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YEAR IN REVIEW
What went right in 2016?

CYBERSECURITY
IN 2016

ELECTIONS, RANSOM, BOTNETS & LESSONS LEARNED

As computers become more pervasive in our government, our businesses and our homes, cybersecurity crises seem to arise with alarming regularity and often in unexpected places.

VIRTUAL IMPRESSION
Google's Accelerated Mobile Pages project is AMPing up

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Cybersecurity in 2016: lessons learned

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MARKETING
BY THE NUMBERS

What is happening in search? Here is the scoop on SEO, blogging and mobile statistics for 2016.

SEO

70%
ORGANIC

1. Organic listings are your friend
70% of the links search users click on are organic
- Search Engine Journal

50%
OF ALL SEARCHES

2. Get to know long-tail keywords
50% of all search queries are four words or longer
- WordStream

53%

3. Mobile, mobile
Phones and tablets produced 53% of all paid search clicks
- Merkle

0.00%
MORE APPS

4. App fatigue is real
A smartphone user downloads an average of approximately zero new apps every month
- TechCrunch

89%

5. Purchase decisions
89% of consumers use search engines to help make purchase decisions
- Outbrain

Blogging

434
PERCENT

6. Blogging and SEO
Websites with a blog have tend to have 434% more indexed pages than those that do not
- IgniteSpot

7. Posting frequency
82% of marketers who blog daily acquired a customer using their blog
- Hubspot

82%
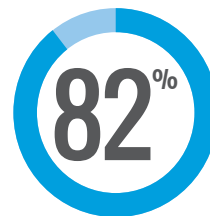
Mobile & email

8. Make email and landing pages mobile-friendly
About 53% of emails are opened on mobile devices
- Campaign Monitor

53%
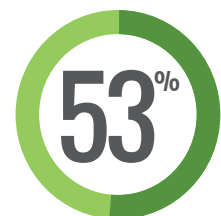
152
PERCENT

9. Close more leads
Automated email messages average 70.5% higher open rates and 152% higher click-through rates than "business as usual" marketing messages
- Epsilon Email Institute

Google is AMPing up the mobile web, and your law firm's marketing team should be paying attention.

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ACCELERATED MOBILE PAGES HAVE ARRIVED

WHAT IS AMP?

The Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) Project is an open-source initiative to make webpages load faster on mobile devices, using a stripped-down version of HTML. An AMP version of a webpage has a simpler, more basic look and loads up quicker on a smartphone or tablet. With more Google searches now taking place on mobile devices than on desktop computers, websites have to be readable on small screens while avoiding long wait times to view content. With Google promoting AMP as the solution, online marketers need to take note.

To see what AMP looks like, Google anything news-related on your mobile phone. You will likely see a Top Stories section of the search results already dominated by AMP pages, denoted by the word AMP and a small lightning bolt in grey. Soon, these easy-load pages will appear throughout organic search results, not just in the Top Stories section. To see how an AMP page compares to the original, visit theguardian.com and click on any article. Then add /amp to the URL to view the AMP version. (This is viewable in a desktop browser as well.)

News publishing websites were among the first to embrace the new format, and recipe and lifestyle sites were not far behind. An earlier initiative by Facebook, called Instant Articles, also allowed mobile users to read a quick-loading version of a news story, but Facebook's format received mixed reviews from publishers, in part because Instant Articles kept users within Facebook's platform. The AMP Project raises similar concerns, but it has a wider appeal, in part because it is open source; AMP is good for Google, but will also help sites like Twitter and Pinterest deliver mobile content faster.

AMP pages are quicker to load not only because they are written in a lighter version of HTML, but because third parties like Google may create caches of the AMP content, which can be displayed instantly to mobile users. This will undoubtedly improve the user experience, but publishers may have the same complaints that they have with Facebook's Instant Articles: users viewing Google's cache are never actually visiting the source website. This has implications for websites that rely on advertising however, law firm websites can focus on the fact that AMP pages load faster, so users — and ultimately search engines – will prefer them.

AMP is a new project that is still being developed and tested, and the early adopters are news publishers, not websites for law firms or other businesses. There is no guarantee that the AMP experiment will be successful, but the fact that Google and other major players are throwing their weight behind it means that it is likely to become a crucial part of the mobile web. Google is now rolling out AMP in organic search results, not just the Top Stories section. You can see what this will look like by visiting g.co/ampdemo on a mobile device. The company has stated that this is not a ranking change, so websites are not currently being penalized for not having an AMP version. However, note that general mobile-friendliness, achieved with a responsive design or a mobile version of a site, is essential, and not being mobile-friendly will result in a penalty in search results. So think of AMP as the next stage in mobile-friendliness: having AMP is not currently necessary, but it may be in the near future.

While AMP is not a ranking factor at present, there are other benefits, such as user experience. After all, the goal of the project is to create webpages that load fast and are easy to read on mobile devices. For now, many smartphone users may not be familiar with AMP, but that could change quickly if Google promotes the project more heavily. Given the option, users will be more likely to click on a search result that bears a fast-loading stamp of approval. Publisher

experiments have already shown that the mobile bounce rate — users who visit a single page on a site and then leave — is reduced significantly on AMP pages. The AMP Project is still in development, but the popular website platform WordPress has already released a plugin that allows webmasters to try out AMP on blog posts. Law firm marketers would benefit from taking the time to experiment with AMP to see what works and what does not.

There are potential pitfalls with AMP pages. As one example, implementing an AMP version of a page may result in a website's header being replaced with a simplified version. If the header is a prominent place where the law firm's phone number or other important information is usually displayed, then the marketing team may want to consider other options. The AMP version of a page may also tend to omit elements like fillable forms, comment fields, and share buttons, so this should be kept in mind when designing AMP pages. Finally, the process of sharing content such as blog posts is complicated by AMP. When a user clicks on an AMP mobile search result, they are viewing Google's cache of that page, and when they use their device's Share function, the URL that is loaded up to share is a google.com address that incorporates the source website address, like this:

google.com/amp/yoursite.com/content

So a particularly shareable blog post may pop around the mobile web quite a bit without sending traffic back to the firm's website. Of course, this is not all bad, as the easy-load version still contains the firm's content and message, but it is something to be aware of as webmasters become familiar with the AMP project.

The bottom line: while AMP pages are not essential for law firm websites at present, they are likely the wave of the future. It is always a good idea to be ahead of the curve, so taking the time to research and experiment now will likely pay off as the AMP project continues to reshape the mobile web.

- Brendan Conley

DO LAW FIRM WEBSITES NEED AMP PAGES?

Websites are not currently being penalized for not having an AMP version. However, note that general mobile-friendliness is essential, and not being mobile-friendly will result in a penalty in search results. So think of AMP as the next stage in mobile-friendliness: having AMP is not currently necessary, but it may be in the near future.

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EMAIL ETIQUETTE & ETHICS

IN AN ERA OF CONSTANT CONNECTION

In a world driven by fast-paced communication, email has become an integral part of business correspondence. Not only is email a key way of communicating with colleagues and clients, it is also inherently tied to a firm's identity.

With so much time and energy spent on emails, there are a number of practices that every professional should apply as part of an effective communication strategy. The volume of messages sent and received each day means there is a higher likelihood of making embarrassing and even damaging mistakes.

Email related errors can have serious professional consequences, such as misunderstandings with clients or loss of reputation. As a result, mastering email etiquette is essential to achieving success. The aim is to develop the habit of crafting a well-composed message with the following elements in mind.

Pick a specific subject line
Every email should have a clear, direct subject line that eliminates the risk of the recipient having to guess what the message is about, or worse, ignore it completely. The email's subject should capture the reader's attention as it will determine the priority it gets from the recipient.

"People often decide whether to open an email based on the subject line," according to career coach Barbara Pachter, the author of "The Essentials of Business Etiquette." "Choose one that lets readers know you are addressing their concerns or business issues."

For example, instead of using the curt "Hello" or vague "Some important issues to discuss," consider subject lines like "Response needed by 2/12/2017" or "Following up on housing project proposal." The latter two may be more effective as they convey the key information the recipient needs to know. The recipient will also appreciate being able to estimate the amount of time and effort the email needs.

Be aware of tone

Business emails should have a professional tone. While the prevailing assumption may be that email allows informality, the opposite is true. When drafting an email, it is best to leave out humor and sarcasm as they can easily be misconstrued without context from facial expressions or vocal cues. On-screen language is some of the easiest to misunderstand. Additionally, be aware that people from different cultures are likely to write and speak differently to help prevent miscommunication.

Perhaps the best way to avoid confusion is to be straightforward. On the other hand, emails that are too direct can come off as more abrupt than intended and convey irritation to the reader. A useful habit is to read the message out loud before sending to make sure it does not sound harsh.

Proofread and double check

This step is perhaps one of the most important when it comes to avoiding mistakes. Proofread every message to check for grammar, punctuation, capitalization and spelling errors when composing emails. Such mistakes will not go unnoticed by email recipients, and the sender and their business may be judged for making them.

Reread the email draft before hitting send and refine it if necessary. An email riddled with spelling and grammar errors can imply laziness or incompetency.

Provide timely responses to emails

Because emails have a tendency to pile up and be overlooked if they are not addressed in a timely manner, business communications should be checked and responded to regularly. Even without having a complete answer immediately, try to inform the recipient that their message has been received and you are working on getting back to them.

By failing to respond promptly, there is a risk of appearing indifferent or careless. In addition, professionalism and courtesy in business email correspondence can go a long way in gaining an advantage over competitors who may be complacent or uninformed about email etiquette.

Add email addresses last

Adding email addresses after composing the message ensures the email is not sent before it is finished. Even when replying to an email, it is a useful habit to delete the recipient's email address and add it back only when the message is reviewed and ready to be sent.

Double check that the correct person's email address has been selected to ensure unintended recipients do not receive the message. It is easy to choose or type the wrong name, especially with the predictive nature of the "To" field in many email services. While this can be embarrassing to both the sender and the person who receives the email by mistake, it can also lead to a detrimental disclosure of confidential information.

Email is an indispensable tool for professionals, among them attorneys. It allows lawyers to communicate with colleagues within their law firm, as well as with clients and opposing counsel. However, its prevalence also raises a number of ethical questions for attorneys as there are

> ## ALL BUSINESS EMAILS SHOULD USE A PROFESSIONAL TONE.
>
> --------------------------------
>
> *While the prevailing assumption may be that email allows informality, the opposite is true. When drafting an email, it is best to leave out humor and sarcasm as they can easily be misconstrued without context from facial expressions or vocal cues.*

inherent risks associated with using email. Being too quick to hit the "Send" button can lead to negative consequences such as embarrassment, upset clients, breach of confidentiality, income loss or malpractice claims.

Maintaining attorney-client privilege

The use of email adds a new layer of complexity to the issue of confidential communication. Perhaps the biggest risk that email poses is that of protected information falling into the wrong hands. The attorney-client relationship is based on the duty of confidentiality that lawyers owe to their clients. Attorneys are responsible for taking reasonable precautions to ensure they do not inadvertently disclose a client's confidential information, no matter the form of communication used.

The American Bar Association Standing Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility concluded in 2011 that lawyers may use unencrypted emails as an accepted method of transmitting protected client information without violating confidentiality rules.

MAINTAINING ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE

The American Bar Association Standing Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility concluded in 2011 that lawyers may use unencrypted emails as an accepted method of transmitting protected client information without violating confidentiality rules.

The committee noted that it is the attorney's ethical duty to warn the client about the risk of email communication using a device, computer or email account that may be susceptible to third-party access.

The committee noted that it is the attorney's ethical duty to warn the client about the risk of email communication using a device, computer or email account that may be susceptible to third-party access. There are several considerations under which a lawyer may be ethically obligated to warn the client about sending or receiving emails that may compromise confidentiality. They include but are not limited to:

- The client having already used email or expressed an intention to do so.

- The client having access to a workplace device or system.

- The employer or a third party having access to the client's email communications.

- Having workplace policies and jurisdiction laws that do not protect the privacy of the client's personal email communications.

Web bugs
Another email related ethical concern are web bugs. A web bug is a device embedded invisibly in email to track a recipient's actions. Email senders can use them to find out a variety of information, including:

- When, how often and how long an email was viewed

- Whether the recipient forwarded the email or attachment

- The recipient's approximate geographical location

In October 2016, the Alaska Bar Association Ethics Committee joined the New York State Bar Association in declaring that web bugs are not "ethically permissible." The latter association issued the only other existing ethics opinion on the issue in 2001. Both organizations determined that attorneys are not allowed to plant web bugs to track emails sent to opposing counsel. Even if the use of web bugs is disclosed, it violates ethical rules that prohibit lawyers from engaging in misrepresentation and deceit.

Web bugs can destroy confidentiality by providing the sender access to information that is protected by the attorney-client relationship. For example, a web-bugged email containing a draft settlement document could give the sender valuable insight into what pages of the agreement the opposing counsel and his client found the most important.

Inadvertent disclosure
The use of email in attorney-client communications can also give rise to unauthorized disclosure. Many email services have a feature that allows names to be suggested as the sender begins to type in the "To" field. While this is a convenient option to have, the suggested name may not be the intended recipient. Habits such as hitting "Reply to all" or attaching the wrong document to an email may also result in the accidental disclosure of information that the sender meant to keep confidential.

Certain email providers such as Gmail allow erroneously sent messages to be recalled. However, in many cases undoing one's actions may not be possible. According to the American Bar Association Model Rules of Professional Conduct, a lawyer who receives an inadvertently sent email related to a client's case should immediately inform the sender. As different states have varying laws on inadvertent communication, the attorney who sent the email must then review the relevant jurisdiction's rules.

Email undoubtedly facilities communication with clients and other professionals. When it comes to day-to-day email correspondence, creating a lasting good impression is invaluable to building trust and confidence. Awareness of email ethics and best practices will help diminish its accompanying potential pitfalls and ultimately enrich the attorney-client relationship.

- Dipal Parmar

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CYBERSECURITY

As computers become more pervasive in our government, our businesses, and our homes, cybersecurity crises seem to arise with alarming regularity and often in unexpected places. In particular, networking among computers and electronics is sharply on the rise, giving hackers extraordinary power to attack, compromise and control systems from afar without ever leaving their desks.

This year alone we have seen hackers wreak havoc on a national party, a presidential election, public institutions and services, consumer electronics and even basic web pages on the internet.

The events seem to blur together into a confusing haze of perpetual cybersecurity meltdown. But if we analyze exactly what makes these hacks possible — why one system gets hacked and not another — we can keep recent events in perspective and glean lessons from them that can be applied to security in our own lives.

IN **2016**

ELECTIONS, RANSOM, BOTNETS & LESSONS LEARNED

ELECTION EMAILS

> A political data breach of such scope and consequence has arguably never before been made public.

Beginning in the summer of 2015, the Democratic National Committee's computers were successfully penetrated by hackers, whose intrusion went unnoticed for nearly a year. The following summer, in the heat of the presidential race, a trove of emails captured from the hacked computers was published by WikiLeaks.

The emails served to undermine the DNC's stated neutrality in the party's nomination process, suggesting that executives may have actively undermined the campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders. The leaks led the committee chair, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, to resign just before the Democratic National Convention in July. After the convention, the committee's CEO, CFO, and communications director also resigned.

True to its principles, WikiLeaks would not name its source. Immediately following the emails' publication, a lone hacker calling himself Guccifer 2.0 claimed responsibility. American security experts, both public and private, agreed that the Russian government was responsible for the hack. Furthermore, they believed Guccifer 2.0 to be a disinformation campaign on Russia's part.

In a separate hack also leaked to WikiLeaks, Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's personal Gmail account was compromised in March, 2016. Hackers used a phishing email made to look like a security alert that directed Podesta to their Google spoof site, where he unwittingly entered his credentials. Not only was Podesta's entire email history immediately available to the hackers, but he would not become aware that he had been hacked for at least several weeks. While not as revealing as the DNC emails, these leaks nevertheless proved embarrassing just the same. Again, evidence and expert opinion tended to pin the blame on Russia.

The aggregate effect of the hacks was to put Clinton's campaign on the defensive repeatedly and arguably contribute to her defeat. The most remarkable thing about the events is not the hacks themselves, which politicians concede to be all but routine, but the leak and publication of the emails. A political data breach of such scope and consequence has arguably never before been made public.

In the weeks since the election, evidence of Russia's interference has only grown. The FBI, CIA and Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr. all agree that Russia's efforts aimed, at least in part, to help Donald Trump win the White House.

On October 21, 2016, hackers disrupted access to dozens of popular websites by activating a virus resident on a large number of internet-connected consumer devices. You may have noticed an interruption in your ability to access Amazon.com, Netflix, CNN, The New York Times or other sites. What you probably do not realize is that you may have inadvertently taken part in the attack.

It is important to note that although these events could be described as Russian interference in the election, there is no evidence that any actual votes were hacked. In fact, the prospects for anyone who might wish to do so are quite limited. This is because voting machines with unique security features are in various locations and would need to be hacked simultaneously — an operation that would likely take years, increasing the chances it would be discovered before damage was done.

DATA HELD HOSTAGE

A great many ransoms are likely paid quickly and quietly by private firms and institutions such as law firms.

On Friday, November 25, 2016, the start of the busiest shopping weekend of the year, the ticketing system for San Francisco's light rail transit network was taken offline by ransomware. Ticketing kiosks began displaying the message, "You Hacked, ALL Data Encrypted," along with an email address to contact for the key to unlock the system. The ransom was reportedly 100 Bitcoin, worth roughly $70,000.

The trains and their safe operation was not affected. In fact, the outage proved a boon to transit riders, as the agency's response was to allow riders aboard

for free until systems were restored the following Sunday. The agency has reportedly not paid any ransom, but they have not disclosed whether they were able to completely remove the ransomware from their computers.

This is only the most recent ransomware attack on a public institution. A string of them happened in rapid succession in February, 2016. The police department in Melrose, Massachusetts fell victim to an attack after an unsuspecting user within the department opened a seemingly innocuous email that contained a virus. They quickly paid their Bitcoin ransom and suffered no permanent data loss. A hospital in Hollywood, California, and a school district in North Carolina were similarly compromised and eventually paid up.

As the hackers were never identified, the question of whether these three attacks on American public institutions were related remains unanswered. Moreover, a great many more ransoms are likely paid quickly and quietly by private firms and institutions such as law firms. We only hear about the attacks on public organizations because of their public accountability. But we know that such attacks on private entities are not uncommon.

However, some ransom demands go unpaid because the targets have comprehensive data backups and plans in place to quickly restore the hacked information. Most people are

unlikely to ever hear of these attacks because they cause so little harm. No individual or business can completely eliminate the possibility that they will be exposed to malware. Nonetheless, they can ensure that their losses in such an event will be minimized.

BOTS ATTACK

> *If a DNS provider cannot respond timely to users' requests, those users will be unable to access certain websites.*

On October 21, 2016, hackers disrupted access to dozens of popular websites by activating a virus resident on a large number of internet-connected consumer devices. You may have noticed an interruption in your ability to access Amazon.com, Netflix, CNN, The New York Times or other sites. What you probably do not realize is that you may have inadvertently taken part in the attack that caused the disruption.

The hack was a Distributed Denial of Service, or DDoS, attack. A "distributed denial of service" attack involves flooding a server with requests so as to make it unavailable to respond timely to its true users. A denial of service attack enlists multiple internet-connected devices at disparate locations, making it very difficult to stop the attack by blocking all requests from a certain computer.

A very crude version of a DDoS attack might involve coordinating hundreds of individuals to simultaneously load and reload a website that ordinarily sees small amounts of traffic at any one time. Likewise, a sudden spike in popularity of a website can inadvertently cause it to shut down. This happens often when an obscure site is the subject of a popular post

on a message board such as Reddit, or when the Canadian immigration website became unavailable on the night of the US presidential election.

The October attack, however, was not crude or inadvertent. The target was no ordinary website, but rather a major Domain Name System (DNS) provider called Dyn. As a DNS provider, Dyn takes the user-friendly URL like "www.amazon.com" that you enter into your browser and translates it to an IP address — a string of digits that directs to a certain server on the internet. If a DNS provider cannot respond timely to users' requests, those users will be unable to access certain websites, which is exactly what happened.

The agents of the attack were internet-connected consumer devices such as Wi-Fi routers, printers, security cameras, and baby monitors that had been infected with a virus known as Mirai. The infected devices, recruited in the October attack, composed a "botnet" — a group of devices subject to the control of a third-party hacker — that may have numbered in the tens of millions.

It is not unlikely, therefore, for any household full of online gadgets to have taken part in the attack. The hijacking would in most cases go completely unnoticed by the user because no one device would have to devote itself entirely to the DDoS attack in order for the aggregate effect to be crippling to its target. The user might go on using their infected Wi-Fi router, blissfully unaware that the device is sending a DNS request to Dyn once per second or so.

The Mirai botnet attack was the largest DDoS ever. The load of malicious data directed at Dyn's servers is estimated to be as high as 1.2 terabits per second — some 50,000 times the total

bandwidth of a typical home's internet connection. Dyn said that the attack was very complex and unlike typical DDoS events.

Hacker groups Anonymous and New World Hackers quickly claimed joint responsibility for the attack, saying it was retaliation for Ecuador's cutting off internet access at their embassy in London, where Julian Assange has taken asylum since 2012. Assange is the founder of WikiLeaks, a darling of so-called "hacktivist" groups of politically-minded hackers. This also served to implicate Russia, accused of colluding with WikiLeaks to disrupt the US presidential election.

However, Flashpoint, a business risk intelligence firm, believes the attack was the work of amateur hackers with no political or financial motivation, but simply a desire to cause chaos for sport. The firm cites similar characteristics with past attacks known to have been perpetrated by amateurs, as well as the lack of a clear political or financial objective.

The fact that anyone from any nation-state to hacker group to loosely connected amateurs can be implicated in the largest DDoS attack in history is troubling. If such a sophisticated and disruptive attack could in fact have been achieved by amateurs, the thought of an attack by a powerful national government is truly frightening. And if it turns out that only government agents could pull off such a feat, their willingness to do so and the mystery of their motivation should cause no less concern.

These days, those who would wreak havoc with computer viruses need not even have the ability to write code. Even if a hacker has no motivation at all to cause disruption, they should have no difficulty finding someone willing to pay for the ability to do so. In fact, about a month after the Dyn attacks, two hackers advertised a Mirai botnet of their own which they made available for rent by anyone with a target in mind and cash (that is, bitcoin) in hand.

The hackers appear to be the same ones behind past successful hacks of large US companies, and they claim to have a botnet numbering at least 400,000 Mirai-infected devices at their disposal. They also claim to have made significant improvements to the original Mirai code, making it more difficult to detect. Clients can rent 50,000 of the bots for two weeks for a cost around three to four thousand dollars — likely too pricey for an individual who simply wants to cause destruction, but affordable for motivated organizations with an ulterior motive.

If you notice a common thread in all these hacks, it might be "low-hanging fruit." Given the scale and consequence of these hacks, it is easy to forget that in most cases they do not start with a supercomputer or a super-genius overcoming some seemingly

> If you notice a common thread in all these hacks, it might be "low-hanging fruit." Given the scale and consequence of these hacks, it is easy to forget that in most cases they do not start with a supercomputer or a super-genius overcoming some seemingly impenetrable wall of security.

impenetrable wall of security. Instead, they tend to rely on that weakest of link: humans. Podesta's lack of skepticism about an email that seemed to come from Google let his email get hacked. Employees at private and public organizations consistently fall prey to similar scams. And consumers' unwillingness to change their new gadgets' passwords (or their unawareness of the importance of doing so) lets hackers control millions of the devices at will.

DO NOT BE AN EASY TARGET

> A bad password is the weakest link in most security chains. Do not be the low-hanging fruit.

For all the sophistication of various methods of hacking, the ordinary password remains the cornerstone of cybersecurity. A bad password is the weakest link in most security chains, and a strong password is enough for practical defense for the layman. The Mirai malware, though a marvel of ingenious coding, nevertheless depends entirely on factory-default or otherwise easily guessable passwords.

So what can you do to protect yourself? Make your passwords longer, do not use the same password twice and do not use dictionary words. Use a password manager like LastPass, Keeper or 1Password. Enable two-factor authentication for sensitive logins. When you buy a new internet-connected device, immediately change the default password. Implement and stick closely to a comprehensive data backup plan so that if you fall victim to ransomware, you have a real choice whether to pay up.

Watch out for phishing emails. They look like emails from entities you trust, but they contain links to malicious sites. If an email looks suspicious, do not click on anything in it. Only log into a sensitive website after typing in the URL yourself or clicking on a bookmark you created. Look for security icons next to URLs in your address bar. Finally, talk about cybersecurity and share these tips with employees and colleagues.

Do not be the low-hanging fruit. A determined hacker will always be able to find an attractive and penetrable target. But it does not have to be you or your firm.

- Ryan Conley

SAME GREAT STORIES
NEW WEBSITE
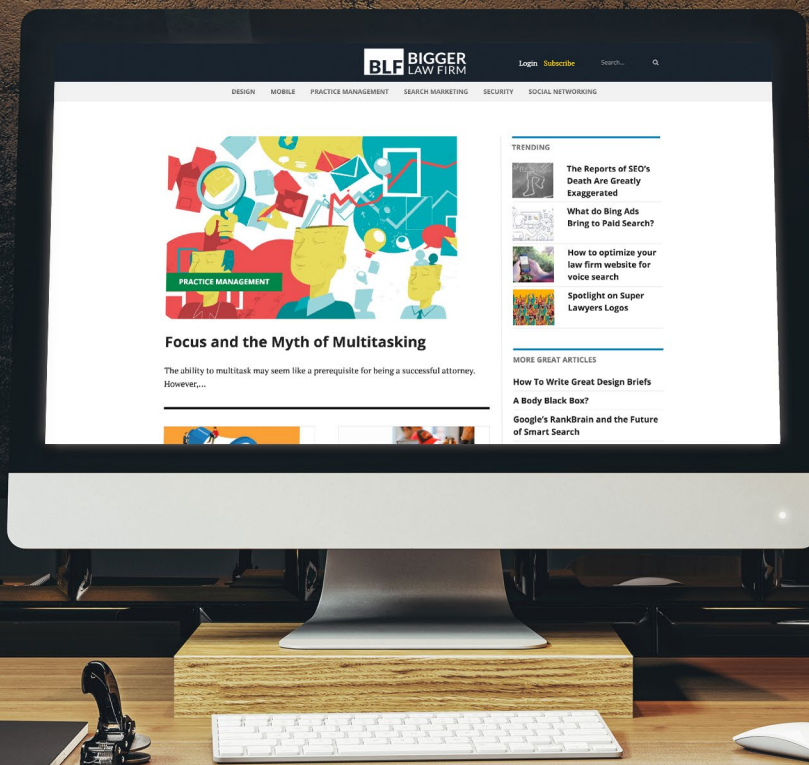
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WHAT WENT RIGHT?
IN 2016

This year has been turbulent. Between Britain leaving the E.U., global terrorism, a toxic U.S. election cycle, and a cyber attack that disabled Twitter and a large chunk of the internet for half a day, few people will pine for the glory days of 2016.

As search marketers, we had our own challenges. At the beginning of the year, Google changed their search engine results page (SERP) to eliminate the sponsored listings in the sidebar, which immediately had an affect on law firms' paid conversion rates. Then in the fall, it turned its local algorithm upside down and followed that move with the launch of Google Penguin 4… the effects of both are still rippling through their index.

In spite of these challenges and the distraction of global and domestic events, many firms have seen their traffic and leads increase this year. Rather than talk about all of the challenges of 2016, we decided to reach out to law firms and marketers throughout the world and ask:

"What went right?"

The responses are encouraging.

CAREER CHANGES

Elliot M. Portman of Hauppauge, New York was the Nassau County District Attorney before building a successful practice with two partners. In 2015, it was time for a change. Portman left his partnership to go solo. "I decided to market to an under-appreciated segment of my debt collection practice: other lawyers. I placed advertisements in State and local Bar Association publications, and offered to collect the judgments the attorneys entered on behalf of their clients and for collection of their own legal fees," Portman said. "The results have been favorable and the monthly amount of claims received has been growing since the second half of 2016. When I attend Bar association meetings, people now know who I am and what I can do for them."

Portman identified an underserved niche, placed ads with publications that would reach his market and networked. Traditional advertising and networking helped Portman's solo practice take off in 2016.

Elliot M. Portman
Portman Law Group, P.C.
www.plg-ny.com

Attorney Adam J. Ouellette of Fort Lauderdale, Florida also looked to his fellow lawyers to launch his business, Esquire Academy. After practicing for 18 years, Ouellette decided to build an online program he calls "Ideal Client Attraction Formula". Ouellette says his new program "utilizes many ways of getting in front of prospective clients and referral partners from the use of Facebook ads, autoresponder campaigns, as well as video and leveraging the power of social media to deliver information to their community of ideal clients."

Ouellette continued by saying, "The same info I teach allowed us to 'newsjack' various new changes in real estate law to get upwards of 5 or more real estate agents a day for months opting into our autoresponder system wanting us to train them and share our expertise. This created an automated campaign that nurtured new prospective referral partners to move them from not knowing us to them trusting us enough to send us their buyers and real estate closings."

Adam J. Ouellette
Esquire Academy
esquireacademy.com

LET YOUR CLIENTS SPEAK

Madison Mississippi attorney, Randall R. Saxton focused on reviews in 2016. "As 3 out of 4 clients are using the internet to find attorneys, feedback from former clients can heavily influence a prospective client's decision to retain me. Many simply call the closest attorney with the best reviews," said Saxton. "In a consumer context, reviews from customers are generally viewed by potential buyers as more reliable than what the seller, in this case an attorney, might say about themselves, and with the addition of reviews on a couple various sites, my

consultations have nearly doubled." Saxton's efforts have paid off. At the time of this article, he has perfect 5 star ratings on Google My Business and Avvo.

Randall R. Saxton
www.saxton.law

BLOGGING AND SEO

You may have read some chatter about blogging being dead in 2016. However, Lindsey Houk, partner at Charlotte North Carolina based Waple & Houk, PLLC would disagree. Houk said, "By far and above, the best marketing strategy we implemented in 2016 was consistently writing blog posts, which provided continuous dynamic content contributions to our website." "This resulted in optimized site traffic overall, improved ROI for our existing pay-per-click campaigns and significant increases in organic search engine referrals. Our goal was to create content focused on frequently searched topics related to our areas of expertise, which we've seen pay off in spades both digitally and as a new client referral source."

Lindsey Houk, partner, Waple & Houk, PLLC
www.waplehouklaw.com

Nathan Dineen of the Wisconsin law firm, Vanden Heuvel & Dineen also looked to blogging and SEO in 2016.

"In the past, we focused on one area of online advertising while neglecting the others. In 2016, we focused on SEO, we have posted blogs weekly on a variety of topics, we regularly posted to Facebook and Twitter, and in the second half of the year implemented a chat function on our website in order to address clients concerns quickly." Dineen said. "We have seen our traffic

and conversions increase steadily over the year. The keys to our success have been diversity and consistency."

Nathan Dineen
Vanden Heuvel & Dineen
www.duidefensewi.com

NICHE SPECIFIC MARKETING

New Jersey law firm, Scarinci Hollbeck acquired five intellectual property lawyers with a lot of experience in the entertainment industry. Peter Moeller, the firm's Director of Marketing and Communications, explained how they helped the attorneys get noticed. "In 2016, our firm acquired five intellectual property attorneys whose main industry of practice is music/entertainment. To help get them noticed, we implemented a two-part strategy: 1. Creation of a separate website dedicated to their practice; 2. organic SEO through the use of original content.

After researching the entertainment industry and our competitors, we learned what buzz words they were using, as well as what phrases and terms were being used by people searching Google.

We highlighted the areas of this industry that were low in competition but rich in relevant searches. We began writing articles that covered these topics of concern and pushed them through social media, created specifically for this group. In fewer than six months, we dominated Google's search results for entertainment attorney in New Jersey and other related terms. We are receiving dozens of calls a month and gaining new clients because of this strategy."

Peter Moeller, Director of Marketing & Communications
scarincihollenbeck.com

COMMUNITY SERVICE

When the special needs law firm of Selogie & Brett, LLP wanted to help more families in Southern California, they decided to do something unconventional. Amanda Selogie and Vickie Brett started the Inclusive Education Project (IEP), a not for profit. Through donations, IEP is able to fund educational programs to empower families to fight for children living with special needs and funds pro-bono sponsorships for low income families that need legal assistance.

Donor contributions go to fund community presentations which help educate and empower families to advocate on behalf of their children living with special needs. Additionally, donor contributions fund pro-bono sponsorship of low income families who require legal aide. Donor contributions flow directly to students living with disabilities and their families who fight for the right to a free and appropriate public education.

With the help of their marketer, Erica Perebijnos of EP Designhouse, the firm organizes, sponsors and markets trunk shows and other fashion events that are likely to attract mothers. They recently hosted Winter Market that raised a few thousand dollars for the Inclusive Education Project.

By reaching out to the community, Selogie & Brett are thriving and their not-for-profit is helping families in Southern California have an opportunity to thrive as well.

Vickie Brett, Amanda Selogie, Selogie & Brett, LLP
www.selogiebrett.com | iepcalifornia.org

HASHTAG #SUCCESS

When Omaha, Nebraska based Knowles Law Firm wanted to expand brand awareness of their long standing personal injury firm, they created a hashtag.

Attorney Bob Knowles wanted to increase visibility in a "cause-related way". "We launched a three month, community-based campaign, #KnowlesKnows, in August 2016. Utilizing AT&T's "It Can Wait" virtual reality tool at events around the metro area, the distracted driving message was shared with nearly 8,000 people, enabling personalized outreach in the community and attracting thousands of engaged participants to take part in the potentially lifesaving experience." said Knowles.

During the campaign, the #KnowlesKnows hashtag generated more than 250,000 impressions on the firm's Facebook page.

"Most importantly," Knowles said, "the safe driving message was shared with thousands of people in the local community, many of which called the experience 'sobering' and 'life changing'."

Bob Knowles
Knowles Law Firm
www.knowleslawfirm.com

YOU ARE LOOKING GOOD

Spencer X. Smith of Madison, Wisconsin helps AM 100 law firms with their social marketing. So what has Smith done to boost his clients in 2016? It is a strategy, Smith says, that "costs literally nothing". They simply make other people look good.

"This works incredibly well on LinkedIn since individual profiles are so much more important than firm pages. People want to hear from individuals with whom they're connected, and when those individuals (the attorneys) are using LinkedIn to highlight accomplishments of others, those shares get dramatically more engagement than posts that are simply self-serving.

Those engagements (likes, shares, comments) then tell the LinkedIn computers that what you share is important, leading LinkedIn to show more of your future posts to a broader audience. This yields more profile views, the number one criterion of what success looks like on LinkedIn." said Smith.

Spencer X Smith
Spencer X Smith Consulting
www.spencerXsmith.com

Law firms all over the world have carved out their own secret recipes for building their practices. Some by trying traditional advertising, others by embracing tried and true search marketing tools, and some have made helping the community and others the apex of their success story.

Want to build a bigger law firm in 2017? Try something.

- Jason Bland

> "It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.
>
> - Franklin D. Roosevelt"

Legal Tech Solutions
to help your firm get organized

Legal technology in all its iterations helps the already innovative legal powerhouse mind who uses it.

Many new software products designed for use by attorneys are often billed as being game changing and innovative. Some of the newest technology may be a must have for many law offices, advancing how the offices conduct business and keep up with clients needs. While attorneys are notoriously slow adopters, in part due to justifiable ethical reasons, some firms would benefit from exploring new solutions.

However, those contemplating buying new products should remember that the software itself is not what makes an innovative and revolutionary law office. The attorneys working in the office and using the software are the innovative factor in this equation. New software may offer new features, but a few new features do not make a revolution.

If the purpose of a new product is to help lawyers get their jobs done more efficiently and easily, then it may be useful. If it solves real problems and helps assist attorneys with daily activities, then has it not accomplished its purpose?

Legal technology in all its iterations helps the already innovative legal powerhouse mind who uses it. The lawyer drives how the software tool(s) work for an office and how they win cases, not the other way around.

Meet two new software options for innovative legal minds: FactBox and FileVine

"This came in from somewhere. Could you send it somewhere else?"

FACTBOX

FactBox was founded in 2013 by several partners in a large investigative firm who regularly dealt with massive volumes of complex information. While they had good memories, they wasted time duplicating efforts. Hoping to find a better way to manage information and organize sources, they united their efforts and launched FactBox.

FactBox bills itself as "legal case-management software designed specifically for the problems of busy lawyers." The software helps categorize ideas and facts in the structure of the user's choosing. It also quickly sorts and filters information so that users can find connections that may have been lost in the influx of information.

FactBox has a short learning curve and set up time. Unlike some varieties of software specifically designed

for particular legal niches, FactBox appears to offer flexibility for attorneys to use it for a wide variety of cases. Creating case templates is a useful feature that allows work product for one case to be used in another similar case, when relevant.

Reporting: Report generation is an interesting feature of FactBox that is specific to depositions and court proceedings. The software allows an attorney to tag files with chosen keywords. This creates reports containing information specific to the named deponent. Additionally, the central database can collect and store witness information that may be used to construct witness lists.

Memos & sorting: Memo mode saves time when drafting solo or collaborative reports. Organization fields allow a paralegal or lawyer to search by source, chronologically, alphabetically or by user-generated tags. This means all parties working on a case can analyze different displays of

the same information, reorganized to present all aspects of a case in a way that may result in finding new links and connections to pursue.

FactBox users report the software is easy to interact with because it does not make attorneys change the way they work. Instead, it integrates seamlessly with a law firm's already established workflow.

FactBox is a cloud-based application that runs in a browser window and is compatible with both Windows and Mac. FactBox also allows the user to upload documents and link to information on the internet. The hassle of setting up onsite hosting

> FactBox helps categorize ideas and facts in the structure of the user's choosing. It also quickly sorts and filters information so that attorneys can find connections and pursue new links that may have been lost in the influx of case-related information.

solutions or working with hosted options that carry extra fees for remote access is not an issue with FactBox. The simple cloud-based solution does not require any advanced server configurations or any other challenging integrations to access and use remotely or onsite.

Attorneys interested in FactBox have a choice between a demo and a free 14-day trial. If the goal is to try out setting up cases, examine other useful features and see how reports are generated, the free trial may be the way to go.

After the trial, there are two options to choose from: pay a year in advance for a discount at $38 per month, or pay month-to-month at $45 per month. The pricing includes integrating with cloud storage, live support, unlimited cases and data storage. If a colleague is referred and signs up, the referrer gets a free month.

FILEVINE

FileVine is a cloud-based practice management and collaboration tool. It was created in 2013, and launched by Ryan Anderson, CEO.

FileVine allows attorneys, staff and clients to communicate in real time. It also offers task management, document management and lead management. FileVine attempts to solve the problem of lost emails and misplaced documents by organizing all files and communications relevant to a case in an easily accessible platform.

FileVine offers various tools to help attorneys keep track of case-related matters. The goal of the software, as a case management tool, is to treat each case as a project that needs to be completed, not just a series of assets that need to be organized.

FileVine automatically creates tasks and deadlines as an attorney inputs case information. It also provides built-in reminders, and allows attorneys to create custom "phases" for a case.

Reports & records: FileVine generates reports that show how long cases are taking and at what cost, which can be a helpful analytical tool for firms wishing to bring costs down and finish cases more efficiently. It also creates what are referred to as records, which are automatic hyperlinks to any document relevant to a case file. If, for example, a user comes across a reference to an accident report, that reference will be linked to the actual report form. One click allows the user to open any relevant document without the hassle of searching. FileVine also offers bill and expense tracking.

Feed-based workflow: FileVine operates similarly to other non-attorney based collaboration software like Slack or Glip, with a feed-based interface. On login, a users home screen shows items and projects an attorney has assigned to others, self-assigned jobs and current communications from clients.

Settlement calculator: The built in calculator, embedded in each case file, is also a valued tool for lawyers who frequently work with multiple cases and numerous financial settlement offers. Personal injury attorneys would find this tool to be very effective as it will save them time tracking multiple offers and amounts via spreadsheet.

Secure texting: The ability to text a client from directly inside the client's file inside the program is a major selling point for this software. Each client is assigned a private texting number attached to their file in

FileVine. Text messages between client and attorney like pictures are saved to the corresponding client document folder in FileVine.

The ability to text means a lawyer has a higher chance of connecting with smartphone-dependent clients who do not have landlines or other internet services at home. According to Pew Research, 68 percent of Americans have smartphones and tablet/iPad ownership now runs at about 45 percent.

Regardless of the size of a law firm, privacy is not a concern with FileVine. If a paralegal or an attorney needs access to one file the lead counsel is working on, they may be granted a certain level of access.

There are two drawbacks with FileVine's set up: no ability to remove files once they have been uploaded, and a single administrator on all projects. While the persistence of

> The goal of FileVine, as a case management tool, is to treat each case as a project that needs to be completed, not just a series of assets that need to be organized. According to FileVine, users have reported an increase in productivity of over 67 percent.

files could present some mistakes with accidental deletion, a single administrator could be an issue with some collaborative teams.

FileVine offers custom pricing options according to the specific needs of a law firm. While the price may tend to be higher than competing products, current FileVine users report that support is second to none. Having a specific solution for the needs of a particular firm makes having a tailored solution for case file management well worth the investment.

- Kerrie Spencer

How relevance & authority affect search results

Google facilitates 3.5 billion searches a day and 1.2 trillion searches a year worldwide. The answers are out there, the hurdle is how to best present it to consumers. Google's solutions to this is relevance and site authority.

From the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Age, we have categorized periods of time with their respective influence on society. The 21st century will be known as the Age of Information. Knowledge is now literally at our fingertips, and with 46 percent of the world having access to the Internet, many are able to be informed and educated.

RELEVANCE

When you make any search inquiry, you want the best, most appropriate content shown to you. This is where search relevance comes into play. Based on the way you choose to formulate your queries, search engines will display results pertinent to your needs. Search engines use two types of search relevance for showing results: pure keyword and contextual relevance.

Pure keyword relevance

Pure keyword relevance is the standard way search engines analyze search queries. Taking into account what your search term is, search engines will give you what they think is the best result based on the keywords. An example of pure keyword relevance would be to search for a specific law firm and get the appropriate business information regarding that firm.

Contextual relevance

Contextual relevance is all about relatability. When you search for anything, search engines will remember what your previous queries were. For example, if you watch a video on YouTube, contextual relevance dictates that the next video up for suggestion will be something similar to what you just watched. Based on your previous results, contextual relevance will show you related topics and content. This approach is suited for consumers wanting to browse and ascertain information themselves.

Hummingbird

Hummingbird is a search algorithm implemented by Google that aims to improve contextual relevance of results. It was created in August 2013 and announced in September of the same year.

Hummingbird was developed to increase comprehension for synonyms and context. It allows Google to discern more accurately what users are looking for. This idea is known as semantic search. Instead of processing search queries word for word, a semantic search will try to understand why the user is looking for something, based on the context of the search terms. Semantic search takes into consideration things like synonyms, concept matching and natural language queries rather than just word strings.

Writing for Hummingbird

In order to better create relevant content, zero-in on your targeted audience. A more broad approach may yield more results in total throughout Google's listings, but these results will not be ranked well.

Based on that sentiment, having content that is high valued for your particular audience will give you a better chance of ranking at the top of the search engine result page and holding visitors' attention once they have arrived on your website. Both of these goals are key to helping improve your site's conversion rate.

> ### WRITE FOR PEOPLE, NOT SEARCH ENGINES.
>
> --------------------------------
>
> *Having content that is high valued for your particular audience will give you a better chance of ranking at the top of the search engine result page and holding visitors' attention once they have arrived on your website.*

AUTHORITY

Another metric search engines use to rank websites for their search results is site authority. There are many factors that affect authority, such as page speed, related keywords, search engine optimization and design.

PageRank

PageRank is Google's official metric for site authority. Named after cofounder Larry Page, PageRank was the first and best-known search algorithm that ranks websites on their search results. Based on a 0-10 valuation, with 10 being the highest possible score, PageRank allowed people to see how authorative Google considers their web pages to be. Google, for example used to rate its own home page at 10.

However, because of manipulation to PageRank through black-hat seo methods like selling links and keyword stuffing, Google announced on April 15, 2016 that they have closed PageRank data to the public. This is an attempt to keep PageRank score impartial and organic.

Post-PageRank authority

Now that PageRank is no longer publicly visible, Moz's Open Site Explorer has emerged as a substitute. Simply plug an URL in, and you will see Moz's calculation of Page and Domain Authority. Page Authority is merited based on the strength of the respective page. Domain Authority is gathered from the entire website. Moz uses its own metrics and scores their authority from 0-100.

Open Site Explorer also offers a wide array of data about links, including inbound links, linking domains, anchor text and a metric it refers to as just discovered links. The tool also lets you compare link metrics and look for new linking opportunities. While Moz does not reveal the secret of how it calculates Page and Domain Authority, the measurement is likely based heavily on link portfolios and link activity.

Among the search engine optimization techniques available, links are perhaps the most important factor of influence. Links are a vote of confidence for your website. Your best bet to increase site authority would be to have another website that is highly valued link your content to their site. However, this must happen organically, or you risk violating Google's Webmaster Guidelines. Link building is possible, and effective, when handled carefully.

- Dexter Tam

Are you competing against your marketing company?

HAZEN LAW GROUP ISN'T