

# Seek and Find

## Optimizing Attorneys' Biographies on Firm Web Sites

BY JAYNE NAVARRE, ROB KAHN, AND ADAM STOCK

As a principal administrator in your firm, you probably don't need another thing to do or even think about, right? Still, this one has to be on your radar if you lead a team of marketers or IT professionals. You're already invested, maybe even heavily, in your law firm's Web site, so why not do all you can to help people find your law firm and, more specifically, the attorneys for whom they are looking?

The search engine's job is not to help you or your firm get found. Its job is to return pages and sites that are the most relevant to the query and the most popular as determined by traffic and site size.

Search engine optimization is the process by which Web pages are improved to better rank in the results of most search engines. Attorney biography pages, like all other Web pages, need to be optimized so that clients can easily find your attorneys (or their unique services) when using popular search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft (LiveSearch/MSN), and Ask.

Following these pointers will help your attorneys' biographies rise to or near the top of search engine results.



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### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

For online search engines, content is king. But remember, the most common search term that clients will be using to find an attorney is the person's name. Make sure the individual's name is prominently featured on the biography page, such as in the headings (<h1> or <h2> tag) and in the body of the biography. The attorney's name should also be part of the page's title (in the <title> tag). You will know this has been done correctly by looking at the top of your Web browser while on the biography page. Does the name appear on the very top bar, next to the browser logo? If not, the person's name is not in the title tag.

If the attorney has a photo to accompany his or her Web biography, the "alt" and the "title" attributes of the image tag should also include the person name. Does the name appear as a small pop-up when you hold your mouse over the person's photo? If not, the image does not have a title tag with the name. The <alt> tag will ensure that the name appears on mobile devices and to sight-impaired visitors using screen readers.

### BIOGRAPHY MANAGEMENT

Many law firm Web sites manage attorney biographies with a database. Commonly, the database generates a number as the URL (unique record locator) for each attorney biography page, which corresponds to the location in the database; such as *www.yourlawfirm.com/attorney-517.asp*. Because page URLs are the first thing a search engine catalogs, the

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biography page URL is best optimized when it contains the attorney's name rather than a meaningless number.

A sophisticated content management system will allow you to assign a unique text URL to each page in your firm's Web site. The attorney biography page URL should look something like this:

*www.yourfirm.com/attorney-james-brown.htm*. Using the dash rather than an underscore between words in the URL tells the search engine that these are separate words. Typically, someone searching for "James Brown attorney" would not enter the search term a "jamesbrownattorney," "james\_brown," or even brownj. Any combination that does not have the dash means the search engine sees the URL as one word. While the query likely would return the same or similar results, it is a good idea to use a dash in the URL for optimal accuracy and a better shot at achieving the top position in search results.

#### WHAT'S IN A PRACTICE?

An attorney's Web biography is not the time for perfect prose. Consistency and repetition of key phrases help search engines understand that the term is highly relevant for a particular page. Is the attorney a municipal bond tax specialist in Delaware? Say it proudly! Several times. The same way.

When selecting keywords, think of the search terms people might use when seeking an attorney's special expertise. If you are unsure about how clients might be searching for their practice use the tools available on the Web that are provided by many search engines to help you determine the most popular search words and phrases, such as the keyword tool from Google. Of course, some issues are topical so don't get too nuanced or trendy. That's what client alerts are for. Remember, in addition to their legal practice, your location might also be important to potential clients looking for expertise in a particular jurisdiction.

#### INBOUND AND OUTBOUND LINKS

Other important determinants of a Web page's relevancy and popularity are inbound and outbound links. Inbound links are the links on other pages that point to an individual's biography; outbound links are the links on the biography that take readers to other pages.

Rich sources of inbound and outbound links for a biography are the other pages on your law firm's Web site. Wherever possible, if the attorney's name appears on the firm's Web site, make it a link to the attorney's biography page. Ensure that all links are absolute, fully qualified, and written the same way. Similarly, link keywords in the body text of a biography, such as practice group names (i.e. "climate change" or "environmental compliance") to those practice group pages.

Search engines also like links out of a site. If you are comfortable linking out – for instance, to case law, a client in a case study, or involvement in a group or professional association such as ALA that is highly relevant to your practice – take that text and link out to the Web site where it can be found. You may want to change your Web site's settings so linking out opens a new browser window instead of leading the visitor away from your firm's site.

Other good sources of outbound links are attorney-authored articles that appear elsewhere on the Web. If your firm places a lot of content outside your Web site that includes attorney names – such as educational articles, news alerts, and press releases – make sure they are also optimized and that their names are live links back to their biographies. This includes when their names appears in Adobe Acrobat PDFs. Most search engines now scan PDFs as long as the documents are not locked.

When you create links, always add the title tag and name the link with keywords. Using the words "click here" as the link is less relevant to the search engine. For example, which of these do you think will

be better indexed in a search engine: For James Brown's Bio click here, or James Brown's Bio or, Learn more about James Brown's corporate transaction experience? Does anyone enter the search terms "click here?" Imagine how many returns you would get for those terms!

Professionals in your firm's marketing department should track important keywords for each attorney. This will help them consistently refer to the same or similar keywords when adding additional content elsewhere or media releases.

### OTHER CREATIVE IDEAS

Also, do not overlook the power of alumni or philanthropic connections. When possible, link out to an attorney's law school or college alumni page. If an attorney is an active donor for a cause or if he or she holds a board position in a community or philanthropic organization, include a link to the appropriate site. If those sites have pages that list member or alumni names or members of a board of directors, ask that the links be established to the named attorneys' biography pages. A simple e-mail should get that done. Let them know that you have reciprocated with links out to their Web sites as well.

Finally, you may want to consider having the Web site address in your attorneys' e-mail signatures link to the attorneys' biographies rather than the firm's

home page. This would also apply for any hard-copy announcement, press release, or article you publish. Spell it out: [www.ABCLaw.com/attorney-james-brown](http://www.ABCLaw.com/attorney-james-brown) or [ABCLaw.com/james-brown](http://ABCLaw.com/james-brown).

### WORTH THE EFFORT

As you can tell, optimizing attorneys' biographies for search engines is a lot of work, but it can be fun, too, and it will help you to more clearly describe and focus your firm's practice in simple terms to potential clients. ✱

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## HR + IS = SPECTRUM

How does *your* HRIS add up? SPECTRUM puts HR and IS on the same side of the equation. What does that mean? True integration. Our solution brings everything HR together into seamless harmony. Find out what that can mean for you. Look into SPECTRUM at [www.spectrumhr.com](http://www.spectrumhr.com) or call 800.477.3287.

