

I recently received a request for a lawyer referral. Three lawyers came to mind, so I prepared to pass on their contact information, including website addresses. To my surprise, one of the lawyers did not have a website. Without a website, I feared the lawyer would appear unsophisticated to the client. I calculated the extra effort necessary to describe his qualifications. In the end, I chose to save myself some time and avoid the risk of appearing to give low-quality referrals. I passed on contact information for only two lawyers.

For solo and small firm practitioners, not having a website may mean losing out on new clients.

### Referrals Check You Out on the Web

Some lawyers say they don't need a website because most of their business comes from referrals. According to Margot W. Teleki in the July 17, 2006 issue of the *New Jersey Law Journal*, "the first thing your referral will do is check out your firm's website before giving you a call to see who and what you are and how well you're suited to meet his needs." Gerry Morris, a white collar criminal lawyer and Austin sole practitioner, says, "Sometimes clients referred to me by other lawyers come into my office with a print-out from my website in hand."

If your firm doesn't have a website, could you be losing referral business without knowing it? When your prospective client can't find you on the web, could that send the message that your firm is too small, too new, too unsophisticated, too unsuccessful, or too behind the times to handle the good quality work you desire to attract?

### Small Firms Lag Behind

Legal marketing consultants Alyn-Weiss concluded that "law firm websites are the single most effective marketing tools employed by corporate, transactional,



# NO LAWYER LEFT BEHIND:

## *The Risks of Not Having a Website*

BY DEBRA BRUCE

Illustration by Gilberto Saucedo

and defense firms." In their 2006 national survey of 119 firms, 82 percent had "received work directly or by referral during the past 24 months" from their website. Yet the American Bar Association's Legal Technology Survey for 2006 reported that only 40 percent of sole practitioners and 65 percent of small firms (2-9 attorneys) have a website. Virtually all firms with more than 50 lawyers have a website, and 92 percent of those with 10 to 50 lawyers do.

Why don't the remaining solo and small firms have websites? Some small firms with stretched resources believe a website is beyond their financial means because they don't have the budget to hire an information technology consultant. Others struggle just to keep up with their clients' legal needs and still have some semblance of a personal life. They believe they just don't have the necessary time to invest in creating a firm website. Some worry they won't be able to keep a website updated. A few technophobes think they can outrun the tsunami and retire from practice before websites become *de rigueur*. (They are the same ones who thought they could avoid a desktop computer and email.)

### Benefits of Websites

Besides avoiding looking inadequate or behind the times, why would lawyers want websites? Websites give clients a chance to get to know you and your qualifications at their convenience and before they are ready to make the commitment of a phone call. Websites can emphasize your achievements and demonstrate your expertise, which decorum would prohibit in person. Informative articles and other valuable content pertinent to clients' needs build trust because you provide service before ever meeting with the client. Websites save time and improve staff productivity by answering those recurring client questions about office hours, location, and how the legal process typically works. They can include intake forms for clients to complete before their first appointment or lists of essential documentation to bring to the appointment.

Most important, a website with useful content and key words often found by search engines will reach clients when they are interested, 24/7. Morris says his website ([www.egmlaw.com](http://www.egmlaw.com)) brought in enough business in the first year to more than pay

for itself. Soon, it so outperformed his Yellow Pages ad that he canceled it.

### Getting Started

If you are now squirming in your seat with awareness that your firm just has to get a website, how do you go about it? Begin by shopping the competition. Many websites have the name and web link of the designer in small print at the bottom of the page. Contact designers whose work you like for an estimate. Ask your friends and colleagues whether they would recommend their web designer and what costs to expect. You can also find plenty of designers by entering terms like “websites for lawyers” or “law firm web designers” into a search engine. Websites like [www.elance.com](http://www.elance.com) and [www.guru.com](http://www.guru.com) provide a forum for freelance web designers to bid on your project and provide links to portfolios of their previous work. Those sites also post satisfaction ratings and comments by previous customers.

What kind of expense should you expect? That depends on the number of pages and complexity of your site. A firm of 5 to 10 lawyers might expect to pay \$2,000 to \$8,000 for a custom site. However, according to Luke Gilman, a web designer turned law student ([www.GilmanCreative.com](http://www.GilmanCreative.com)), a firm on a tight budget could still get a custom web design for under \$1,000.

### Websites on a Tight Budget

For even greater cost savings, check out the many template websites that are available. Sure, some other firms may have a website that looks like yours, but that’s better than being invisible. They usually have many templates to choose from and are so user-friendly that “even a lawyer” can create his or her own website in a day. To illustrate how easy it is to create a template site, you can view one I created with another coach at [www.houstoncoaches.com](http://www.houstoncoaches.com). It took about eight hours of work initially, and we pay about \$12 per month at [www.spinsite.com](http://www.spinsite.com).

For templates specially designed for law firms, visit [www.legalwebdesigner.com](http://www.legalwebdesigner.com) or [www.easylawsite.com](http://www.easylawsite.com). Their five- or six-page law firm websites cost from \$400 to \$1,000, plus a monthly fee of \$25 to \$40.

That usually includes domain name registration, hosting fees, and a limited number of email accounts. For a real bargain, however, check out [www.easylawweb.com](http://www.easylawweb.com), where you can get a five-page site for only about \$6 per month, or [www.citymax.com](http://www.citymax.com) for \$20 per month. There’s only one template to choose from, but amazingly, the cost includes the hosting fee and an email account. Finally, for the ultimate bargain, get a minimal site free at [www.justia.com](http://www.justia.com).

### Legal Directory Websites

Attorneys can also get template websites created for them at online legal directories such as [www.lawyers.com](http://www.lawyers.com) and [www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com). A search for a lawyer usually brings up listings in those two directories on the first page of any search engine. Due to the directory listing cost, even the simplest template site runs about \$2,000 per year and more targeted premium listings can cost much more. Many

lawyers find directory listings worth the price, although results may vary depending on the region and area of practice. Even some firms that already have custom websites pay the fee to have their site linked to a directory listing.

The only excuse for not having a website is that you already have more business than you want.

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### SOLO AND SMALL FIRM PRACTICE

To address the unique practice issues of solo and small firm lawyers, the Texas Bar Journal has developed this special series of articles that will appear regularly in the magazine. If you would like to see a particular topic covered, please send your story ideas to Associate Editor **Patricia L. Garcia** at [pgarcia@texasbar.com](mailto:pgarcia@texasbar.com).

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