



How to Develop a Scalable, Sustainable Digital Marketing Plan for Your Law Firm

A LAFLEUR LEGAL MARKETING GUIDE

ebook / whitepaper



“NO
STREAM
RISES
HIGHER
THAN
ITS
SOURCE.”

~ Frank Lloyd Wright



STRUCTURE & STYLE

Marketing, especially digital marketing, is a practice that is, at best, under-appreciated and, at worst, disregarded entirely. Unlike advertising, where the goal is to tap into our collective preferences and desires in order to entice consumers, the goal of marketing is to promote awareness of a given brand and provide a greater understanding of the products or services that the brand is capable of delivering. It's a keystone of commerce, but in order to be effective, it must seem to be intrinsically anonymous and also remain outwardly honest. Maintaining the illusion of anonymity is a kind of practical magic, and like all magic tricks, once the device behind it is revealed, it is no longer magical, but mechanical.

This concept of anonymity often leads law firms to underestimate the power of marketing, which can be devastating — especially in our modern era where information and communication are the catalysts for generating attractive leads, achieving desired results, and retaining clients. Without a concrete understanding of the fundamentals of digital marketing, constructing a scalable, sustainable marketing plan is impossible. And executing a marketing campaign without a plan is like building a skyscraper without a blueprint: a discombobulated mess on the brink of inevitable collapse.

Underestimating the power of marketing can be devastating.

A NOTE ON ARCHITECTURE

Most people think of architects as the geniuses behind the grand designs of our country's great buildings. And while that interpretation accurately reflects a segment of the profession, architecture isn't just limited to designing aesthetically stunning and pragmatic structures like elaborate homes and majestic buildings. At its core, architecture is about planning; it's about strategy.

In our personal lives, we are the architects of our relationships, our perspectives, our ideologies. Professionally, we work to design the trajectory of our careers, whether we be civil engineers or civil servants. On a more granular level, marketing is just another form of architecture. Although achieving tangible results is the primary function of marketing, the essential form of marketing is planning. Thus, in marketing, we are presented with an instance of form over function, for results will never materialize without meticulous attention paid to planning.

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, many firms continue to operate under the assumption that marketing is optional – that it is a convenience, a luxury. The heads of these firms insist that delivering a quality customer experience is enough. While it's true that many firms are able to retain clients through

excellent word of mouth, the industry has become far too competitive to rely on the status quo. Instead, successful firms must adopt a proactive approach, providing potential clients with pertinent information and the opportunity to enlist their legal services once these prospective clients have conducted thorough research — research that can be branded and made easily accessible through successful marketing campaigns.

Simply put, firms that emphasize efficient, holistic marketing practices are able to generate ideal leads and exceed anticipated caseloads early in their annual business cycle, and they are able to do so year after year. Conversely, firms that fail to build their brand through effective marketing receive only a fraction of the clients that they would be capable of retaining if they instituted strategic marketing initiatives.

The purpose of this whitepaper is to help you think more intuitively about the opportunities that well-considered, well-placed marketing can bring to your law firm and to help you focus on meticulously creating a blueprint: your marketing plan. Before diving in, however, it's imperative that you weigh your options and choose the marketing medium that will most benefit your firm.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Although lawyers are often practitioners of business in addition to executing the law, they usually learn very little about marketing best practices while in law school. In many cases, the lone business-related course a law student takes will be one centered on bookkeeping. However, with increasing (and increasingly complex) regulations in the public and private sector, the demand for lawyers with a high degree of business acumen has increased dramatically.

Harvard Law School is one of the first to have acknowledged the need for more enterprising lawyers. Says Dean Martha Minow, "To assist clients or even to launch entrepreneurial ventures of their own, lawyers need to understand and use the tools and skills involved in growing and running a business." Of course, before being able to implement those skills and tools to effectively market a law firm and its services, lawyers need to define what marketing actually is.

According to the American Marketing Association, marketing is, "The activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." If that sounds like an amorphous collection of intentionally vague key terms, that's because it is. To simplify, the essence of marketing is communication. It's a conversation meant to inform potential clients of a firm's excellence while simultaneously establishing and increasing brand awareness, all while tracking pertinent data to continually sharpen the provider-consumer dialogue and expand upon new lines of discussion. Of course, any definition of the thing itself is useless without structure, hence, the need for a marketing plan.

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CHOOSING YOUR MEDIUM

Most markets have a handful of “TV lawyers,” several “radio lawyers,” and possibly even a few “newspaper lawyers,” although we are seeing less and less of these as print media continues to decline. These firms choose a medium and spend exorbitant amounts to corner the market in that specific area. However, this outbound strategy can become extremely expensive and will ultimately be dominated by the largest firms with the willingness to spend. It’s not a strategy for every firm by any means, but each market can support a handful of firms taking this approach.

Digital marketing, on the other hand, provides firms of all sizes with the appropriate tools to control who is receiving information, how they are accessing that information, and how they are interacting with it. (In fact, 96% of potential clients use online search to gather legal advice.) This allows for a more targeted approach based on clearly defined market segments and tactics that connect relevant messaging with the proper audience. Once you understand the

demographic makeup of your primary audience, you can begin working toward developing a holistic strategy.


Additionally, digital marketing provides more territories to target and powerful, effective tools to test, track, analyze, and revise your efforts. Not only is digital marketing more efficient, interactive, and scalable than outbound marketing, but in most instances, it is far more cost-effective, as it allows you to alter your budget in real time according to constantly updated information.

Before you can begin to track your marketing campaigns, however, you will first need to implement them. And before you can do that, you will need to create a practical, relatable, and reviewable marketing plan that takes into account your firm’s mission statement, available budget, and desired objectives. You will need to set your sights on establishing attainable, scalable goals for your firm.




96%

OF POTENTIAL
CLIENTS USE
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TO GATHER
LEGAL ADVICE.



“EFFECTIVE
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TARGET PRACTICE

One of the keys to developing an effective, achievable marketing plan is to first establish a target and work to set your sights within defined parameters. Most attorneys have a vision of what they want their firm to be known for and how to achieve that reputation, even if that vision is solely in the abstract.

Using the simplest terms, those abstract ideas need to be put on paper in a brainstorming session. Don't worry about the wording; just focus on documenting the key concepts. Once those abstract ideas have been transferred into the tangible, you can begin to define certain goals that you would like your firm to achieve.


As you identify and target your goals, keep in mind that your marketing efforts will impact nearly every service that your firm is capable of delivering and will likewise impact any potential clients. It might sound silly, but you will need to determine what to do in the event that your marketing efforts are highly successful. It's possible that your campaigns will generate more quality leads than your firm is able to handle effectively. You should consider what you will do if a substantial increase in client base creates an immediate need to expand your infrastructure.

For these reasons, it's important that you establish scalable, realistic goals that can be adapted and augmented at any time in a marketing campaign. Generating quality leads in large numbers will actually hurt your firm if you are unable to service your clients effectively, which will also damage your reputation.

Once you have clearly defined and recorded your vision for the firm and the goals you hope to achieve through your marketing efforts, you can begin to document the areas in which you excel, why those areas are important to your target audience, and how they will help you reach your goals.

Executing a
marketing campaign
without a plan
is like building a
skyscraper without
a blueprint:

The background of the slide is a dark navy blue. In the lower half, there is a complex geometric pattern composed of various shades of blue and cyan triangles and polygons. On the right side, there are several thin, dark blue lines that appear to be part of a larger, partially visible structure, possibly representing a skyscraper or architectural framework.



a discombobulated
mess on the brink of
inevitable collapse.

IDENTIFYING YOUR PRIMARY DIFFERENTIATORS

Your potential clients likely do not know what characteristics they should be looking for in choosing an appropriate attorney; this creates a great opportunity to help educate your client base while also telling your story and emphasizing your firm's positive attributes.

In doing so, you need to illuminate to potential clients what it is about your firm that differentiates it from (and places it above) your peers. This should be expressed as if the client were sitting directly across from you. That is, you should highlight the attributes, successes, and capabilities of your firm in a concise, conversational tone; this applies to website content, blog articles, email campaigns, PPC campaigns, and basically every element of your overall marketing

strategy.

These differentiators should be deliberately filtered into your messaging, especially throughout your blog content (which is a great place to separate yourself from your competitors, as only about 25% of firms maintain a professional blog on their website). Even if bar rules restrict you from referring to yourself as “the best,” you can steer potential clients toward reaching that conclusion through comparative discourse. For instance, you can tell the story of a case in which your attention to detail made the difference between a mediocre result and an outstanding one. Also, reviewing these cases will help you understand your strong suits as a firm and move you in the direction of your ideal client — your ideal persona.

Highlight the attributes, successes,
and capabilities of your firm in a
concise, conversational tone.

DEVELOPING PERSONAS


In addition to outlining goals and establishing differentiators, your team must also create ideal client profiles, also known as “personas.” It’s pretty hard to market to your audience without first taking the time to get to know who they are, where they live, and how they access the Internet. In order to create accurate and effective client personas, your firm must first understand your ideal clients’ circumstances, needs, and demographics as well as the opportunities your local region presents. This requires a great deal of research and a thorough understanding of what that research reveals.

Fundamentally, creating client personas is a thought exercise. It helps you and your team factor out assumptions, bias, and preconceived notions to make informed decisions based on actual data. Creating personas involves examining different variables, as well as an analysis of how those variables overlap and relate to one another. Certain age groups, ethnicities, genders, etc., are going to interact with your marketing materials in different ways. For instance, nearly 70% of those seeking legal advice use both a

smart device and a PC. Understanding your potential clients’ usage patterns will help you to customize and optimize your efforts, resulting in more traffic and better leads.

For instance, if you practice personal injury law and your firm is situated in an area where there is a great deal of commercial trucking traffic, you’ll likely want to aggressively pursue clients who have been involved in motor vehicle accidents involving commercial trucking negligence. Alternately, if you specialize in crafting wills and managing estates and live in a region that is also occupied by a large number of senior citizens, you’ll want to adjust your marketing efforts to cater to this particular age group (or their caretakers, depending on the circumstances).

What follows are three examples of client personas based on their demographics and their corresponding need for legal specialization. These sample personas should provide a great deal of insight into the needs of each client, which can help you develop your own client personas and pursue higher quality leads.



Understanding
your potential
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efforts.

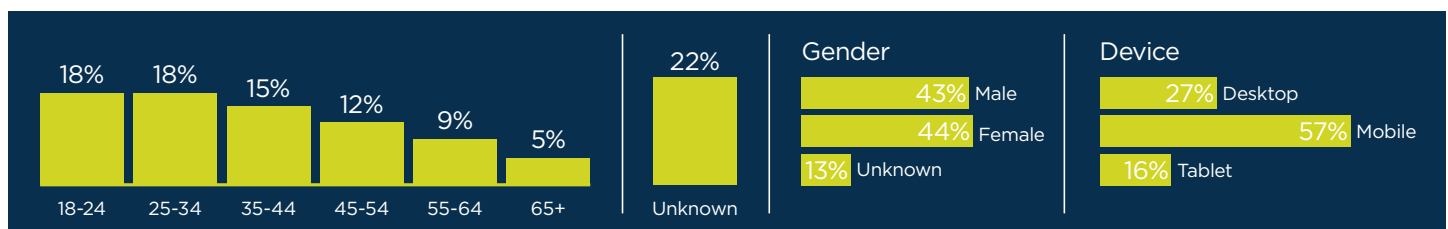
SHELLY
retired, age 58

NEED: An attorney that practices personal injury law

PERSONA

Shelly is a retired teacher living in Springfield, Massachusetts. She is 58 years old. She tries to remain active and often takes walks with her chocolate lab, Buddy. During one of their morning strolls, they encountered an imposing German shepherd without a leash or owner in sight. The animal became territorial and attacked Buddy. In her attempt to separate the two dogs, Shelly was bitten by the German shepherd. Immediately after, a couple drove up, got out of their car, and pulled the German shepherd away.

Unfortunately, the damage had already been done. Shelly suffered three puncture wounds and a large tear in her hand. The couple quickly apologized, grabbed their dog, and left the scene without sharing any of their personal information. Shelly snapped a photo of their license plate on her smartphone as the couple drove off. She then called her husband to let him know what had just happened and promptly went to the hospital to receive treatment for her injuries.



search area: Springfield, MA

search term: Dog Bite Lawyer

The information from Google AdWords above tells us that the most common individuals searching for "Dog Bite Lawyer" in and around Springfield, Massachusetts are of no clearly defined age or gender. However, the significant majority of these people are conducting their search on their smartphones or mobile devices, which helps us tailor our social media and pay-per-click campaigns to capture the largest and most targeted audience.

WILLIAM

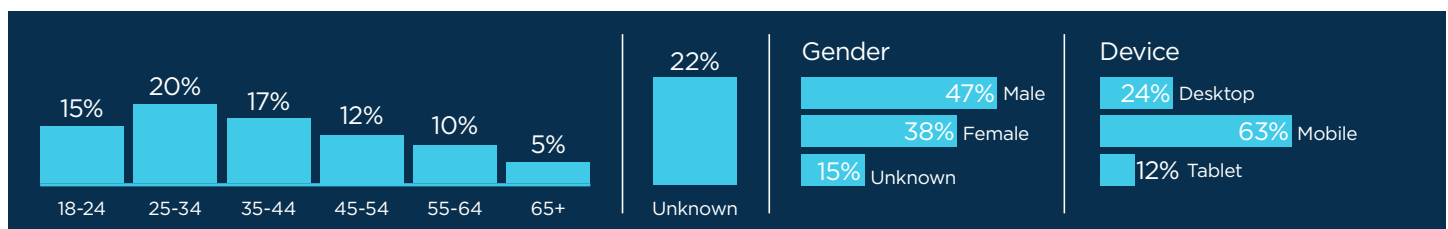
entrepreneur, age 31

NEED: An attorney that practices business law

PERSONA

Bill is a 31-year-old entrepreneur – a true blue-collar worker. He is married and has two children, but he feels like work prevents him from spending enough time with his family. His primary occupation is as a corrections officer, but during much of his free time, he builds custom furniture that he sells through his own website that he built himself. His dream is to design and build furniture as his sole source of income. A layperson uninitiated in the law, Bill is unaware of the steps he should take to register his

business or the legal pitfalls that could be lying ahead. He is willing and able to pay for legal assistance, but he feels confident that he could handle most of the work on his own. He is searching for resources that will help him get started, but he is open to the possibility of hiring the right lawyer with whom he can build a long-term relationship. He is seeking a business-savvy attorney that can steer him in the right direction from a legal perspective and also direct him toward other services he may need in the future.



search area: Colorado

search term: Business Lawyer

In the state of Colorado, the target audience for the search term “Business Lawyer” is well-represented by men aged 18-44 who are using mobile devices to conduct their queries. Those firms who fail to develop accurate personas might falsely assume that most entrepreneurs are individuals over the age of 40 who most commonly use their computers to conduct their search, which would leave them with very few leads and a declining return on investment.

REBECCA

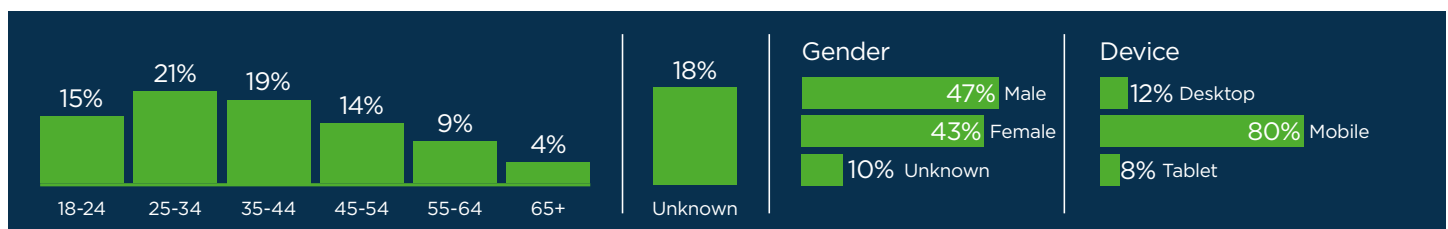
stay-at-home
mom, age 34

NEED: An attorney who works with family law and divorce

PERSONA

Rebecca lives in Raleigh, North Carolina and has been the stay-at-home mother of three children for the last 14 years. After years of “trying to make it work,” her husband Robert has moved out of the house and is seeking separation and divorce. Though Rebecca has known that this was inevitable, she always held out hope that they would be able to work things out. Rebecca has been out of work ever since giving birth to her first child, and she has very few job prospects. Robert is pushing for

a formalized agreement involving the separation of assets and debts. Rebecca has no idea if what Robert is asking for is fair. She has met with a lawyer, but she was not impressed after he made several off-hand comments about the situation. She is now searching for a lawyer that will advocate for her with understanding and compassion. This is not an easy time for her, and the last thing she wants to feel is helpless and more uncomfortable than she already is.



search area: Raleigh, NC

search term: Divorce

While there doesn't appear to be any discernible pattern between age groups and gender when it comes to divorce in Raleigh, North Carolina, the preferred research device statistics are overwhelming. If your firm isn't optimized for mobile (which 33% of legal sites are not), your Google results are going to suffer due to your negligence, which will cause you to miss out on a potentially lucrative client base.

THE BLUE- PRINT

Once you have taken steps to establish your goals, identify prime differentiators, and construct accurate personas, it's time to begin drafting your marketing plan. A marketing plan is a written strategy that outlines a course of action to achieve certain goals in distinct areas and through distinct channels. Its purpose is to communicate these goals and the subsequent plan of action that will facilitate those goals. While each individual marketing plan will contain its own unique set of tactics and objectives, they should all adhere to the following three characteristics:

PRACTICAL

RELATABLE

REVIEWABLE

THE BLUEPRINT: PRACTICAL

Your marketing plan is more than the hastily scribbled notes from a mandatory meeting or the feedback compiled from an innocuous employee questionnaire. Your marketing plan should be a carefully constructed plan of action detailing a carefully considered strategy on several fronts with contingency plans in place in case you have to deviate along the way. It's not conceptual; it's practical.

If you are planning on building a new website, there should be an overall content strategy consisting of relevant tabs and pages that are represented by wireframes (a rough design template that provides a visual representation of the placement and spacing of all forthcoming content). These wireframes should convey an outline of your intentions and objectives. Only 53% of law sites have "organized content," which leads to a negative user experience, low time spent on page, and a high bounce rate.

If you will be creating and maintaining a pay-per-click campaign (PPC), you'll need to research your competitors' ad copy, key terms, and landing pages in order to establish a foothold from the outset of launching your campaign. You'll also need to set a flexible budget that will allow you to aggressively bid for coveted search terms and place display ads on high-traffic content sites. Key term placement in the legal industry is especially expensive, and if you aren't willing to spend accordingly, you'll likely find yourself spinning your wheels.

If you would like to engage potential customers through social media, you will need to research which platforms garner the most users for your specific legal specialty. LinkedIn is the most commonly used platform, by far, with about 95% of all lawyers maintaining a profile. Given this medium's focus on professional aptitude, it is an ideal research portal for potential clients.

Instagram is an immensely popular social application, but being a visual medium structured around images (rather than discussions, educational materials, etc.), it is far less useful for legal teams than Facebook or Twitter, which can reach large swaths of potential customers and educate them regarding their particular legal needs.

Construct a plan of action.
Count on contingencies.

THE BLUEPRINT: RELATABLE

A marketing plan is about establishing clear objectives, not muddying the waters with indecipherable jargon. Keep things simple. Keep things coherent. To ensure cohesion among all elements of the team, keep marketing elements separate, let everyone know their role, and avoid drowning the content in ambiguous, complicated language.

The plan should be segmented into distinct sections focused on each unique aspect of the overall strategy. A successful plan will ensure that all of these aspects work in tandem, but for the sake of clarity and understanding, they should each comprise their own section. For instance, your email and blog directives should remain separate, even though they both exist in the content creation realm. They are sure to overlap at some point, but they serve different objectives and will likely be tailored to different audiences.

Each member of the team should have a distinct role. Copywriters write the content, designers design digital elements to engage the audience and optimize their experience, coders code the information so that it is easily scalable and provides interactive functionality, and information analyzers analyze the relevant data to help revise the plan in real time. The work of all these team members will have a great deal of influence on one another, and they should attempt to engage in productive dialogue concerning the best course of action depending on the objective.

A marketing plan isn't a term paper. The word count and man hours it takes to create the plan are irrelevant, or rather, they matter only in proportion to the actionability and understandability of the overall strategy. The length will vary depending on the scope, and in many cases will collapse under its own weight if it is too complex or too ambitious.

Remember that, above all, the marketing plan is meant to incite definitive action. Confusing the issue by turning the document into a Russian novel that is more conceptual than actionable will defeat the purpose. To help avoid this, make sure that your firm has an explicit mission statement and that all team members are familiar with this philosophy. If everyone is on the same page, you will be able to transform ideology into practice, making the marketing plan less of an abstract concept and more of a guide to success.

Keep things simple.
Keep things coherent.

THE BLUEPRINT: REVIEWABLE

The marketing plan is a living, breathing document that will exist in a constant state of revision. As such, it should be subject to regular review in order to determine which goals have been met, which ones have not, and the impact of those successes and failures. Perhaps you're meeting your goals, but it turns out that those goals were irrelevant. Perhaps you aren't meeting your goals, but that is because of external factors not accounted for in the original draft of the plan. Be open to the possibility that you have over or underestimated these goals in the initial draft and that they likely need to be updated.

A marketing plan cannot be reviewed and revised properly if the goals and objectives of the campaign are not established early on in the plan's creation. Define attainable goals and a clear course of action to achieve them along a carefully considered time frame.

Each subsection of the plan should consist of its own micro objectives that will combine to influence the macro goals of the overall plan. Once the allotted time frame expires, data must be accurately assessed in order to reevaluate the marketing plan.

People are prone to basing their marketing efforts on preconceived assumptions, and they often fail to use the data at their disposal — the infallible information that will direct them toward inevitable success. There must be someone on the team that recognizes the benefits of A/B testing (testing at least two variables within a single campaign to determine efficacy) and who is adept at deciphering analytics to provide appropriate feedback. Listen to this person; they rely on the numbers, and the numbers rarely lie.

A man with a beard, wearing a light blue blazer and dark trousers, stands in a modern office, pointing with a red marker at a whiteboard. The whiteboard displays a flowchart with several boxes and arrows. Three other people (two men and one woman) are seated around the whiteboard, looking at it attentively. The office has large windows in the background.

Define attainable goals and a clear course of action.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

In all, developing your digital marketing plan should consist of a five-pronged approach. First, you need to decide that digital marketing is indeed the best route for your firm (rather than attempting to outbid the competition for television, radio, or print spots). Once you've made that decision, it's time to sit down with the proper stakeholders to establish attainable and scalable goals and objectives. With those goals and objectives in mind, you'll need to determine your prime differentiators — what can your firm

offer potential clients that most other firms cannot? Next, you'll have to conduct a great deal of research to determine the perfect persona(s) for your firm's capacity and area of specialization, including the demographics and preferred devices and browsers in your service region. And finally, when constructing the digital marketing plan itself, bear in mind that the document should be practical, relatable, and reviewable.

Once you've completed your marketing plan, it's time to move on to execution. Adhere to the guidelines and objectives you established early on in the process, but don't just sit back and enjoy the view — you have to continue to refine the plan based on the data. This means that you will have to deviate from tactics that are under-performing or emphasize certain strategies that are performing especially well. By consistently and accurately analyzing the data at your disposal, you can continue to optimize every element of your campaign.

We said earlier that developing your marketing plan is a lot like developing a blueprint. However, we should amend that statement and instead liken your marketing efforts to that of a city planner. There are myriad elements at play in this process, and each one will affect the others; however, they should overlap in seamless fluidity. By taking comprehensive measures to construct a solid foundation, you can continue to update and augment your marketing efforts, resulting in real-time adjustments, optimal lead generation, and satisfied clients, which will ultimately lead to a sterling reputation, iconic brand awareness, and increased customer retention.

Adhere to the guidelines and objectives you established, but don't just sit back and enjoy the view — refine the plan based on the data.

ABOUT LAFLEUR LEGAL MARKETING



If your firm is looking for the ideal marketing partner to help you construct, implement, and optimize your marketing plan, we would love to hear from you. We are a legal marketing agency dedicated to servicing our clients with honesty and transparency. We specialize in content strategy, cutting-edge design, and marketing automation. If you would like to discuss your marketing needs further, please call us at (888) 222-1512 or visit our website to learn more about how we can help your firm expand your client base and strengthen your brand.

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