



Select 'Print' in your browser menu to print this document.

©2006 Texas Lawyer Online

Page printed from: <http://www.texaslawyer.com>

[Back to Article](#)

---

## The Elements of a First-Rate Firm Web Site

Marc Watts and Miles Holsworth  
Texas Lawyer  
09-25-2006

Developing a Web site requires teamwork, research, time and money. It also involves determining how to entice visitors to stay on the site, how to use and showcase the many resources available, and how to keep the site fresh after creating it.

Locke Liddell & Sapp spent the better part of a year working to determine what makes a good firm Web site. In addition to the traditional Web site features, our new site includes an extranet, which allows clients with a password to enter a secure, Web-based workspace where they can collaborate with attorneys on documents; a dashboard on the home page with different portals so groups of users, such as clients and in-house counsel, can quickly go to a page that meets their needs; photographs of firm attorneys to showcase the people, offices and communities the firm serves; and seven videos targeted to specific users.

Here are some of the lessons we learned from the process.

\* *Use the Web site to brand the firm.* The site's design should be neither cookie-cutter nor extreme; differentiate the firm from competitors without departing too much from what other firms are doing.

Locke Liddell decided to work with two different vendors, a tech firm plus a branding-and-design firm, which offered two different perspectives and skill sets. Doing that allowed us to combine a cutting-edge, back-end design with Web site architecture and user-friendly content.

Remember that rolling out a new Web site is an opportune time to increase branding of the firm by showcasing a new logo, vibrant colors and personalities through the extensive use of firm-specific photographs and videos.

Make sure to work as a team, communicating frequently up and down the chain of command, as well as horizontally, during the redesign process. Clearly establish expectations and what the firm requires vendors to deliver, so that vendors work collaboratively to help the firm establish its ultimate goals and objectives.

\* *Make the site simple for visitors to navigate.* Use database technology with relational data to make the site easier to manage. New technology eliminates the outdated process of assigning items one step at a time to a specific location. Instead, it allows Web masters to go to one place and assign content to multiple spots.

Cross-link relevant items to all locations on the site where they should appear; this will make the site current across the board. Also, look into a modular architecture that allows the firm to continue adding to the site without hurting the integrity of what is already there. For instance, such technology allows the Web master to add a foreign translation module without altering the Web site's core module.

### Target Users

\* *Meet demand.* Do the relevant and necessary research to determine what the firm's targeted users want and how the firm can provide it for them. For instance, eye-tracking software uses infrared technology and dots to show which part of the Web site first attracts the attention of a panel of users. That is helpful information to have in deciding where to put items on the dashboard.

The site should bring relevant information to targeted users in a way that is easy to navigate. It's critical that users be able to drill down into the site's content without losing sight of where they are or how to get back to where they were. Make the look and feel of the site comfortable and consistent. Offer alternatives to the users for example, break attorney bios into segmented parts so visitors to the site can quickly read specific information, but still provide the opportunity for visitors to view a lengthy bio if so desired. Use attorney pictures to your advantage, allowing users to quickly put a name with a face.

Take advantage of ways to integrate users into the site by providing a chat room, calendar sharing, online registration for special events, distribution of firm newsletters and other information through a registered process and alumni registration. Focus on your targeted users and what will be most helpful to them, such as providing an avenue whereby law students can quickly read biographical information of on-campus recruiters and find alumni from their school who practice law at the firm.

\* *Create realistic budgets and plans.* Doing research, putting the proper team in place, and designing and creating a Web site will take a minimum of six months. Create a budget that includes all expenses, such as research, brand design, photography and videos — characteristics that establish the firm's brand and are specific to the firm's market. Make sure the proper staff is in place not only to build the new site, but also to maintain it and add enhancements for the future.

\* *Make it fun.* A new, cutting-edge Web site will generate excitement among clients and attorneys, and provide a forum to remind the community of all the qualities that make your firm special.

*Marc Watts serves as a member of Locke Liddell & Sapp's management committee, managing partner of the firm's Houston office and co-chairman of the firm's branding committee. Miles Holsworth of Dallas is the firm's executive director, and he oversees management of the firm's Web site, [www.lockeliddell.com](http://www.lockeliddell.com).*