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Establishing A Web Presence After A Merger

Edwards Wildman Showcases Expanding Capabilities

By **Gina Carriuolo and Jennifer O'Leary Cathell**

Merger activities typically disrupt “business as usual” and result in more questions than answers. This was particularly true when the law firms of Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLP and Wildman Harrold Allen & Dixon LLP merged in 2011 — forming a global and geographically diverse AmLaw 100 law firm with 14 offices in the U.S., Europe and Asia. Edwards Wildman’s marketing efforts, specifically our online and digital Web presence, were quickly devoted to achieving a cohesive “one voice, one brand, one solution” approach, as we set out to redesign our website and digital persona.

A 12-person website committee, including marketers, business de-

velopment professionals, IT, lawyers and firm leadership, all united to not only make the website redesign happen, but also make it successful. Based on our intimate knowledge of the firm’s digital marketing efforts, experience with design and brand management, and a long list of “must haves” for future website roll-outs, we set out to essentially “reintroduce” Edwards Wildman through the website redesign.

We partnered with One North Interactive, an established interactive and digital agency for law firms and other professional services organizations, to deliver a comprehensive Web solution. We sought to implement an aggressive eight-month website project spanning strategic planning, design, technical architecture, testing and overall implementation.

Our primary mission with the site redesign was to create a user experience focused on building and demonstrating value, by:

- Targeting and communicating with a broader audience. The merged firm boasted new capabilities and expertise that needed to be highlighted;
- Representing one unified brand, beyond logos and colors, and brand promise. Our packaging needed some work and a clear strategic direction;
- Competing and growing in a global and dynamic market for legal services. Edwards Wildman is an established 125-year-old firm

with the capabilities and bandwidth to address clients’ increasingly complex legal challenges. The redesign needed to reflect that ability and commitment;

- Providing more comprehensive search functionality and improving overall site navigation; and
- Leveraging existing social media and facilitating the use of other new media. Unifying our social media presence and integrating separate firm blogs and content sources into the main website.

Of all the various objectives, branding the merged firm in a unique and integrated way and demonstrating its global expertise were paramount to a successful redesign.

More than six months following the launch of our new site, we’ve been able to realize significant changes in website traffic. New content, enhanced through cross-promotion, is driving interest in the firm’s wide array of blogs. Web visitors are able to tap into a deeper knowledge base and, more importantly, find related resources based on specific interests and legal needs in one central, easy-to-access location. Some of the new site functions and features are listed below.

EXPERIENCE MAP

The information we display on our site with regard to our lawyers’ work for specific clients, matters and regions is perhaps the most powerful content presented on the site. Using

Gina Carriuolo is Director of Marketing at Edwards Wildman, responsible for the firm’s marketing, branding and electronic outreach functions. She has led numerous mergers, location openings and two complete rebranding, name changing efforts by setting and implementing strategic priorities, gaining consensus among all firm functions and balancing resources and needs. **Jennifer O’Leary Cathell** is eMarketing, Design & Brand Manager at Edwards Wildman. She conceptualizes, produces and enforces the visual identity for the firm’s brand. She oversees the creation, design and production of all Edwards Wildman marketing materials, including websites, blogs and videos.

the Google Maps Application Program Interface (API), we dynamically plot points around the world map to illustrate the firm's global experience. The pins open to tell stories of where we've been, and what we've done, proving that it's cross-border skills and expertise — not the physical location of a lawyer — that drives global client success. Consistently ranked among the top five pages viewed on our site, this unique and visually appealing map encourages visitors to click in and explore.

FLUID, TOUCH-FRIENDLY RESPONSIVE DESIGN

In a site without mega-menus, each landing page is designed to create a bold, engaging experience regardless of the medium. Scaling images and site elements allow visitors to move from desktop to tablet with ease.

NEW SEARCH CAPABILITIES

The intuitive search function is a prominent component of the new site. Our site search capabilities have helped us to transform the process of searching from being a purely functional task to an experience of discovery. Categorized results allow a visitor to easily narrow the result options to meet their specific needs. Search results start with a clean, relevancy-based listing. Users can apply section filters to narrow results.

An additional layer of dynamic information, such as the most relevant activity for the search, including lawyers, services, blog posts, insights and news are included to the right of the main search results. This sidebar approach allows us to preserve relevancy in a clean listing, while still presenting some of the rich information that's relative to a user's search query. Another search function seen on all biographies is "Search me on this site." This search allows the visitor to click in and view everything on the entire site

related to the individual they are looking to learn more about.

BLOG INTEGRATION

The user is no longer required to access and consume our blog content separately from the firm's main site, as all of the Edwards Wildman blogs are now presented alongside other insights on our main site. This helps present the whole picture of a practice or an individual's thought leadership efforts. On practice and biography pages, our blog posts are showcased as insights, but are also more prominently displayed in a "news ticker" like format, bringing the visitor's eye to the most recent and relevant topics of information. The feature brings life to our descriptions and helps to showcase our lawyers' understanding of industry news, and current events.

FILTERABLE EXPERIENCE

Most law firm sites include all levels of experience and all related details on attorney bio pages, but we customized the way we present this information. We allow users to filter an attorney's experience based on what's most relevant to their needs. This feature gives our lawyers to ability to showcase the depth of their practice without making it difficult for the user to find what is of importance to them.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

The site launch last fall gave our team the opportunity to reintroduce the online presence to staff, clients and strategic alliance partners. We sent personal notes to employees highlighting site improvements and how they could contribute content and communicate suggested changes. In addition, we paid close attention to website usage analytics — how are folks using the site? Which pages are the most popular? Are the videos being watched? To what extent? These insights into Web user behavior have helped us tweak the

site to make navigation and information consumption as easy as possible. Our blog readership has increased at least four-fold since we integrated all sites and have made it very simple to access the blogs from one location. We have also been able to take advantage of the improved search functionality and get a better sense of what people are looking for and, more importantly, how quickly they are finding what they need.

Beyond website monitoring tools and analytics programs, word-of-mouth and direct feedback from firm management, our marketing peers, industry analysts and even competitors has been invaluable in understanding how well the re-designed site is performing in the context of increasing client access, interaction and overall service.

Since the re-launch, site visits have increased significantly, surpassing initial projections, based on a very measured and methodical roll-out of new features and functions. The largest traffic increase was registered on the firm's biography pages, exceeding 500% versus other features.

The new site is a fluid work in progress and will continue to evolve as the content needs and information access requirements of both our internal users and clients' progress. It's already helped us to celebrate our firm's successes, validate the experience of our lawyers and practices, and demonstrate our full global breath of activity. We're eager to continue to track both its success, and the additional benefits that it brings the firm.