kept searching—so it'll show you something new.

"A lot of people don't understand how personalized it is to them and their behavior," said Mike Crimmins, digital manager at Firmidable. "Things have changed, and people don't realize it."

This makes it dangerous for you, as an attorney, to rely on the search results you see to determine how well your firm is reaching prospects.

Why so dangerous?

Because successful legal marketing speaks to the right audience at the right times. And Google, most likely, places you in an audience very different from the people you need to reach.

With results optimized for you, not your potential clients, decisions you make based on what Google shows you, like that HubSpot article said, could send your digital marketing down the wrong path.

So, what should you do about it?

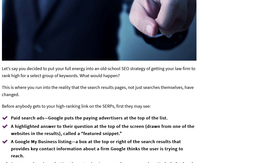
This doesn't mean that you're powerless to <u>optimize your website content</u> to attract more clients.

In fact, this evolution of SEO makes clear, understandable, well-organized, thorough writing about topics of concern to your clients even more important.

Google's use of more sophisticated signals than keywords is precisely why you need substantial and relevant content.

"You can spend your time trying to rank for keywords," Mike said, "or you can spend your time trying to rank for your overall, organic web presence."

No. 2: When Your Law Firm Ranks High for a Keyword, But Nobody Sees It



It feels good to find your law firm at the top of the SERPs for a certain keyword that you think is important. Google determined that your law firm's website was a highly relevant result for that search. That's excellent.

But is it bringing new clients in the door? What if you were one of few people who ever searched for a lawyer website that way?

It happens. And it means you can't even rely on that positive keyword ranking to gauge your online presence.

So before you emphasize a certain query where you have the potential to rank high, check the data on the value of that keyword phrase. Does anybody search those terms?

Or better yet, get the digital team at your legal marketing firm to provide a more holistic look at your SEO efforts.

Another wrinkle is that a powerful legal marketing strategy speaks to clients appropriately at every stage in their process of shopping for a lawyer. You're probably not entering searches that match what clients say when they're at each different point in the funnel leading toward you. A strong legal marketing agency knows how to target clients in each part of that decision funnel.

And this is just the beginning of all the variables that make assessing keyword rankings more complicated than it used to be.

At Firmidable, we're always adjusting for the changing dynamics of the web. For example:

- **Because of privacy concerns, Google provides less data than it did in the past about how certain keywords perform, making a broader strategy even more important.**
- **Google is getting better at understanding natural language, meaning it could send clients to you from searches that are much more nuanced and varied than what you'd think of to search yourself.**
- **Voice searches through services like Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa and Google's Assistant are leading people to make much more detailed, conversational searches, also unlike what you might Google as a text.**
- **Amazingly, even after trillions of searches, Google still<u>s sees completely new search queries every day</u>, showing how there's always more to discover about keywords and SEO.**

So, what should you do about it?

"You can focus on that one really specific keyword, or you can focus on a greater topic," Mike said. "When you focus on the greater topic, you get better results."

So rather than zeroing in on a particular keyword ranking, make sure your website's coverage of a topic is comprehensive, that you address a variety of related topics, that you're a true resource and authority. That way, Mike said, you can't a wider net for new clients.

"Google does still use keywords," he said, "but you're really got to look at the whole picture."

No. 3: What Does Your Law Firm Really Get for Focusing on Keyword Rankings?

Let's say you decided to put your full energy into an old-school SEO strategy of getting your law firm to rank high for a select group of keywords. What would happen?

This is where you run into the reality that the search results pages, not just searches themselves, have changed.

Before anybody gets to your high-ranking link on the SERPs, first they may see:

- **Paid search ads—Google puts the paying advertisers at the top of the list.**
- **A highlighted answer to their question at the top of the screen (drawn from one of the websites in the results), called a "featured snippet."**
- **A Google My Business listing—a box at the top or right of the search results that provides key contact information about a firm Google thinks the user is trying to reach.**
- **A map pack—a box plotting three top business results on a map (particularly for local searches, which many law firm searches are.)**

"We can do examples where, if you do a search—especially on your phone where everybody's searching now, the first screen you're going to see is ads, the second screen is the Google map pack—and not until the third screen do you reach the organic results," Mike said.

So you have to question how much of your marketing efforts are best spent on achieving positions in the SERPs that aren't even all that prominent at their top.

And there's another obstacle to consider: A well-established competitor.

If you're going up against a website that's been doing effective SEO in the same legal practice areas for many more years than you have, it could take a long time to climb up to their position in the SERPs.

Google gives websites credit for longevity. To formulate a realistic keyword strategy, you need to understand that.

"Ranking for a keyword, that's not going to happen overnight," Mike said. "Google really takes a long time, and they look at a lot of different factors."

So, what should you do about it?

"You still want to rank for keywords, but you want to make sure you're ranking for the right keywords for you and your business and your client," Mike said.

You might downplay highly competitive keywords that use the word "lawyer," for example, in favor of more deeply informational material that answers specific queries.

"You're going to want to look at what your competition is doing," Mike said, "and not just living in the silo of 'I need to rank for this specific keyword' without any data behind it. It's just so much more complicated now."

No. 4: How to Truly Measure Your Law Firm's Online Success

So you can't rely on keyword rankings as the chief measure of your digital marketing. But now, in the third decade of the 21st century, having a strong web presence is more important than ever for a successful law firm.

What are you supposed to use to see how your digital strategy is working?

Look at the big picture:

- **Overall website traffic**
- **Leads**
- **Intakes**
- **Revenue**

If you increase overall traffic to your website, then your leads—people who reach out to you after visiting your site—will likely increase, too.

You achieve this by enhancing the content, technical underpinnings and user-focused design of pages all across your site.

You can monitor website leads using call-tracking phone numbers on your site, data from a <u>live chat service</u> if you have that activated, and data from forms that your website visitors submit.

This information can also help you see how your site content is resonating and inform what topics to develop next.

Of course, more leads mean more opportunities for new client intakes. More intakes mean more cases and revenue.

The software your firm uses to track intakes can help you analyze your sources of revenue and, in turn, fine-tune your online marketing program.

"A lot of companies still sell SEO as rankings and traffic," Mike said. "What you really want is more money from your website."

Alex Ludwig, senior account executive at Firmidable, said evaluating your website's performance is like evaluating your health habits. It's not about just one factor. And keyword rankings are just one factor in your law firm's digital marketing.

If you focus only on cutting carbs, then you ignore exercise, sleep, eating whole foods and more crucial elements of well-rounded physical fitness.

"Fixating on carbs doesn't mean your whole lifestyle is working and healthy," Alex said. "By the same token, we can put all our time and effort behind your keyword ranking, and it will help, but it's not going to help like it did 10 years ago."

"Don't get caught up in minor metrics. Instead aim for major results."

To build a holistic approach to your law firm's digital marketing, contact Firmidable today.

Firmidable has been a national expert in legal marketing for almost 30 years. It brings law firms customized, data-driven marketing strategies and services, including online and traditional media for a wide range of legal practices. From Maine to Hawaii, it has transformed the lives of attorneys—and their clients.

Share This Article

About the Author: Mark Waller

Mark Waller is the senior writer/editor at Firmidable. He has written book-length websites for law firms, enhanced content on dozens of law firm sites for search engine optimization, written and optimized law firm Paid Search ads and developed scripts for law firm TV ads helping firms across America grow their caseloads. Before he started in legal marketing, Mark's writing and communications career included working for a university president and as a local journalist. He was a member of the staff at The Times-Picayune newspaper in New Orleans that won the Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of Hurricane Katrina.

GET THE LATEST TIPS TO BOOST YOUR REVENUE

EMAIL ADDRESS
YOUR NAME
YOUR NUMBER
YOUR FIRM NAME
SUBSCRIBE NOW

Recent Posts

- Arizona Law Firm Taylor & Associates Selects Firmidable for Workers' Compensation Marketing
- Here's a New Way for Lawyers to Find Specialized Workers' Compensation Law Firm Marketing
- Law Firms: How to Handle COVID-19 Trends in Social Security Disability
- Avoid This Common Mistake When Measuring Your Law Firm Marketing
- This News from Google Can Improve Your Law Firm Website Ranking

Recent Tweets

Tweets by @firmidable

Firmidable
@Firmidable
Since it ran into the last quarter of 2021, is 2022 shaping up to be a year planning to grow your church or ...
2022 #bashfirmmarketing #lawyers #lawfirmmarketing #legalmarketingfirmsolutions.com/the-powerful-...

For Powerful Law Firm Marketing... This blog post gives the power... firmidable.com

Sep 30, 2021

Firmidable
@Firmidable
Amid all the focus economing on #Medicare, #Medicaid and #Social #Security, #Legal #Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability benefits, parts of which #Congress #Democrats are trying to #Build Back #Better #2022 #bashfirmmarketing #lawyers#ssi-ssdi2021#ssdi-...

Embed View on Twitter

Categories

- Business Tips for Law Firms
- Digital Marketing for Lawyers
- Legal Marketing
- SEO

Find us on Facebook
Firmidable

AMP YOUR REVENUE NOW!

YOUR NAME
YOUR EMAIL
YOUR NUMBER
YOUR MESSAGE
GET IN TOUCH

ADDRESS
1539 Jackson Ave., 5th Floor
New Orleans, LA 70130

HOURS
Monday - Friday
8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

PHONE
P: (504) 525-0910
F: (504) 525-7011

EMAIL
hello@firmidable.com
careers@firmidable.com