

## **Enhancing Your Image with Global Technology**

By Henry J. Chang

### **Introduction**

For an immigration law firm, enhancing its international image is an extremely important objective. This is because, due to the nature of the field, a relatively high percentage of the firm's potential clients will reside outside of Canada. Technological advancements have now made it much easier for immigration law firms to reach these international markets. However, some of these advancements will be more effective than others.

Technology should be considered a tool, not an end in itself; it should not be implemented simply because it is innovative or popular. Instead, global technology should be utilized where it will support the firm's overall marketing strategy. The following discussion will guide immigration lawyers who are considering the use of one or more global technologies to support their international marketing efforts.

### **Basic Marketing Concepts**

As the utilization of global technology should support the firm's overall marketing strategy, it is helpful to discuss some basic marketing concepts.

#### **Identify the Firm's Target Market**

Before a firm may successfully market its services, it must begin by identifying its proposed target market. Different groups have different needs so it is important to first determine what type of customer will generate the most revenue and then tailor the firm's marketing message to be most appealing to this group. The global image of the firm will become part of this marketing message.

Because a firm's services may be useful to more than one type of client, it is often tempting to target more than one group. However, it is impossible to be all things to all people so this temptation should be resisted. A marketing strategy that attempts to reach everyone will be less focused and therefore less effective.

A firm may begin by considering its existing client base, in order to determine what group is currently generating the most revenue; this may be an appropriate group to identify as the target market. However, it should also try to identify other potential groups that might need the firm's services. In order to identify these other groups, the firm should consider what kinds of services it is capable of providing and then consider who would need these services.

Once the firm has identified one or more potential groups, it should consider the size of those groups. If a particular group is not large enough to sustain the firm, a different group should be considered.

The firm should also consider the buying power of each group. Even if a group is large enough and interested in the service that the firm provides, it must be able to afford the services offered. If a particular group may be unwilling or unable to purchase the firm's legal services, a different group should be considered.

After identifying several potential target markets, the firm should choose the group that offers the most potential for revenue.

### Identify the Service to be Offered

Once the firm's target market has been identified, it should consider what legal services would be of most interest to this target market. The firm should also attempt to identify which of these services are best able to generate revenues for the firm.

For example, there is less benefit in offering a particular service if hundreds of other competitors already offer the same service to the target market. Unless the service can somehow be differentiated from those offered by its competitors, the firm will have to compete based on other factors such as price, which can adversely affect profitability.

When considering what services to offer the target market, the following questions should be considered:

- a) What services could be offered to the target market that other firms are currently unwilling or unable to provide?
- b) What services are other firms currently offering to the target market, which could be improved?

### Develop an Effective Promotion Strategy

Once the firm has identified its target market and the services that it will provide thereto, it can then develop a promotion strategy that appeals to the target market and motivates them to purchase these services from the firm. Some of the more useful technologies that may be utilized as part of the firm's promotion strategy are discussed below.

### **Establishing a Website Presence**

#### Introduction

When the author established his firm's first website in 1995, very few lawyers had their own websites. However, much has changed in the last thirteen years. Now, almost every immigration lawyer has some form of web presence. Unfortunately, this has created a marketing problem that did not exist back in 1995; it is very easy for a firm to find itself "lost in the crowd."

For some firms, achieving a high rank in search engine results is not an essential component of their marketing strategy. This is because it is not their objective to persuade random website visitors to hire them. Instead, these firms establish websites in order to strengthen their relationships with existing clients or to facilitate new relationships with potential clients who have been directly referred to them. For these firms, search engine ranking is not as important.

Of course, the vast majority of immigration law firms would prefer to generate new business from website visitors. In order for this to occur, the following elements must be present:

- a) The website must provide relevant content that motivates the target market to retain the firm; and
- b) The target market must be aware of the existence of this content.

Each of these elements is discussed in greater detail below.

## Develop Website Content

Visual design is certainly an important component of a website and should be tailored to the chosen target market. However, visual design alone will not convert website visitors into clients. The usefulness of a website to its target market ultimately determines its success as a marketing tool.

As law firms offer legal expertise to their clients, the most useful content that may be offered on a law firm website is legal information; therefore, a firm should be prepared to provide legal information that is most relevant to its target market. If the firm wishes to focus on foreign investors, its website should provide useful information regarding the many investor options available in Canada. Similarly, if the firm's target market consists of foreign nationals who are inadmissible to Canada, the firm's website should provide useful information regarding grounds of inadmissibility, temporary resident permits, rehabilitations, and authorizations to return to Canada.

Content is less useful if it consists of basic information that can be found elsewhere on the Internet. Where possible, the firm's website should offer original, insightful content that not only provides useful information regarding the applicable law but also demonstrates the firm's expertise in the particular field.

Legal content may appear on a website in many forms. The following are just a few examples of relevant website content that may result in increased traffic, return visits, and new clients:

- a) Detailed articles in the field of immigration law;
- b) A periodic newsletter or weblog (i.e. blog), which can provide useful insight into current legal issues in the field of immigration law;
- c) An online discussion forum, which allows website visitors to post their questions, discuss issues, and have their question answered by a member of the firm; or
- d) A downloadable podcast that discusses current immigration issues.

As stated above, the ultimate objective of the firm's website content should be to motivate the target market to purchase the firm's legal services. Demonstrating the firm's expertise in a particular area may help convert website visitors into clients. Similarly, demonstrating the complexity of the law in a particular area may establish the importance of retaining legal counsel.

## Promote the Website

### Search Engine Optimization ("SEO")

One of the most important and cost-effective website promotion strategies is to achieve high ranking in the organic search results of one or more search engines. The term "organic" is used here because search engines display both paid (i.e. "sponsored") and unpaid links in their search results. The unpaid links that appear in response to a specific search are known as organic search results.

Theoretically, these organic search results are more credible than paid advertisements and search engine users should prefer these search results to the sponsored links that appear on the same page. However, one study published by Pew Internet in 2005 suggested that a significant number of users were too unsophisticated to make this distinction.<sup>1</sup> The study found that only 38% of search engine users were aware of the difference between paid or "sponsored" results and unpaid results.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2005/Search-Engine-Users.aspx>.

Hopefully, the average search engine user has now attained a higher level of sophistication than in 2005. Nevertheless, organic search results are extremely cost-effective way of promoting, since search engines do not charge fees for these listings.

In addition, organic search results also offer one very important advantage. Any web traffic that results from paid links will only exist as long as the website owner continues to pay for the sponsored link. The only way to ensure sustained web traffic is by attaining high ranking in organic search engine results.

Unfortunately, achieving high ranking in organic search results is also one of the most difficult strategies to implement. Many web surfers will not visit a website unless it appears on the first page (or, to a lesser extent, the second page) of a search engine's results; it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve this objective.

The need to overcome this difficulty has prompted the development of an entire industry devoted to SEO. A typical SEO strategy considers how specific search engines rank web pages and identifies the keywords that the target market will use when search for specific information. The content or the HyperText Markup Language ("HTML") formatting is then modified in order to achieve higher results when these keywords are searched.

There are many SEO consulting companies offering their optimization services to website owners, in exchange for a fee; some of these companies are better than others. For law firms that are either unwilling or unable to perform implement SEO strategies in-house, third party consultants offer the only option. However, for those who are technically inclined, there are several useful tools available on the Internet.

In order to determine what search terms are most likely to be used by search engine users, the author recommends WordTracker.<sup>2</sup> WordTracker is an online service that will help identify most likely keywords that a search engine user will type when searching for the firm's website content. It is a paid service but is effective in identifying the most appropriate keyword combinations.

Once the most likely keyword combinations have been identified, the firm's website must be analyzed and modified to achieve higher ranking in organic search results. One program that the author recommends for this task is Internet Business Promoter ("IBP").<sup>3</sup> Based on a specific set of keywords and a specific search engine, IBP compares the content and HTML formatting of the user's website to websites that appear in the top ten search results. Based on this comparison, it will recommend modifications that should help to increase the organic ranking of the user's website.

Since different search engines utilize different algorithms to rank websites, it is usually only possible to optimize a website for one or two search engines. In a press release published on February 18, 2009, comScore, Inc. confirmed that Google held a 63% share of the U.S. search market in January 2009; Yahoo! Held a 21% share of the U.S. search market during the same month.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, websites should be optimized for Google. However, once this has been done, additional optimization for Yahoo! may be considered.

### Link Building

Having links to the firm's website on other websites will not only give it greater exposure but search engines will also give it higher priority in organic search results. However, search engines tend to do so only when the linking website is well-established and is relevant to the subject

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.wordtracker.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.ibusinesspromoter.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=2729>.

matter of the linked website. In other words, having a link on a newly-created website or on a website that discusses an unrelated topic will be of limited benefit.

The first thing that the firms should do is to submit the website to important directory websites. Unlike search engines, these sites manually add new websites to their directory listings. One of these directories is the Open Directory Project ([www.dmoz.com](http://www.dmoz.com)). Other major search engines refer to this directory to find new content so it is definitely worth submitting the firm's website here. Also, since this website is well-established, a link in the director should also improve the firm's organic search ranking on Google. The Yahoo! Directory ([dir.yahoo.com](http://dir.yahoo.com)) is still an important directory on the Internet also, although Yahoo! itself tends to emphasize its search engine now more than its directory listings.

Lawyers should also add their listing to established legal websites or websites that list immigration resources; one example is Findlaw ([www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com)). These industry-specific directories will also drive traffic to the firm's website and improve its organic ranking in certain search engines.

Although it has become less popular these days, requesting reciprocal links can still potentially increase website traffic. By requesting a link to the firm's website and offering a reciprocal link in exchange, it is possible to increase the number of incoming links to the firm's website. A higher number of incoming links also tends to increase a website's search engine ranking. It is often best to find websites that are established and have similar traffic. Websites that are not established or that have little traffic will not help and high traffic websites have nothing to gain by agreeing to a reciprocal link arrangement.

#### Other Promotion

Traditional offline promotion can also increase a website's traffic. All printed material from the firm such as business cards, letterhead, brochures should prominently display the firm's website address. In addition, any print advertisements, yellow page listings, or published articles should prominently display the firm's website address. Finally, the lawyer's email signature (text that is automatically inserted at the end of each outgoing email) should always include the firm's website address.

#### Blogs

The term "blog" is a contraction of the terms "web log" and is basically a recurring publication that appears on the Web; it usually contains useful information or commentary on a specific subject. Blogging can be as simple as a publishing an online newsletter on the firm's website at regular intervals. Although blogging can be part of the firm's website content, it is discussed separately because blogs may also appear on third-party websites.

Although blogging has been a popular buzz word in recent years, it really isn't an innovative concept. A number of individuals began publishing regular newsletters on the websites long before it was ever described as blogging. Nevertheless, the popularity of blogging has increased dramatically in recent years. With increased interest in blogs, it is certainly worthwhile to consider publishing one, especially as component of the firm's overall website content.

The primary benefit from blogging is development of the blogger's reputation as an expert in the field and the related potential for client referrals. Of course, the author believes that the same benefit would be obtained through the frequent publication of any legal content on the firm's website, whether or not it takes the form of a blog. However, blogging on third-party websites can establish the blogger's reputation among persons who might not otherwise visit the firm's website.

## **Social Networking**

One of the hottest topics currently being discussed in the field of marketing is social networking. Social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter are now receiving increased attention from lawyers. The question that many lawyers ask is whether social networking will really generate business for the firm. The general consensus seems to be that social networking can generate business for the lawyer, if it is done correctly.

Unfortunately, effective social networking involves a considerable time investment. Lawyers tend to be busy people so not everyone will be in a position to embrace social networking as a marketing tool. Nevertheless, lawyers who are willing to commit the necessary time and effort to social networking will see results.

Three of the more popular social networking tools are discussed below.

### **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is the unquestionable winner when it comes to professional social networking. It is designed primarily for business networking rather than for personal networking. Although LinkedIn sells upgraded memberships, the basic free membership is sufficient for most purposes.

Founded in 2003, LinkedIn states that it exists to help individuals make better use of their professional networks. At its most basic level, a LinkedIn profile is an online résumé, which includes information about the individual's education and work experience; it even includes the ability to add a photo (which is advisable). LinkedIn profiles are searchable by other LinkedIn members and may also be viewed by non-members on the Internet.

LinkedIn also allows individuals to add trusted connections to their profile; this can be done manually or by importing the contacts contained in their electronic address books (i.e. Outlook, Hotmail, and many others). Once added, these trusted connections become part of the individual's professional network. Trusted contacts are also able to write public recommendations, which endorse the individual's professional abilities.

Technically speaking a LinkedIn network consists not only of an individual's own connections, but also of their connections' connections. This is because LinkedIn members may also view the networks of their trusted connections. If a useful contact is found in the network of a trusted connection, the individual may ask that trusted connection to forward a message to that contact. If the trusted connection agrees, the message is then forwarded to the contact and the introduction is made.

LinkedIn members with upgraded accounts also have the ability to send a limited number of InMail messages directly to a specific person. However, as LinkedIn is based on the concept of networking through trusted connections, members tend not to accept unsolicited messages from people they do not know. Trusted connections are usually developed by inviting contacts that the individual has met in person (perhaps through an exchange of business cards) or by introductions through existing trusted connections.

Another way to gain exposure in LinkedIn is by creating a LinkedIn group. A LinkedIn group may be used to post a blog, to make important announcements, and to initiate discussions on a variety of relevant topics. If you have something to say and believe that others will find it interesting, consider setting up a LinkedIn group.

While social networks such as Facebook seem to receive more attention in the media these days, most of these networks were designed for personal networking rather than business networking. LinkedIn was always intended to be a business networking tool and it remains one of the best places for professionals to engage in social networking.

## Facebook

Facebook is a personal networking site so it focuses primarily on non-business objectives. It was originally designed to allow university students to manage their networks of friends, rather than business contacts. Although many businesses are now flocking to establish some kind of presence on Facebook, it retains many of the characteristics of a personal networking site. As a result, Facebook creates some interesting challenges for lawyers who seek to market their practices.

The starting point for establishing a presence on Facebook is a profile page, which is free to create. A Facebook profile page bears some resemblance to a LinkedIn profile in that it contains information about the individual's education and work experience but it also includes personal information such as hometown, marital status, interests, and personal photo albums.

A lawyer who wishes to establish a Facebook profile must be prepared to share his or her personal identity with others. This does not mean that they should include material that would be considered unprofessional or inappropriate, since the objective is for potential clients to read the profile. However, the information provided on a Facebook profile should attempt to humanize the lawyer as an individual. For example, a lawyer may use his or her profile page to describe why they chose to practice immigration law or why helping clients is so personally rewarding. The information provided on a Facebook profile page should be personal rather than promotional and it should be sincere.

Once a lawyer has established a Facebook profile, he or she should consider establishing a Facebook group, which is also free to create. Groups are a simple way to create a community of members who have a shared interest in a particular issue. Facebook groups offer functions such as discussion boards, shared photos and videos, and links to important websites; group administrators may also send updates to all group members.

A group should never be self-serving or blatantly promotional; it should instead offer a place for members to discuss specific issues that are important to them. Immigration tends to be an important issue for a lot of people so a Facebook group focusing on a particular aspect of immigration law would likely be of interest to many members. If Facebook members find the group to be useful, it will grow. As it grows, it should generate an increasing number of clients.

Another feature that a lawyer should seriously consider is a Facebook page, which is again free to create. Unlike profiles and groups, a Facebook page is a profile designed for businesses to share their products and services with Facebook users. As Facebook pages are intended to be used for commercial purposes, lawyers are permitted to promote their services here. Pages are somewhat similar to groups but are more customizable. Lawyers can incorporate HTML, flash, and Facebook applications on their page in order to create a Facebook version of their law firm website, which can be viewed by the Facebook community. Facebook pages also allow businesses to establish their own network of Facebook "fans," which are roughly analogous LinkedIn trusted connections. Facebook page administrators have the ability to send messages and updates to fans in order to keep them informed of current issues.

There are a number of other Facebook features that might also be useful for marketing but there are too many to mention here. In any event, Facebook's profile, group, and page features are a good starting point for any lawyer who wishes to establish a presence in this growing social network.

## Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging tool that enables its users to send and read other users' updates, which have come to be known as "tweets." Tweets are essentially short, text-based messages

(up to 140 characters long). When posted, a tweet will appear on the posting user's profile page and will also be delivered to any users who have signed up to receive the posting user's messages; these subscribers are referred to as "followers." Twitter has become very popular because tweets may be sent and received by users via cell phone SMS, instant messaging, or via the Web. In terms of business applications, Twitter can be used to broadcast the firm's latest news updates or blog postings, interact with clients, or to enable collaboration and group communication.

Many people still have difficulty understanding the value of Twitter; aside from recognizing its usefulness as a personal social networking tool, they don't accept Twitter's usefulness as a marketing tool. Not surprisingly, the legal industry has been slow to embrace Twitter. Nevertheless, Twitter can be a useful part of a lawyer's marketing activities, if it is used correctly.

As a general rule, the more contact that a lawyer has with a potential client, the more likely it is that the potential client will hire that lawyer in the future. Regular contact reminds them that the lawyer exists and helps to establish a less formal relationship with these potential clients. Twitter allows a lawyer to maintain frequent contact with these potential clients, 140 characters at a time. This ongoing contact should increase the likelihood of these potential clients becoming actual clients in the future.

Twitter can be used in a variety of ways, some more effective than others. For example, some users will simply use Twitter to send out promotional messages or press releases about their company. However, their followers will quickly become irritated and stop following them. To succeed with Twitter, a lawyer must offer something of value and it should be offered without any hidden agenda.

As in many social networks, successful selling often involves not trying to sell anything at all. By making a valuable contribution to the Twitter community (i.e. providing useful information that people want to hear) and by avoiding anything that might be construed as self-promotion, a lawyer can develop his or her network of followers over time. Many of these followers should choose to become clients on their own.

### Conclusion

Law firms have a considerable arsenal of online marketing tools at their disposal, many of which will become invaluable during these recessionary times. However, using these marketing tools is not without risk. Nevertheless, if properly utilized, these marketing tools have the potential to develop new sources of business for these firms.