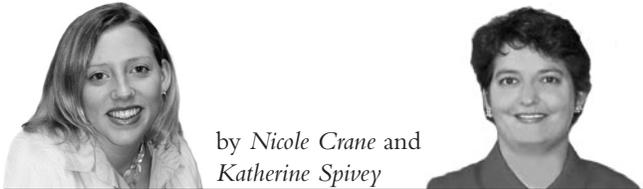


Make Your Firm's Web Site Bios Mean Business



by Nicole Crane and
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Ah . . . Web site bios. Every attorney needs one, and every marketing professional has written one. While we know they're important, just exactly what do they do? Exactly what about a bio makes a client think, "Yes! I want that attorney to work for me!"

Is it impressive details of deals completed, cases won, articles written and degrees received? Is it a personalized tone that emphasizes a concern for quality, an understanding of business needs and a commitment to clients? The answer, of course, is "all of the above." For marketers, the art of the bio is to combine convincing detail with an engaging message in a way that spurs action — a call or e-mail to your firm's attorney rather than to someone else.

A Web site bio needs to be consistent in theme and style to match the client's needs and interests with each lawyer's strengths, as supported by the firm's and the appropriate practice group's capabilities. Certainly that's easier said than done. But perhaps no other marketing tool gives us such an opportunity to add immediate, tangible value to our firms.

Take your bios from "just the facts"
to "you've got the business."

A well-crafted, effective bio is any attorney's competitive edge for winning new business. True to their training, attorneys tend to load their own bios with weighty details given in language that resembles a legal brief. If we use *our* training and experience to change a list of facts into a dynamic argument that tells a potential client, "I understand your needs and concerns, and can help you achieve your goals," we've not just written a bio — we've become partners in our firm's success.

Take your bios from "just the facts" to "you've got the business." Follow these tips to make your attorneys stand out from the crowd and sell themselves and your firm to potential clients.

1. Include the Essential Elements

It's a given that an attorney bio should contain the following essential elements:

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- education;
- selected experience;
- areas of practice;
- bar and court memberships; and
- contact information.

And, if applicable, Web site bios should list:

- association memberships (relevant to work or clients' interests);
- honors and awards;
- judicial clerkships/internships;
- speaking engagements; and
- publications.

Highlight relevant items that help clients see that your attorney knows current trends and regulations. However, avoid conveying the information in long sentences with serial commas. Use bullets within the narrative or summary areas outside of it to present straightforward details. A Virginia firm with 50 lawyers doesn't need 50 Web site bios that all read: "He/she is admitted to practice in the state of Virginia."

Use formatting to your advantage. Potential clients — busy people with limited time for gleaning information — are scanning, not reading word-for-word for this information. Highlighting it in the sidebar enables potential clients to find it quickly. Using the sidebar template also allows the attorney to use the remaining space to feature talent, experience and case successes. Remember that not everyone reads online, so ensure that your Web site bios provide high-contrast readability and offer a print-friendly version.

2. Maintain Consistent Messaging, Tone, and Style

Web site bios are an extension of your firm's culture and strategic messaging. The attorney's bio needs a message that is consistent with the firm's culture and brand, as expressed in all of its marketing collateral material. If your firm has an informal tone throughout your Web site, then be consistent with the tone in your Web site bios. Your attorney bios should be congruent with the firm's culture, not divergent.

3. Keep Information Current

Web site bios are like convenience stores — they are open for business 24-7. Each attorney's Web site bio is a response to a free-floating request for proposal (RFP). When a potential client views an attorney's Web site bio, the information should spark interest. Outdated information (e.g., touting a capability to help with Y2K concerns) suggests that an attorney can't keep pace with today's business world. By contrast, if you know that your attorney will soon be meeting with a potential client, you can customize the bio for that potential client's specific interest, demonstrating a proactive, competitive image.

4. Focus on a Theme or Area of Practice

Often the process of updating a Web site bio helps an attorney focus on shaping the practice and individual business-development goals. If your attorney has multiple experiences in class-certification issues and is interested in expanding that part of the business, then highlight that experience. Include any speaking engagements, publications or association memberships that may also pertain to that special area of practice.

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If you have an attorney who is involved in multiple practice areas, you can create multiple bios that link from each relevant practice page. A bio tailored to a specific practice speaks directly to a potential client with a particular need. Don't make clients wade through general bios to see what might apply to them if you can provide specific bios.

5. Use Specific Examples

Which sounds more enticing to you: reading that attorney A worked with a Fortune 500 client in the construction industry on a \$6 billion contract dispute and saved the client money, or that attorney B has experience in commercial litigation?

When citing your attorney's accomplishments, be specific. Give examples of work and courtroom experience. Detailed evidence concerning accomplishments (with as many names, dates and dollar figures as possible) tells the potential client, "This attorney speaks my language and may be able to help my business." Do NOT guarantee success based on past experience — that is a major ethical lapse. But showing your firm can get the job done and has a solid track record is essential in selling business to potential clients.

6. Check Keywords to Increase Search-Engine Rankings and Search Results

Does your attorney have a nickname? Is he or she well known for a specific practice area, industry or landmark case? If so,

you might be missing out on search-engine and Web site directory optimization if you are excluding the correct keywords. Keywords can significantly affect search-engine rankings and relevant search results.

When developing keywords, consider what your audience would use: what terms, what variants, what acronyms, what misspellings, etc. Check your Web traffic report to see what terms people are currently using. Keywords must be relevant to the text in the Web site bio. Using "Britney Spears" as a keyword works only if you've done legal work for her; otherwise you risk site rejection by the search engines and directories.

Remember: providing a tangible benefit by helping your firm's attorneys secure new business will help them see you — and the marketing department — as a valuable partner rather than another overhead cost.

Place the keywords strategically, including them in the HTML title, text, meta description tag, meta keyword tag, alt tags and comment tags. If this all sounds like Greek to you, sit down with the Web site gurus in your firm to learn how to optimize hits on your attorney bio pages.

7. Prepare Yourself When Meeting with the Attorney

The best Web site bios are developed interactively between marketers and attorneys. Do not walk into your attorney's office with a printed copy of the current bio and expect him or her to update it then and there. Review the bio ahead of time, prepare questions for the meeting and keep the meeting short to not cut into your attorney's billable time.

Have thoughtful suggestions and ideas based on this checklist before you even walk into the lawyer's office. E-mail the attorney these questions before your meeting. Ask in what direction the attorney wants to develop his or her practice, what industries or experiences interest the actual or potential clients, if he or she has upcoming speaking engagements or publications and whether he or she is involved in any new associations. This is an opportunity to capture new information, so go into your meeting with lots of questions.

8. Link Information in the Web Site Bio to Other Relevant Web Pages

If you cite a specific experience in your attorney's bio, have it link back to the relevant information in the appropriate practice area. This demonstrates the entire firm's capabilities in a given area and suggests what the attorney can draw on for resources. Use hyperlinks to connect speaking engagements, publications and other newsworthy information back to your news section. Again, this helps sell the capabilities of the entire firm. Make sure that the navigation and access to additional information is clear and direct since a potential client may have entered your firm's Web site through the bio instead of the homepage.

Beyond the Bio

Now that you have effectively researched and marketed the content of the attorney's Web site bio, your job as a marketer

isn't finished. Include new details in your content-management system for future RFPs. Add the new information in your practice, publication, speaking engagement and news Web pages, either as narrative text or as links. Add or update the specifics in other customized marketing materials. Beyond content management, you can enhance value for the firm's marketing process in many other ways.

- Look for upcoming speaking opportunities, articles regarding potential new clients or business ventures and best practices that might interest your attorney. Sending your lawyer this information reinforces that you understand the practice area and what he or she needs to develop business and can play a key role in his or her success.
- Help attorneys cross-sell business by communicating through your internal newsletter or intranet about new business or other success stories you've uncovered while updating bios.
- Think of creative ways to market Web site bios. For example, include a link to each lawyer's Web site bio after the contact information in his or her e-mail signature. Make sure the link goes directly to the individual bio page, not just the Web site homepage.
- Use the new content to improve recruiting collateral and Web pages by highlighting successful accomplishments or listing clients that will impress new recruits.

- When you prepare bios for newly hired attorneys, show them effective bios of key attorneys from relevant practice areas. This will help laterals and first-years alike understand the firm's businesses and culture and educate them on what information is considered "marketable."

On Your Mark, Get Set . . . Add Value!

Updating content on a Web site bio is an ongoing process. If you develop a consistent method for adding new content, you can keep attorneys focused on the advantages and business opportunities that can arise from a successfully marketed Web site bio rather than having them view it as a chore. Remember: providing a tangible benefit by helping your firm's attorneys secure new business will help them see you — and the marketing department — as a valuable partner rather than another overhead cost. Work that's valued is work you can really enjoy — and it all starts with you. Happy writing!

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