Marketing & Technology

4 Tech Tools for Marketing in 2021
Marketing Planning for Success
Website Best Practices for 2021
Using Google to Generate Leads
Why Pay Attention to Social Media?
On Your Website, Content is (Still) King
Twitter Fleets: the Future of Legal Tweets?

2021: The Year of Zero AR
Why We Mentor Our Associates
Dealing with Distressed Businesses & Catastrophic Losses During COVID
5 Key Legal Trends for Family Lawyers
Finding Hidden Assets in Divorce Cases
Legal Fatigue/PTSD During COVID-19
What You Can Learn from Client Tax Returns

www.FamilyLawyerMagazine.com

Got More Clients During COVID? See page 51
1. Strategic Thinking
“They will help you grow your business into the future before you even know what the future is.”
~ Joy Feinberg, Feinberg Sharma, P.C., Illinois

2. Website Designs for Family Lawyers
“You’ve been extremely patient, responsive, and knowledgeable.”
~ Melanie K. Reichert, Broyles, Kight & Ricafort, P.C., Indiana

3. Producing Results
“I am sorry I did not use them sooner... even in the middle of the pandemic, new cases keep coming. I now need to greatly increase the size of my staff!”
~ Maria Cognetti, Cognetti Law Group, Pennsylvania

4. Knowledge of the Divorce Market
“It is quickly apparent that working with a firm devoted to promoting family law practices has its advantages.”
~ Robert Stevens, Clark & Stevens, South Carolina

5. Marketing Strategy and Program
“I have worked with Divorce Marketing Group for the past five years... to develop and implement an effective marketing strategy tailored to meet our marketing objectives... I highly recommend them.”
~ Moura Robertson, Doerner, Saunders, Daniel & Anderson, L.L.P., Oklahoma

Contact Divorce Marketing Group Today to Ask How We Can Help You Market Your Practice.
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Stay Focused and Plan for Success

In times of uncertainty, it’s easy to get distracted. Those who stay focused, plan, and adapt as they go will rise above the rest, even before the dust settles.

The pundits say a new normal is coming – but what about now? The world is changing, with or without the pandemic. The world has been changing for family lawyers since I started working with them over 25 years ago. In 1995, we founded a publishing company, launching Divorce Magazine and DivorceMag.com. As the world changed, we morphed into the only marketing agency dedicated to helping family lawyers grow their practice.

Technology and marketing have played an ever-increasing role in client service and practice management for many years. In 2020, their importance was magnified a thousandfold. Internet and cloud-based services became essential due to social distancing. This includes software and apps for case management, interactions among employees, with the courts, and with clients and prospective clients. Those who have embraced new technology and online marketing are industry leaders, and they are reaping the benefits now.

In 2020, visits to DivorceMag.com increased by 128% over 2019; the majority of that increase happened between May and December. On January 2, 2021, we had a record day in traffic to the website. This is tangible proof that your prospective clients are increasingly looking for divorce information and lawyers online, and this will be part of the new normal.

Did your business increase in 2020? Are you poised to get a share of the increased business through the internet for years to come?

This issue offers articles that will help you stay focused and plan for your success by embracing marketing and technology. For example:
• Marketing Planning for Success (p. 10),
• 4 Tech Tools for Marketing Your Family Law Practice in 2021 (p. 24),
• Using Google to Generate Leads for Your Practice (p. 28),
• Why Lawyers Should Pay Attention to Social Media (p. 32),
• Website Best Practices for 2021 (p. 20).

To help you take care of yourself, your clients, and your practice, check out:
• 5 Key Legal Trends for Family Lawyers in 2021 (p. 6)
• 2021: The Year of Zero AR (p. 14),
• What Family Lawyers can Learn from Client Tax Returns (p. 19),
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With all that’s happened in the past year, many family lawyers have struggled to meet the shifting needs of their clients, and these challenges have continued as the coronavirus pandemic persists across the US. Much of the circumstances for 2021 remain uncertain – especially the lasting impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on how we think about the delivery of legal services.

Most family lawyers have already adjusted how they operate their legal practice in some form or another, and much of this shift has seen firms adopt more online cloud technologies to support secure remote work – both among staff and with clients.

What many family lawyers are also realizing is that these shifts will be permanent in many ways. For example, in 2020, 83% of family lawyers were meeting with clients virtually and said they will continue to do so in the future, even after the social impacts of the pandemic subside.

These are just some of the findings from Clio’s 2020 Legal Trends Report, which is based on aggregated and anonymized data from tens of thousands of legal professionals in the US. The report has become an industry benchmark for understanding what’s impacting the legal profession and how lawyers should be adjusting their practices to see better returns for their business.

1. Lawyers Need to Maximize Their Client Opportunities

According to Clio’s ongoing research into the impact of COVID-19, compared to other practice areas, family lawyers may have fared slightly better through the early months of the pandemic, but caseloads in the second half of 2020 have been about average.

Although caseloads have largely returned to baseline levels, many law firms have seen an ongoing negative impact in their monthly billings, which have remained about 6% to 9% below year-over-year monthly averages compared to 2019. Many factors related to the court system remain out of the lawyer’s control, and many potential clients remain unsure about whether or not to pursue their legal matters.

Given these circumstances, family lawyers should be looking at how to maximize their opportunities in what remains a potentially volatile market. There are a couple of goals to focus on here. The first is to build the types of potential client opportunities that will turn into profitable work once the circumstances allow for it. Clients that may be holding off on their legal matters will eventually seek assistance, and the lawyers who have been keeping abreast of the situation are the ones that will come across as the most knowledgeable and trustworthy.

The second goal should be to identify and support the types of opportunities that can still be pursued. While many people indicated that they are postponing legal work, the data suggests that many are still willing to pursue these matters with their lawyer.

2. Clients Are Seeking Tech-Enabled Legal Services

Clients have grown more accustomed to technology during the pandemic and...
are using it more. Data from the Legal Trends Report indicates:

• 58% of clients say technology is more important to them now than before the pandemic
• 69% prefer to share documents electronically
• 56% prefer video conferencing over a phone call
• 65% prefer to pay through electronic payments

This shift is significant because it signals that people have changed their behaviors as they adapted to the pandemic restrictions, which in turn shapes their expectations for working with businesses and professional service providers.

As clients adopt new technologies, they also grow more reliant on the ease, convenience, and time-saving benefits of solutions like video conferencing software. The fact that we can connect face-to-face without leaving our home or office vastly reduces commute times and allows more flexibility within the context of other personal and professional commitments. The same advantages apply to paperless workflows, which are fast, easy, and help keep a clear record of communications.

Client-Centered Law Firm Design Is Key to Driving New Business

As client expectations shift, family lawyers should be especially aware of how these needs have changed. Being able to meet these needs is key to securing new clients and ensuring client satisfaction. This is the idea behind client-centered law firm design, which requires designing your services based on the needs of your clients. This goes beyond any considerations regarding the actual outcome of a client matter, and focuses entirely on the experience of working with the lawyer.

When potential clients think about the hireability of a lawyer, positive reviews and referrals are key. How are lawyers to earn these positive reviews and referrals? The data suggests most people are looking for more flexibility and transparency in the overall pricing and cost of legal services, and the traditional method of meeting in a commercial office space is at the bottom of their list of priorities.

Consumers are seeking a different format for legal services — and the innovations lawyers implement will be relevant both now and after the pandemic.

Technology Adoption Leads to Increased Revenue

Clio’s research compared caseload volumes and revenue collection of firms using certain types of technology solutions against those not using them. For example, Clio’s analysis shows that in 2020, firms that used client portals had up to 17% more cases than those that did not — and were projected to earn $37,000 more in revenue per lawyer.

A few points stand out here. First, the revenue advantages that firms have seen with these client portal solutions were extremely strong during the first months of the pandemic. Firms using these technologies were much better prepared to manage the transition to remote online working conditions during the initial lockdowns and social distancing recommendations.

Second, the revenue advantages of these technology-focused law firms have only increased since the start of the pandemic; these technologies continue to support business continuity and the types of revenue-generating activities that drive firm earnings.

Virtual Legal Services Should Be Part of Every Family Law Firm’s 2021 Roadmap

Our data makes it clear that clients are less interested in meeting in person and are more equipped to receive invoices and pay online, as well as communicate via video conferencing and other forms of online communication. Family lawyers who adopt a cloud-first approach to managing their firms will benefit from it in the coming months and years.

When envisioning the future of your legal practice, you must know that the infrastructure standards for technology have evolved in a way that has made it more flexible, more secure, and easier to set up. Building a versatile family law practice will ensure that you are equipped to support clients both virtually and in-person, while also supporting secure remote access for staff as well.

Bryce Tarling is a Senior Content Strategist at Clio, and a member of the research team involved in publishing the annual Legal Trends Report. An avid learner, he strives to dig deep into the underlying indicators that can help businesses thrive. To read the full report, visit www.clio.com/resources/legal-trends/2020-report.
Cohesive Marketing Plan, Execution, and Consultation.

Successful marketing begins with your business goals and a sound, custom-designed, and well-executed marketing plan. Few family law firms have the time and marketing expertise to plan and implement their marketing program.

Focus on Your Practice. Trust the Marketing to Us.

You are bombarded with marketing offers and often make ad hoc decisions in between handling cases. As our client, you will benefit from our team’s marketing expertise and our highly effective products and marketing services – all at very competitive rates.
**Better Websites**

*Media Interview/Exposure to 4,500,000+ People*

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Be quoted, interviewed, or published on Divorcemag.com, FamilyLawyerMagazine.com, Divorcedmoms.com and our social media pages that reach millions of divorcing people.

*Own a Better Website with Unique Content*
We build user-friendly websites with the right design and highly relevant content, optimized for the right prospect and search engines.

*Have More Referrals Regularly*
Keep in touch with your referral sources on a regular basis through the use of our monthly newsletters and have us update your company’s social media pages.

*Online & Offline Advertising*

*Stand Out from Other Family Lawyers*
We will help you articulate how you are different from your peers and be chosen by your desired prospective clients through proper branding.

*Elevate Your Online Reputation*
Have you Googled your name lately? Do you dominate the first page of the search results and show up as the expert?

*Generate Leads Through Google Advertising Programs*
Attract the right kind of prospective clients through Google Pay Per Click and Pay Per Lead Programs managed effectively by us.

*Ready-Made Content for Your Website*

Family Lawyer Magazine, DivorceMag.com & DivorcedMoms.com
Marketing Has Changed. Have You?

Twenty years ago, when we first told family lawyers they needed websites, they looked at us as if we were from Mars. Twelve years ago, when we told them they needed to be on social media, many family lawyers told us that they would not be caught dead on Facebook. Ten years ago, when we started doing podcasts and shooting videos for clients, most family lawyers didn’t see the need. Those family lawyers who embraced those new marketing ideas have continued to reap the benefits of being an early adopter.

Technology has accelerated change. In 2020, there were 2 billion websites, although “only” 400 million of them were active; there are currently 43 million podcast episodes; Youtube, the second-most-visited website in the world, has 2 billion monthly active users (that’s about one-third of the entire Internet!); and Facebook, with over 2.7 billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2020, is the biggest social network worldwide. Guess what? This matters more now to your prospective clients than ever – particularly during and post-COVID.

Today, if you don’t have a great website or a social media presence, you are pretty much viewed as a dinosaur. If you have podcasts and videos, then you are seen as progressive and relevant. But it is no longer enough to only have these. While technology has created more options, it has also made marketing more confusing and complicated for family lawyers who do not have the skills, inclination, or time to devote to promoting their practice.

Marketing Planning for Success

Failing to plan is planning to fail. Rapid changes in technology are generating a multitude of new marketing opportunities – which also makes marketing more complicated, and planning more important. Here are tips for growing your business in 2021 and beyond.

By Martha Chan, Family Lawyer Marketing Expert
**Marketing Under Pressure**

At Divorce Marketing Group, many of our clients come to us for websites because their competitors have better websites than they do. Others need to have their existing websites redesigned because they are terribly outdated in looks, user friendliness, and technology. Many do not realize their content desperately needs updating as well. Some dip their toes into marketing because their business is not doing well, or they fear they are not getting their share of the growth in divorce since COVID. They now want a Facebook page or to place some advertising on our websites DivorceMag.com or DivorcedMoms.com or a Google advertising program created for them.

**Ad Hoc Marketing**

Many family law firms practice “ad hoc marketing”: they try out different things once or twice sporadically. These efforts include PPC advertising, search engine optimization (SEO), writing blog posts, directory advertising, etc. Mostly, they try something because a salesperson contacted them or they received a seemingly irresistible email offer from an unknown person (normally from India or the Philippines) telling them they could be on page one of Google search results within two weeks.

When there is no game plan, no strategy, and no business goals, success is unlikely.

**Poor Choice of Service Providers**

Some lawyers discover from their consultation with us that they have been paying far too much for far too long to have their website hosted or updated. Sometimes lawyers have poured their marketing dollars down the drain because they don’t know how to screen for legitimate and effective providers. We have a client who paid $100 for a click on Google; we brought it down to $3. Unfortunately, their former provider did not know how to market family lawyers.

**So You Have a Website…**

Many family law firms think that once they have a website, their work is done and they do not have to worry about it anymore. There is no strategy for growing traffic to the website or updating the content on a regular basis. Google does not like websites with stagnant content, and visitors will leave websites that offer no resources or are difficult to navigate, especially on a cell phone. If you have a website, you need a plan to add new content to it frequently — and these days, consumers often choose easily consumable content, such as videos and podcasts, over text articles.

**How’s That Facebook Post Coming Along?**

Many of our clients ask us to build them company social media pages but do not invest in continuous posts on their Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter accounts. They believe they can handle it in-house — but 95% of the time, no posts will be added until they ask us to take over posting for them.

**Invest in Creating an Impactful Marketing Plan for Your Law Firm Annually**

You have probably heard the saying: “Failing to plan is planning to fail.”

When you create a marketing plan, you need to:
1. Define the prospective clients and cases you desire.
2. Compose your marketing positioning statement to clearly identify the top three reasons why your desired clients should hire you vs some other lawyer.
3. Develop your strategy and business goals.
4. Define and implement your action plan.

More and more of our clients have taken our advice to do two-year marketing plans. Why? So they can focus on their practice knowing they have allocated their marketing budget effectively and that their marketing is being taken care of.

We highly recommend you work with a marketing agency that can help you differentiate yourself from other family lawyers, create a marketing strategy and plan based on your business goals, and execute the plan by utilizing the latest techniques and technologies.

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1. [www.hostingtribunal.com/blog/how-many-websites](http://www.hostingtribunal.com/blog/how-many-websites)

**Martha Chan is a marketing expert for family lawyers. She is a co-owner and vice president of marketing for Family Lawyer Magazine, Divorce Magazine, DivorcedMoms.com, and Divorce Marketing Group – a one-stop marketing agency dedicated to promoting family lawyers and divorce professionals. [www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com](http://www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com)**

**Related Articles**

**Gaining Market Share During & After COVID-19: 3 Steps To Take Now**

Family lawyers willing to adopt new ways of thinking and to follow these three steps can grow their practices and gain market share both during and after COVID-19. [www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/gaining-market-share-during-after-covid-19](http://www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/gaining-market-share-during-after-covid-19)

**15 Signs You Are Throwing Your Marketing Money Away**

Stop throwing your marketing money down the drain and start looking into the most effective ways to market your family law practice. [www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/throwing-marketing-money-away](http://www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/throwing-marketing-money-away)
The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted most business values, depending on the valuation date and type of business, as revenues significantly decreased in 2020. The pandemic has also affected investment properties: in many states, unemployed tenants cannot pay rent and cannot be evicted due to COVID. These uncertainties impact all financial aspects of a divorce – from property division to support.

Tracy Farryl Katz, Jason Naimi, and Briggs Stahl shine a light on the challenges divorce and family law practitioners continue to face during this pandemic, and offer creative solutions to help settle cases.

Tracy Farryl Katz: When we talk about distressed businesses and catastrophic losses, there are essentially three large areas of asset classes that we deal with: business valuations, real estate holdings, and investment portfolios. Let’s start with the meat and potatoes: business valuations.

Briggs Stahl: When valuing a business during COVID, you have three choices. One, if this a business that has been affected substantially by the pandemic or other distressing agent, you can value the business before the distress or catastrophic loss. Two, you can wait until the distressing agent has gone (six months to a year – hopefully no longer) and then look at the effect on the business for this period of time. Three, you can develop a value estimate now by trying to estimate the effect that COVID is going to have on the business. You have two choices when...
creating that estimate: using either a discounted cash flow approach and models for that first year, or using some kind of cap earnings method with a component added or subtracted for the change in the value of the business.

The next question is how are you going to settle this case once you have a value. Especially if you’re deferring the valuation of the business, the non-business-owner spouse may have to become something of a business partner until the company recovers. Are you going to have to establish a compensation level for that spouse in lieu of equitable distribution and alimony?

Another creative way to settle this is to fix a formula based on company performance over the next two to five years, so there’s some percentage payout. I have seen alimony payments structured as a base amount and a sliding scale: reducing alimony in a bad year and increasing it in a good one.

You may also want to consider requiring a minimum amount, or a down payment, with a longer-term payment plan.

Whatever we do to get a payout for our client is going to affect the cash flow from that business – and ultimately, that’s going to affect the business owner’s ability to pay alimony and/or child support. You may also have to look at some form of COVID discount, either a fixed or flat amount or a specific percentage off the top, as you’re doing the payments.

I’ve also had cases where the business’ income and value increased, not only during COVID but in other catastrophic situations as well. I’m based in Florida, and I was doing a business valuation for a roofing contractor when Hurricane Sally hit in May. Then three hurricanes hit in June. You can imagine the increase in business for a roofing contract supplier with four hurricanes! We basically did a hurricane premium: we looked at the extra money he made in that one year and developed a percentage to apply in the equitable distribution for the non-business spouse. The argument was that it was a passive issue: he did not do anything active to cause the hurricanes.

The same kind of application would apply to a COVID discount. You really have two choices: you can either make a one-time adjustment, or you’re going to have to do some kind of discounted cash flow.

**Tracy:** When we talk about your ex-spouse becoming your business partner, let’s not forget these people are not getting divorced because they want to spend more time together. Making a spouse your business partner isn’t the easiest solution, but it’s sometimes the only solution in a cash-strapped household.

**Briggs:** I agree. You also want to make sure the courts are going to be retaining jurisdiction in these areas. You don’t want to file one of these agreements and not have some way to go back into court if issues develop. Include some contingent consideration provisions in the agreement to review financials and make adjustments at a future date.

The provisions need to protect the out-spouse – whether it’s the right to review financials or maybe a seat on the board. I know that’s not going to be popular. And where you’ve got longer term payouts, what kind of security are you going to have? Are you going to hold the stock in escrow? Are you going to do some kind of debt filings, or some kind of UCC filing? How is that going to affect loan commitments of the business? You must be aware of those issues while crafting the settlement agreement.

If the out-spouse is your client, you need to look at things like the capital expenditures, and how you are going to allow for those new debts and compensation, especially for the out-spouse. I’ve seen the business owner’s new girlfriend or boyfriend suddenly become a very highly paid employee in the successor business.

Now over to Jason to talk about some of the real estate issues.

**Jason Naimi:** We’re talking about how to deal with distressed businesses in a pandemic situation. The irony is that in most of this country, real estate is actually hot right now. It’s a seller’s market. I think that’s for two reasons. First, because of the pandemic, borrowing money right now is cheap: we’re seeing interest rates as low as 2.6%. Many people are thinking, “I can sell my home and get maximum value (or near-maximum value) right now. Then I can either buy something immediately, or hold off and rent for a year and buy when the prices come down at low interest rates.”

That means they can upgrade their housing. Here in Las Vegas, we...
COVID-19 turned 2020 upside down for every type of business, and family lawyers are no exception. In fact, you may find business is booming during these times. But your process on managing and collecting payment may have been forced to change while living through a move to remote offices.

Even before the pandemic, law firms had a problem with their Accounts Receivable (AR). According to Clio’s 2020 Legal Trends Report, law firm collection rates averaged 88% in 2019. Our own surveys revealed that far too many firms do not know their collection rate – and that’s a problem.

Fortunately, TimeSolv has developed a cutting-edge feature that allows you to receive payment on hundreds of invoices in seconds, making it easier for you to receive payment and reduce your AR to zero.

Decreasing AR and Increasing Profits

Let’s look at what the average law firm could do to decrease AR and increase profits this year.

1. Accept electronic payments. 65% of customers prefer to pay electronically, so you must be taking credit cards and eCheck/ACH payments.

2. Email invoices as well as physically mailing them. The faster your clients receive an invoice, the faster they can pay it.

3. Send invoices in a timely manner. Law firms that see collection rates over 95% often invoice twice a month.

4. Set the right payment expectations. Is your firm on a Net 30 payment schedule? And if so, why? “Because that’s the way we’ve always done it,” is not a good reason to continue this practice.

Here are three simple steps to achieving zero AR and a collection rate close to 100%.

1. Establish an invoicing and payment policy during client intake that clearly states when payment is expected. Part of this policy should be requesting payment information upfront; this means storing credit card or eCheck/ACH information within your invoicing software. With TimeSolv’s integration with LexCharge and LawPay, you can safely store that information within your client and matter data in TimeSolv.

2. With your client’s payment information, you can dictate when payment is received. Your payment policy should stipulate that you will run payments a certain number of days after sending an invoice, allowing your client time to review and raise questions on the bill. Check with your Bar Association to see if they have established a protocol on the number of days between invoicing and running payments.

3. Use TimeSolv to select all invoices that have come due and, with a single click, run payments through either LexCharge or LawPay. In seconds, you will have collected payment on every single invoice sent that month.

2021 Can be Your Year of Zero AR

This is a profoundly different way of thinking about how to get paid. Imagine no longer having to wait and hope that your client will pay your invoice in a timely manner. Now you dictate exactly when you will receive funds, making cash flow predictable and increasing your collection rate to nearly 100%.

By Scott Clasen, Marketing Director

Scott Clasen oversees all aspects of TimeSolv’s marketing efforts. To learn more about automating your law firm tasks with TimeSolv, click here for a free trial: www.timesolv.com/start-now
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Divorce cases that involve “vice” industries can seriously impact property division, spousal and child support awards, and parenting time. Here are some challenges – and strategies – for family lawyers.

By Ron Seigneur, Business Valuator, and Kim Willoughby, Family Lawyer

This article is based on a seminar the authors presented at the 2019 AAML/BVR National Divorce Conference.
medical or recreational cannabis, hemp, or CBD, there is one constant: the entire sector is evolving rapidly with regard to the regulatory and legislative landscape. This makes valuation and any associated financial forensics extremely challenging. For example, the jurisdictional differences in license rights and the transferability thereof make the valuation of ownership rights particularly complex when compared to most other types of business ownership.

Considerations when Trying to Identify the Income from Vice Businesses

A primary consideration in evaluating income and expense activity in a vice business is whether or not the activity uses traditional banking with respect to deposits and disbursements – operating solely with cash or through diverted bank accounts that are maintained under the guise of another purpose.

Revenue estimates from vice-related activities often require a build-up based on factual evidence of the nature and scope of the activities, supplemented by reasonable estimates and assumptions.

For example, one might estimate illegal cannabis sales in the context of a cultivation operation based on evidence of the number of plants harvested over a set period combined with market evidence of the market price/values of product sold. Revenues from prostitution-related activities might be compiled based on market prices for services. Likewise, gambling and bookmaking activities might be compiled based on evidence of the frequency and magnitude of bets made over time. A lifestyle analysis similar to what is employed by the IRS when examining unreported income cases can be helpful in identifying and estimating the magnitude of illegal vice-related activities.

Discovery Considerations

Discovery can be one of the most difficult parts of a divorce case that involves vice businesses. The questions to ask yourself are:

1. What am I looking for?
2. Where do I look for it?
3. How can I get it?
4. Does the court actually care about it?
5. If I do get it, will there be unintended consequences?

1. What Am I Looking For?
   - Within the businesses: cash sales.
   - Trade/barter transactions.
   - Hidden compensation (options, perks, non-qualified retirement, etc.).
   - Prepaying all sorts of expenses.
   - Loading up on inventory and writing off to COGS when still in stock.
   - Delaying billing clients/customers.
   - Offshore retirement funds set up with a percentage of third-party receivables collections, so only the net collections are reported.
   - Siphoning foreign-source income into undisclosed foreign bank accounts.
   - Siphoning domestic income into domestic undisclosed accounts.
   - Stockpiling cash and keeping it in a business safe or at home in a shoe box, which suddenly disappears when the parties are divorcing.

Less obvious places to look:
   - Cash: Review bank reconciliations for large or unusual outstanding checks.
   - Cash: Look at the detail of outstanding checks for stale checks that should be voided.
   - Cash: Review deposit details for a time period after valuation date to see if deposits were held.
   - Cost of goods sold or other accounts with large balances: the larger the balance, the easier it is to bury items.
   - Sales revenue: Look for offsetting/debit entries.
   - Inventory: Watch for the purchase of large items at year-end or valuation date.
   - Repairs and maintenance: some may be for personal or household items.
   - Fixed assets: Watch for changes in the composition of personal assets, such as autos, vacation homes, jet skis, boats, private jets, etc. This can extend to an examination of changes for friends and relatives as well.
   - Credit cards: Look for any credit balances or large payments at year-end or valuation date.
   - Lines of credit: Watch for draws at year-end or valuation date and follow the proceeds.
   - Within the personal finances: Look for cash, bartering activities, offshore, and foreign accounts. Cash for a variety of services is most common.
   - Deliberately overpaying taxes, with the extended due date falling after the divorce.
   - Buying property in someone else’s name: a paramour, friend, business partner, brother, estranged child, etc.
   - “Borrowing” money from family or a friend and giving them a mortgage on the marital home to reduce equity.
   - Transferring property/funds into an irrevocable trust out of spouse’s reach.
   - Gifts from family during the marriage that suddenly show up as loans on personal financial statements, along with copies of backdated promissory notes.
   - Selling personal assets to “friends,” way below market value.
   - Buying large gift cards at department and grocery stores, which they use for themselves after the divorce is finalized.
   - Making advance payments on credit cards, utility bills, loans, mortgages, quarterly tax payments and then agreeing in the settlement to “assume” those accounts, thereafter reaping untold funds in the “credit balance.”
   - PayPal, Bitcoin, cryptocurrency, etc.

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1 The term “cannabis” refers to the larger family of hemp and marijuana. The latter is the hallucinogenic side of the plant and industrial hemp, and the former concerns the segment of the cannabis family that does not possess more than trace amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the psychoactive agent of cannabis.
2. Where Do I Look for It?
   - Often in the information right in front of you, but you must drill down on that information.
   - Spouse’s information: Conduct a really good data retrieval from a spouse. Find out everything they know. Often, they don’t realize how much they know, or they do not attach enough importance to information that is crucial from an economic and forensic perspective.
   - Employees and bookkeepers.
   - The person on the other side of transactions.
   - Business partners.
   - Poker, golf, fishing, or hunting buddies.
   - Past girlfriends/boyfriends.
   - Bankers: As information holders and/or as co-conspirators.
   - Wealth managers and estate planners.
   - Computers and peripheral devices.
   - Business tools and “equipment.”
   - Business and family calendars.
   - Old, deleted emails.
   - The kids’ devices.

Borrow the concept of a lifestyle audit from IRS audit techniques when you suspect unreported income. Focus on what the subject spends money on: housing, clothing, vehicles, travel and entertainment, and beyond. This can shine a spotlight on the sources of cash needed to sustain such a lifestyle over time. It is not uncommon for the IRS to assume all expenditures are from taxable income, unless the taxpayer can prove where other sources of cash come from, such as family loans and otherwise undisclosed savings and investments.

Obviously, getting information from all of these sources can become very time consuming and expensive. It is a good idea to start with the lifestyle audit to see how large the delta is between the reported income and what seems to be the income based on lifestyle, then decide how much of your resources to spend on finding information. The harder question is how to decide how much of those resources to spend if the client’s spouse thinks money has been siphoned from the marital estate and hidden over time in anticipation of divorce. If cash income is not reported and not used in lifestyle maintenance but is “stashed,” it will be hard to find any way other than tracing income into a business.

3. How Can I Get It?
   - Well-planned and executed discovery.
   - Special Master Appointments for discovery.
   - Uniform Interstate Depositions and Discovery Act.
   - File civil cases based upon joint venture/partnership against third parties who need a nudge to disclose.
   - Find a way to breach attorney/client privilege. Who else was in the room that would have useful knowledge?

4. How Do I Make the Court Care?
   In general, state courts are overburdened. Some states’ discovery rules expressly limit discovery. For instance, in Colorado, case law trends more and more towards “limiting discovery” to “further the efficient resolution of domestic relations cases.” IRM de Koning, 364 P.3d 494, 498 (Colo. 2016).

   Courts impose docket controls that make movement through the system and resolution the most important goals in a case.
   Opposing counsel will say requested discovery is “too expensive, overbroad, unduly burdensome.”
   Looking for a needle in a haystack will not be well received by the Courts. Discovery requests must look like something other than a “fishing expedition,” which is sometimes pretty difficult.
   Catch the Court’s attention. Don’t waste the judge’s time. Make it interesting. Do it the way the Court wants it done (ask the clerk). Make sure this does not look like it’s about your fees. Show some proof. Show the need to get the information and the need to get the information from where you are asking for it. Make sure your client’s emotions/need for vengeance or to embarrass is not the prime motivator.

5. Could There Be Unintended Consequences?
   In general, the unintended consequences are that the attorney for the spouse has done all of the legwork for third-party entities that might use this information to the detriment of both spouses, such as:
   - The IRS.
   - State agencies, including the Department of Revenue & Excise and employment-based taxes.
   - The Federal Government.
   - Angry third parties (e.g., disgruntled employees and business partners, vendors, competitors, or customers).

   How can you avoid these unintended consequences?
   - You can suppress the Court file via confidentiality agreements and indemnification clauses or through closed hearings
   - You can appoint a private judge.

Unique Post-Divorce Issues
Potential IRS Audits and Resulting Liabilities
In vice businesses, there is a likelihood of unreported income and the income tax burdens that are associated with such activities. The IRS has a long reach when it comes to unreported income and can assess substantial penalties. These penalties can include both civil and criminal actions that can even extend to paid tax preparers when an understatement that makes movement through the system and resolution the most important goals in a case. Opposing counsel will say requested discovery is “too expensive, overbroad, unduly burdensome.”
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As such, care should be taken to identify what the parties’ responsibilities are with respect to audits and actions related to marital year tax returns after the divorce.

Cont. on page 43
What information can a family lawyer learn from the first two pages of the 1040?

Heather Moe: Tax returns offer a wealth of information. You can learn about their income sources on the first page – including wages and interest or dividends from investment, brokerage, or savings accounts. If there are IRA distributions, then there are retirement accounts; pension and annuities are sources of income and assets. You can also find other sources of income and assets – such as sole proprietorship self-employment, or if they have rental income.

Which tax schedules are crucial for family lawyers to understand?

Rod Moe: On Schedule 3, which lists the estimated tax payments, you need to determine which bank account those payments came from, since they may have come from undisclosed accounts. In some cases, people will overpay their estimated taxes in order to have a refund coming from the IRS. That refund is an asset that needs to be divided between the parties.

Schedule D discloses sales of investments, which tells you to look for an investment account. Look for loss carryovers, which also need to be divided between the parties; if it was a joint loss, the parties need to share that capital loss carry forward, which can be used to offset future income.

Schedule E shows investment properties, including the address, rental income, and rental expenses. There is a section on the back of Schedule E listing partnerships, S corporations, estate and trust income.

What can you learn from a W-2?

Heather: W-2s offer crucial information about non-taxable items, such as benefits, perks, deferment of income – such as retirement plan contributions or deferred salary. You need to review a W-2 in order to get the whole picture of a party’s income.

What should attorneys pay special attention to when reviewing tax returns in 2021?

Rod: They should pay special attention to loans that their clients may have received from the PPP. Most of these loans will be forgiven, so the party cannot deduct those loan expenses. In fact, the forgiven loan becomes an additional source of revenue, which increases the bottom line for the business. This is a one-time loan, and it should not be considered income available to pay alimony – now or in the future.

How has the pandemic affected business valuations for clients currently going through a divorce?

Rod: First, COVID-19 has resulted in a big uptick in divorce work, because of the close proximity that couples need to maintain. In the case of a business valuation, there is a significant downturn in the revenue of a business and its profit because of COVID. People are having to stay at home. You may have had a business that was very profitable in the past and may eventually be profitable in the future – if they continue to stay in business. Discussions need to be had regarding this temporary reduction in value. If no adjustment were made, the non-business owner would be drastically short-changed going forward. So, if COVID-19 is something very unique – and hopefully, this is going to be ending soon – it can create a lot of problems when trying to determine how much the business owner spouse would have to pay the other.

This interview has been excerpted from a longer podcast, which you can hear at www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/family-lawyers-learn-from-client-tax-return

Rod and Heather Moe provide consultation services and expert witness testimony to family lawyers. To learn more about how they can assist with complex tax and valuation cases, please visit www.rodmoecpa.com.
Does your family law firm’s website deliver on your prospective clients’ needs and your business objectives, or does it merely look good? Do you know what your current and prospective clients expect to see on your website – and what will have them leave? Based on our experience of managing family lawyer websites – and building and managing our own websites which enjoy five million visitors a year – we know what they are looking for.

Ask yourself:
1. Did I get any consultations or business from my website?
2. Does my website properly reflect the branding and marketing positioning of my practice?
3. What is the traffic to my website and how do people find it?
4. Does my website offer useful information and resources to help visitors make decisions concerning their disputes – including the decision to hire my firm?

Let’s start with the most important element that will help your website generate business: how visitors experience your website.

User Experience (UX)
User experience is the forgotten stepchild of most law firms’ websites – and a major reason for fleeing your website to a competitor with better UX.

Good UX starts with a deep understanding of your desired clients. Who are they? (Be specific: “high-net-worth divorcing individuals,” not “people who want a divorce.”) What age-group do they fall into? What do they need? What is most important to them? What information are they searching for? (Again, be specific.)

UX best practices focus on creating a positive experience for your users, including:
• How easy it is to find and consume the information they want.
• How useful and relevant the content is.
• How easy it is to navigate (e.g., via chatbots, text messaging, one-touch phone calls or emails; simple to schedule an appointment or pay for services online).
• Their impression of your firm and the services you provide.

The heart of UX is ensuring that users find value in your website, so the content must focus on how you can solve their problems. For example, a lawyer profile written to demonstrate how you have helped people with similar problems and the
results you produced is a thousand times more powerful than a resume that lists where and when you graduated from law school and the jobs you have held. (You should still include resume information, but move it beneath the details about how you can help.)

Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (EAT)

Google uses EAT to evaluate a webpage's quality. As an experienced lawyer, you may believe that your website already has this in spades—but it probably doesn’t. Let’s look at the three components.

1. **Expertise**: It’s not enough to be knowledgeable: you need to be able to communicate your knowledge in a way that appeals to and engages your prospective clients. Know what your visitors want and deliver that information to them in a way that strikes a balance between being comprehensive and easily digestible. An excellent way to do this is to offer answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) on issues that concern them.

2. **Authoritativeness**: Posting FAQs is a good start, but there’s more to do to have Google consider your website authoritative. Posting interviews you have with the media is invaluable. Links from—and being mentioned or quoted by—relevant, authoritative websites are crucial. Having other relevant, top-ranked social media pages share content from your website also helps.

3. **Trustworthiness**: Do you have plenty of positive reviews—not only on your own website, but also on Google and websites like Avvo? The more, the better. Do you respond to positive as well as negative reviews? Thanking them for taking the time to write the review is both good manners and free advertising for your firm! Addressing negative reviews properly can turn things around. If your client is unhappy, start with an apology, then take responsibility and let them know how you plan to improve/change. Even if you disagree with the review, always take the high road and be professional in your response.

**Is Your Website Responsive and Fast?**

With 75% of people viewing websites on mobile devices, you must have a mobile-friendly website that displays well on smartphones, tablets, laptops, or desktop computers. Also, make sure to optimize the speed of your website. With increasing numbers of people visiting websites on mobile devices, the speed of delivery matters to them—and to Google.

**A Few Words About SEO**

Generating organic web traffic is much too big a topic to handle in this short article, but you should learn a little bit about it so you know the right questions to ask your developer.

- **On-Page SEO**: This includes many elements such as meta keywords, titles, and descriptions; URL structures; image optimization and alt-text; text formatting; headings and header tags; word-count; page speed; mobile responsiveness; internal links; content value; authority; and freshness.

- **Off-Site SEO**: Pay attention to your Google My Business page; sync it to your website and populate it as best you can. Create backlinks from authoritative and relevant websites to yours—create and post your videos and podcasts on your firm’s channels on YouTube, Podbean, and Facebook. Complete your listings on lawyer, article, and local directories; publish blog posts and articles on authoritative websites other than your own.

- **Local SEO**: With a precise focus on a local marketing approach, local SEO is a popular way to market a business to local clients in real-time when they actually need these services. It involves a wide variety of online marketing strategies, such as listings in business directories like Yelp, Google My Business, and Bing Places for Business; content optimization by using local keywords; and local online reviews. Does your website show up in Google searches? If not, it’s time for an SEO audit.

**Is Your Content Easily Consumable and Accessible?**

Providing proper web accessibility to those with disabilities is the law. To be ADA-compliant, your website must be free of barriers that would make it difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to make use of them. WCAG 2.0, Level AA is the technical standard to follow. Not only is web accessibility the right thing to do, but it could also bring you clients—and avoid fines and lawsuits for non-compliance.\(^1\)

Videos and podcasts can really increase UX for all visitors and make visitors want to recommend them to other people by email or on social media. Always transcribe your audio and video to increase the SEO value of your website and improve accessibility.

**Is It Time to Redesign Your Website?**

Before you start the process of redesigning your website, make sure you hire a firm that understands family law as well as your practice, business objectives, desired prospective clients, positioning statement, and branding strategy. Be sure to discuss all of the above so you may end up with a website that generates business.

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\(^1\) In 2019, there were 11,053 federal filings (an increase of 8.8% from 2018). New York, Florida, and California had the highest number of state ADA Title III lawsuits, with 4,794, 2,635, and 1,885 suits, respectively. The number of ADA Title III lawsuits dropped in 2020, but 2021 is predicted to break 2019’s record. See www.adatitleiii.com.

Diana Shepherd (CDFA®) has over 30 years’ experience as a marketing, branding, SEO, copywriting, editing, and publishing expert. As Family Lawyer Magazine’s and Divorce Marketing Group’s Editorial Director, she oversees all corporate content development and frequently creates SEO-friendly videos, podcasts, and copy for family law and financial firms. www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com
If you wanted to sell your home, you would likely put some time and money into repairs, renovations, and clean-up before putting it on the market. By the same token, you should make sure your family law practice is in good shape before you spend significant money on marketing.

Circle the number that applies to you (where 1 is “very poor” and 5 is “excellent”) on the Rating Chart on the opposite page to assess yourself/your firm.

Dan Couvrette is a marketing expert for family lawyers. He is the co-owner and CEO of Family Lawyer Magazine, Divorce Magazine, DivorcedMoms.com, and Divorce Marketing Group, a marketing agency 100% dedicated to promoting family lawyers and divorce professionals. www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com
Rating Chart

Question 1
A. How committed are you to practicing family law? 1 2 3 4 5
B. Are you up to date on the latest law, cases, and experts to draw on to help advocate for your client? 1 2 3 4 5

Question 2
A. Are you and your staff using technology to effectively manage cases and your practice? 1 2 3 4 5
B. How effective are you at presenting your case to clients, opposing counsel, and judges online and offline? 1 2 3 4 5

Question 3
A. How good is your intake person and process? 1 2 3 4 5
B. How good is your firm’s client care? 1 2 3 4 5

Question 4
A. How likely are your clients to refer business to you? 1 2 3 4 5
B. How likely are lawyers and other professionals to refer clients to you? 1 2 3 4 5

Question 5
A. How professional do you and your staff appear? 1 2 3 4 5
B. How professional does your office appear? 1 2 3 4 5

Total: _____________________
Add up the numbers from each question and give yourself a score out of 50. If you’re at 40 or better – congratulations! You’re ready to get to work on your marketing plan. If you’re between 35 and 40 a little work is needed but you’re on the right path. If you’re at 35 or less, you should get your house in order before initiating a marketing plan.
The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of online technologies: from video conferencing to contactless payments. Family law firms who embraced the new reality have survived – or even thrived – through a year of lockdowns and crises. Here are five tech tools to take advantage of in 2021.

By Martha Chan, Family Lawyer Marketing Expert

In 2020, the world had to find new ways to work, shop, and pay for products and services, and connect with clients, family, and friends. The rapid spread of COVID-19 stimulated the rapid growth and use of technology – including court hearings via Zoom, sharing documents in the cloud with colleagues and clients, and Artificial Intelligence to guide and inform clients and prospective clients on a firm’s website.

Like it or not, many of these new trends are here to stay. To help you adapt to our new reality, here are five of our favorite new (or greatly improved) apps and tools for family lawyers.

1. OpenReel: Remote Video Recording with HD Quality
   With social distancing in place due to the pandemic, in-person video recording became impossible – which halted video production for many of our clients. Luckily, new technology allows us to shoot high-definition videos remotely. With OpenReel, we can record a video of up to four people in four different physical/geographical locations simultaneously.

   Once you have downloaded the app to your iPhone (8 or higher), all you need is a fast Internet connection and a ring light with a smartphone holder (which you can order through Amazon for about $50).

   Our videographer can remotely adjust the lighting and sound quality during and after the recording.

   Compared to the traditional in-person video shoot we used to do pre-COVID, remote video recording minimizes the disruption to our client’s office. Much like virtual meetings, remote video recording may just be here to stay for certain situations.

   You can view a sample of a video we produced through remote recording on www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/attacking-defending-trust-assets-in-divorce. You will be amazed by the quality!

2. Kenect: Texting to Get More Prospective Clients
   If you have not added the texting feature to your website, it is time to consider it. And no, you don’t need to use your personal smartphone number. With one click, visitors to your website can send you a text message along with their mobile number for your reply. Texting allows you to instantly acknowledge the receipt of their message via a text back to the sender. It can be set up very quickly on your website, and you can differentiate messages from clients vs prospective clients. Our clients who use texting on their websites love the convenience – as do their potential clients. We did a video webinar on this topic with Kenect, one of the top providers of this service; watch it at: https://bit.ly/2LGb9aN.
Speech-to-Text Apps

Don’t have time to write that blog post or article for your website? There’s an app for that!

Dragon Dictate released the first dictation software in 1990; fast-forward 30 years, and we now have Dragon by Nuance. Offering speech recognition software and apps for the legal industry (among others), Dragon Legal Everywhere’s specialized vocabulary allows you to dictate contracts, briefs, or format legal citations. Three times faster than typing, this AI-powered tool with secure encryption boasts up to 99% accuracy right out of the box.

If you would prefer to work with something you already have, look no further than your smartphone. All modern smartphones offer some kind of speech-to-text feature. For example, my Samsung smartphone allows me to dictate for up to 10 minutes, and Apple Enhanced Dictation removes Siri’s 30-second limit by adding a local file to your device so that you can dictate offline.

Google Docs voice typing is free, highly accurate, and easy to use. You can dictate an entire document and watch it being “typed” in front of your eyes. In the Chrome browser, simply go to docs.google.com, start a new document, click on the “Tools” menu, then click on “Voice Typing.” A microphone icon will appear on the left; just click on it and start talking.

If you have ever used a dictaphone, you will love the ability to have what you say turned into text instantly. One caveat: your assistant or paralegal needs to review and correct some of the text and formatting, especially when it comes to legal jargon.

Text-to-Speech Apps

Reading aloud without stumbling is not easy for everyone – and if you have a strong regional accent, your listeners may find your speech difficult to understand. We use Google Cloud Text-to-Speech, which can convert your text into an audio file that you can use for your office phone greeting(s) and directory, or as voice overs for your videos, or to turn your written articles into podcasts. Powered by Google’s AI technologies, the API offers 220+ male or female voices and 40+ languages with a variety of accents – or you can create a custom voice to represent your firm across all your touchpoints. Because you can select the speed and pitch of each voice, the combinations are almost endless. Be sure to avoid ones that are robotic sounding, however – unless that’s what you want. Find a few voices you like, set the pitch, speed, and accent, and stick with them. For branding purposes, be consistent: e.g., use the same voice for the firm overview on your website and for your phone directory.

Of course, Google is not the only tool that creates good text-to-speech recordings. There are any number of free and paid solutions now available, including:

- Amazon Polly: includes dozens of lifelike voices and support for a variety of languages. Amazon Polly Brand Voice can also create a custom voice for your firm.
- Linguatec Voice Reader: converts any kind of text into remarkably good quality audio files. Available in up to 45 languages depending on the version.
- Natural Reader: the Commercial version comes with 173 voices from 27 different languages. You can use the audio files for any commercial purposes, e.g., in YouTube videos, podcasts, etc.

Technology is a Great Marketing Asset

Technology expands our creativity, efficiency, and effectiveness – even in the face of a pandemic. However, you not only have to know about new technology, you also have to make it work for you. These are just a few of the tools we use to help in the marketing of our clients’ family law practices; if you would like to know more about any of them, feel free to contact me.

Martha Chan is a marketing expert for family lawyers. She is a co-owner and vice president of marketing for Family Lawyer Magazine, Divorce Magazine, DivorcedMoms.com, and Divorce Marketing Group – a one-stop marketing agency dedicated to promoting family lawyers and divorce professionals. www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com

Related Article

Mobile Apps and Software for Family Lawyers

The use of new technology is accelerating as lawyers face more and more new challenges in their practices. Here are some apps & software to consider – from B to Z!

www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/best-mobile-apps-software-family-lawyers
Diana Shepherd: How should a family lawyer proceed if they suspect a spouse of hiding assets?

John Quirk: Trying to get complete financial information from an uncooperative opposing party can be frustrating. Without full disclosure, civil divorce cases can start to lean into the criminal area: contempt of court, conspiracy, wire fraud, or even money laundering.

You have to find an experienced investigator who knows how to collect financial intelligence via financial databases and subpoena. A financial investigator can tell you there’s money in an offshore bank, but if you don’t have supporting documentation, most judges won’t rule on it. Your investigator can share information with a forensic accountant, who will see if financial fraud has occurred. A lawyer can use this information to put pressure on opposing counsel to become more truthful and transparent.

How do you locate hidden assets – domestically and offshore?

Family lawyers usually introduce us to the client; the client hires us and all the work product goes to the lawyer so it’s protected under attorney-client privilege.

We focus on finding money domestically and in all the offshore banking havens: Bermuda, Bahamas, Panama, the Caymans, Turks and Caicos, Switzerland, Guernsey, Cyprus, the Cook Islands, Monte Carlo, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, etc. In each one, the vehicle to hide money is different, and you have to be careful not to violate that country’s banking laws.

We track wire transfers overseas via SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) payments, which show how much money has gone out before and during the divorce proceedings. You must examine all financial information for clues: What are the assets? What’s the revenue? Is the business-owner spouse supplying accurate P&L and balance sheets? Does the lawyer have all of the bank statements, trust papers, the balances of the trust? Financial intelligence in today’s divorce proceedings is crucial.

There are now a few states that are almost as secretive as offshore banking havens – such as Wyoming and South Dakota, and people also start up Delaware companies to hide money.

We do a background check, we start looking at domestic bank accounts, we trace money overseas, then we supply all facts and documents to the attorney so that they can get an appropriate financial settlement for their client.

Why do high-net-worth individuals set up offshore bank accounts?

To open up a bank account in Switzerland, you need a million and a half. So when we talk about high-net individuals and offshore banks, we’re usually talking about multimillionaires. Most of them will tell you that nobody in their right mind keeps a lot of money in domestic accounts because somebody could put a lien on it, get a civil judgment against it, or the government can send the tax collector after it. Offshore bank accounts are used to pay the least amount of taxes as well as to keep them secret.

Using intelligence tactics to find hidden assets and the documents to support our findings has allowed us to recover money from some of the world’s most secret banking havens.

This interview has been excerpted from a longer podcast. To listen to the full interview, go to www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/podcast-finding-hidden-assets-income

John Quirk is the author of ten books on intelligence and national security. Using intelligence tactics and sophisticated databases, he works with local law enforcement or friendly bankers in each haven to find and recover marital assets. www.assetlocationrecovery.com
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Using Google to Generate Leads for Your Law Practice

Here’s a brief overview of both free tools and paid services you can use to increase your online reputation, reviews, and the ranking of your website, and to generate leads for your family law practice.

By Dan Couvrette, Marketing Expert to Family Lawyers

Google plays a very important role in the current and future success of your family law practice because it can either send potential clients your way or to one of your competitors. Today, about 90% of all Internet searches – currently two trillion searches per year and rising – are on Google. You owe it to your family law practice to do everything you can to understand how Google works, because what you know can help you and what you don’t know can hurt you.

You Are Your Google Search Results

If someone refers a prospective client to you – or if they find you via a professional directory, ad, or an article you wrote – they will almost certainly Google your name to learn more about you before they contact or meet with you.

Take a minute and Google your name and your firm’s name and see what comes up on the first page, then ask yourself the following questions about the results:

1. Am I satisfied with these results?
2. Is all the information up-to-date and accurate?
3. Have I claimed all possible professional listings and profiles?
4. Does the information about me support my branding message, the type of clients I work with, the type of cases I want, etc.?
5. Are there bad reviews about me/my firm that I haven’t addressed?
Clio’s 2020 Legal Trends Report found that referrals and reviews were the most important factors in selecting an attorney so when you do the Google Search you are not doing it out of vanity, you are protecting your reputation online and ensuring you are putting your best foot forward. Prospective clients may choose to hire you, or not, based on what they find online about you.

**Google Reviews**

Numerous websites feature reviews and ratings, but none are as powerful as Google because of the sheer number of people who use it. According to BrightLocal’s most recent survey, 82% of consumers read online reviews for local businesses, with 93% of 35 to 54-year-olds saying they “always” read reviews. And, the average consumer reads 10 reviews before feeling able to trust a business.

Anyone can post a review on Google. Whether those reviews are true, false, fair, or sour grapes, they can make or break your online reputation. Needless to say, good reviews will help you generate clients. The more good reviews you have, the less significant one or two bad reviews will be.

Ask satisfied clients for a review when they offer unsolicited compliments, or as part of your wrap-up process. Your tone should be friendly and informal, and start by giving the client a “good review”.

For example: “It has been a really pleasure working with you to achieve your custody goals! You remained calm in the face of setbacks, and you should be proud of modeling such powerful skills for your kids. I was wondering whether you had a minute to share a review about your experiences working with me and my law firm? Your opinion means everything to us, and we’d love to learn more.” Then, make it easy for them to leave that glowing review: “Please click here to leave your review.”

**What to Do with Bad Reviews?**

Here are two crucial steps to take:

1. **Neutralize these bad reviews by responding professionally to them.** 97% of consumers who read reviews also read businesses’ responses to reviews.

2. **Get more positive reviews to push bad ones down to the second or third page of results.**

**Your Google My Business Page**

Your Google My Business (GMB) page can drive traffic to your website and help to improve your online reputation. (If you haven’t claimed it yet, go and claim it now: it’s both free and important.) Sync your GMB page with your website so it will show up on the right side of the search results page when someone Googles your company name.

Provide detailed and complete data; the better the information, the better the results. Include important keywords like “Divorce” and phrases a potential client would use, like “Child custody in Illinois”.

**Special Attributes, Images, and Videos**

You can include special attributes – like black-owned businesses, women-owned businesses, etc. – on your GMB page.

Add photos of staff, the interior of your office, the exterior of your building, available parking, etc. Add videos that tell your firm’s story and promote your branding message. These visual elements will increase the number of people who will click-through to your website from your GMB page. Add badges (i.e., Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers, Family Lawyer Magazine Recognizes, etc.) and your firm logo. Post fresh information on your GMB page to engage your audience; posts can be about your practice, the people at your firm, or the latest information regarding appointments during COVID.

**Google Insights**

Google Insights provides data on the number of views, number of searches, and actions from both organic search results and Google Ads. Google Insights provides you with different ways to understand how customers interact with your GMB listing including:

- How customers find your listing
- Search queries they use
- Where customers find you on Google
- Customer actions
- Direction requests
- Phone calls
- Photos viewed

Google is constantly adding and updating features to make their products more useful to both consumers and business owners, and all of these tools are free.

**Pay-Per-Click and Pay-Per-Lead Advertising**

Pay-Per-Click (PPC) and Pay-Per-Lead (PPL) advertising require both a budget and expertise, so you will almost certainly require professional help for implementation and ongoing work.

Google ads show up in search results and on many, many websites. If you were to type the search term “Chicago divorce lawyer” into Google, the first thing that will show at the top are Google ads with more Google ads at the bottom of the page. The cost per click or lead is market driven, and it depends on how competitive that search term is in your geographic area.

**Google Ads Have to Be Done Right**

I have spoken with many family lawyers who say they have tried Google advertising and it did not work for them. In most cases, those law firms did not know what they were doing – or they hired service providers with no understanding of the family law market, and that lack of experience generated poor results.

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1 “Local Consumer Survey” by Rosie Murphy (Bright Local, December 2019) www.brightlocal.com/research/local-consumer-review-survey

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25 Years of Promoting Family Lawyers to Divorcing People

Having published *Divorce Magazine* and DivorceMag.com since 1996, we know what your prospective clients want and what your website needs to have.

A mobile-friendly website with the right design, relevant content, great user experience, and search engine optimization is key to your family law firm’s success.

Your Website Should Match Your Business Goals and Branding

We begin the process of building your custom-made website by discussing your business objectives and the type of clients and cases you want. Then we help you differentiate yourself from your competition, create exclusive content showcasing your expertise, add ready-to-go-viral content that no one else can offer, and optimize your website to help it rank higher on search engines.

The Content Needs to Appeal to Your Target Market and Search Engines

No single other provider has the depth and breadth of marketing experience in family law to offer you quality content that matches your reputation and deserves to be showcased on your website.
We Only Build Websites for Family Lawyers

We will create an effective and resource-rich website that enhances your credibility and image. To ensure visitors will return to your website, we can write the text and enrich it with videos, podcasts, our top-notch divorce articles, Divorce Guides, and a monthly divorce eNewsletter.

Fixed-Fee Pricing – with No Surprises

If you are paying hundreds or thousands of dollars a month for your website, give us a call. We can save you thousands of dollars a year, every year.

Our Clients Praise Our Websites

“I am very pleased with the services I received from the Divorce Marketing Group. My website looks great and reflects my personality as well as the services that I provide. I would highly recommend the Divorce Marketing Group.”


“I am very grateful and satisfied with the redesign of the website and ... the eNewsletter has gone off without a hitch. Thank you for your help. It was a pleasure working with you.”


“Divorce Marketing Group is a first-rate company and has been invaluable in creating an informative and up to date website for me. Dan, Martha, and the entire staff responds to questions immediately... Being a solo practitioner leaves me little time and Divorce Marketing Group helps every step of the way... I highly recommend Divorce Marketing Group – whether a solo practitioner or a large law firm - this company is the only one I would recommend.”


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Why Family Lawyers Should Pay Attention to Social Media

If you or your law firm are not active on social media, you are missing a massive opportunity to promote your brand, drive potential clients to your website, and increase engagement. Here’s what you must know about social media marketing in 2021.

By Cathy Meyer, Social Media Expert

Some family lawyers overlook the power of social media when contemplating marketing strategies for their family law firm. The thought of constantly tweeting, posting to Facebook or LinkedIn, liking, and sharing can seem time-consuming and low-priority, so it’s easy to dismiss the importance of social media. However, that dismissal could be a big mistake for your business.

With 69% of American adults now using at least one social media platform, not utilizing social media as a family lawyer means missing out on a large pool of potential clients. Even worse, as more and more of your colleagues move to integrate social strategies into their marketing plans, being a social media resistor could leave you looking outdated to prospective clients – if they even find you at all.

Create Brand Awareness
People are spending more time on social media: 44% of consumers have reported an increase in personal social media usage. So a strong social presence helps you get your message in front of a larger audience and increase awareness of your family law practice.

Engage Your Target Audience
People use social media to not only connect with their friends and relatives but also to consume content and engage with brands and services. This makes it a valuable platform to engage your target audience and turn them into prospective clients. The right kind of content will get you the right kind of clients.

Attract Prospective Clients
Social media is highly effective for law firms to attract new clients. The American Bar Association found that 35% of lawyers who use social media professionally have been able to gain new clients as a result. Additionally, 49% of respondents in the previously cited Attorney at Work Survey have also been able to get new clients through social media.

4 Ways Social Media Can Benefit Your Law Firm
Establishing your authority in the family law space on social media will direct online traffic and attract new clients to your firm. If it’s done right, social media can be an invaluable marketing tool for lawyers. Here are a few ways that social media marketing can help your family law practice.
Establish Thought Leadership

One of the reasons social media has been effective for attracting prospective clients is because it helps you showcase your expertise. You can use it to share valuable information that will help you prove your credibility and win the trust of your target client.

Where Do You Start? 7 Tips for Family Lawyers

Hopefully, you are now convinced that social media marketing is essential for family lawyers who want to grow the practices. If you wish to take care of it yourself, there will be a learning curve and it will take time, effort, and a small amount of money. If you go with an experienced team of family law social media marketing experts, it will require little time and effort on your part, but you will spend more money. No matter which route you choose, you truly cannot afford to miss out on this platform to market your services. Here are some of the essential ways to get started using social media for family lawyers.

Get the Basics Right

On every social media platform, you need to start with the basics. This includes:

- Choosing the right social media platform(s) for you. You might want to start out slow by focusing on the platform your target audience uses the most.
- Creating a well-designed company page (not a personal page) that echoes your website. Make sure to fully populate it with contact information, company/service description, and information about your practice areas.
- Setting realistic, specific, and measurable goals. For example, “Increase client acquisition by 10% within six months.”
- Knowing what you want to get out of your social media marketing efforts. Do you want to increase brand visibility? Maybe you want to attract new clients, or perhaps you just want to engage your target audience. Have a clear idea of what you wish to achieve through social media marketing.

Share Original Graphics with Useful Facts and Stats

Images play a critical role in social media marketing as most readers look at images before deciding whether to read the text. So your social content strategy should focus on creating visuals that will immediately attract and engage your prospects.

You can share inspirational quotes, useful tips for potential clients, state-specific legal information, and industry updates through original graphics that stand out. This is especially important if you’re going to use image-heavy platforms like Instagram or Facebook.

Monitor Conversations About Your Firm

One of the main uses of social media for lawyers is in “brand listening.” You can conduct branded keyword searches on social media to look for content and conversations about your firm. This is a great way to understand what people are saying about you and how they might be feeling – for better or for worse.

You can even identify conversations where you can weigh in and demonstrate expertise, such as finding news and discussion about topics that are most relevant to your practice. If there is a controversy in the legal space, being aware of social conversations can also help you avoid being caught off-guard or getting negative PR.

You’ll be able to monitor these conversations in real time and identify trending topics in your area. This can help you to gain valuable audience insights and to take the right action at the right moment.

Create Informative YouTube Videos

Informative YouTube videos are also a vital element in social media marketing for lawyers. Videos not only make your information much easier to understand but also allow you to inject your personality into the content. This makes them a lot more engaging than other content formats.

Plus, you’ll be appealing to the huge portion of the audience that prefers to consume video over text content. Make sure you regularly create YouTube videos to explain relevant topics, tell interesting stories, and discuss trending topics. You could even conduct interviews with industry thought leaders and use their clout to attract new viewers.

Share Valuable Blog Posts and News Updates

The best way to use social media for family law firms is to create engaging content that informs, rather than solely promotional content; relevant “edutainment” will win you more potential clients than a 10-page CV. The more credible and valuable information you provide, the better you’ll be able to showcase your expertise.

For example, potential divorce clients are likely going to want to know about basic divorce proceedings as they decide whether or not to hire a lawyer for the process, so start by outlining how the process works in your state.

There are hundreds of questions a potential client may have about the process of divorce and their specific case. You can use social media to reach those clients by sharing questions and answers common to most divorce proceedings, such as how long divorce will take, how assets are divided, how spousal or child support is awarded, what happens if you can’t agree on custody, and many other matters.

If you want more custody cases or high net worth clients, for example, then your posts should appeal directly to this audience.

When looking for a family lawyer, potential customers won’t make a decision about where to take their business


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Nearly everyone is tired and overwhelmed by the pandemic and current events. While dealing with the exhaustion and overwhelm, most family lawyers wouldn’t think to connect their symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia to battle fatigue, PTSD, or long-term exposure to trauma.

Most lawyers I talk to just want the stress to stop so they can sleep at night.

As a family lawyer, you may be surprised to learn that you can be negatively affected by trauma in your professional and personal lives just like first responders, military frontline troops, and victims of abuse — and the effects can be similar. This is known as “legal fatigue” or “second-hand trauma.”

I have represented victims of domestic violence pro bono and encountered horrific situations that shocked me — even as a seasoned family lawyer with more than 25 years of experience under my belt.

My heart goes out to any lawyer who has lost a client and/or their children to domestic violence; the burden of guilt and shame that they may carry because they failed to save a client’s life must be almost unbearable.

Combine a family lawyer’s “normal” job stress with a world-wide pandemic and the current political and social upheaval in this country and you have a perfect recipe for burnout. When Does Legal Fatigue/PTSD Start Taking a Toll?
The question is: how long can lawyers expose themselves to their clients’ trauma (or second-hand trauma in general) before they start being negatively impacted? When family lawyers listen to their clients’ heart-wrenching personal stories and review the evidence of abuse, injury, or loss, the second-hand trauma will eventually lead to burnout (or worse) if lawyers don’t find healthy ways to cope.

Recent reports of attorney suicides have brought these discussions out of theoretical and hypothetical into reality.

Most family lawyers I know are compassionate, sympathetic, and empathetic — which means they truly understand (and may even identify with) what their clients are going through. If they don’t have a suitable outlet — or an effective shield to protect their psyches when dealing with traumatized clients — they may start internalizing the pain and taking it home with them at night.

I am not talking about whether your client wins or loses, which is another source of stress — I am talking about simply being on the “front line” too long without respite.
What can you do to avoid or at least ameliorate legal fatigue? Here are four simple steps you can take to deal and heal the overwhelm.

1. **Recognizing the Problem:** As most transformational teachers will tell us, recognizing that there is a problem is the most critical step. The issue for many suffering lawyers is that they don’t know why they are suffering; they just think it is part of the business. For many years, I thought I was happy from time to time. I eventually realized it was just a low form of anxiety.

2. **Asking for Help:** There is no shame in asking for help. When we ask for help, we may find the problem isn’t as big as we thought. When we ask for help, we will find out that there are solutions. When we ask for help, we find out that we aren’t terminally unique. Who do you ask? Most bar associations have committees offering confidential counseling or referrals. There are lots of resources for suffering lawyers, including trusted colleagues or friends.

3. **Honoring Yourself:** There are no requirements in the Rules of Ethics that lawyers have to work 24/7 or suffer nervous breakdowns. Establish boundaries to give yourself time to balance life and work. Establish periods of time every day and on the weekends where you don’t think about your clients or the stress.

4. **Making a Plan (and Sticking to It):** Many lawyers have calendars that don’t leave enough time to go to the bathroom. They have surrounded themselves with chaos because it makes them feel like they are important and busy. It only adds stress and anxiety to their day. We have to prioritize our time and decide where to allocate our resources. If you are finding you don’t have enough time to do your work efficiently, you need to reduce your workload.

We have to accept the fact that we are living in times that will cause tragic consequences for us or our colleagues if we don’t protect ourselves. If you see a colleague who seems to be struggling with anxiety or despair, or shows signs of self-medicating with alcohol and/or drugs, it is critical to reach out and help. We don’t need to be reading about any more suicides.

Gray Robinson is a third-generation trial lawyer who hit a wall after 27 years of outwardly successful practice. He recently passed the Oregon Bar Exam and started practicing again – but his real passion is helping lawyers and judges understand and manage stress in order to thrive both personally and professionally.

www.lawyerlifeline.net

**Related Article**

**Coping with Coronavirus Fatigue**

Coronavirus fatigue mimics both extreme “down” and “up” emotions at opposite ends of the bell curve of normal behavior. Here’s an explanation of what it is, why it’s dangerous, and how to survive it.

www.familylawyermagazine.com/articles/coping-with-coronavirus-fatigue
It’s a sad day when the children come to court: they suffer so much anxiety in the lead-in to stating their preferences that the experience is one they will likely never forget. However, this is the only time most of them can have their voices heard in the divorce proceedings.

By Dr. M. Jude Egan, Family Lawyer

Time was when a child went through a teenage rite of passage with the elders of his or her clan. Such a rite of passage might have included learning a prayer, an important dance, or going off into the woods on a solo adventure/journey.

In more modern times, the rite of passage has increasingly been one in which kids come to the courthouse to talk to judges about their living situations. Most judges don’t blatantly ask the children with whom they might like to live, but they will ask them a variety of other questions about who does the majority of the parenting and with whom they feel the closest feelings of warmth and love – and they might just ask a child where they prefer to live as well.

Sufficient Age and Capacity to Reason
The CA Family Code, section 3042, is not unlike the code sections of many other states. It requires that the Court hear from a 14-year-old child regarding their preferences (assuming they want to state a preference) and may allow a child under 14 to state a preference, either in Court or to another person the Court appoints.

California Family Code Section 3042 (a) requires that: “If a child is of sufficient age and capacity to reason so as to form an intelligent preference as to custody or visitation, the court shall consider, and give due weight to, the wishes of the child in making an order granting or modifying custody or visitation.”

Section (c) says: “If the child is 14 years of age or older and wishes to address the court regarding custody or visitation, the child shall be permitted to do so...”

Section 3042 spells out how a child can give his or her preferences to a judge in more detail than many jurisdictions, but, in general, the method is similar in most states. As a child gets older, their voice gets louder. In California, children who are 14 years old have the right to address the court, while the Court may elect to hear from children younger than 14.

Kids in Courtrooms: A Sad Day for Everyone
I am on the record with clients and the Courts as saying that, generally speaking, I do not believe children should come to court; these are adult issues that should be resolved by adults. But there are times when the facts as seen by the parties are so at odds that we must bring the children in. I always feel it’s a sad day when the children come to court, however. The kids suffer so much anxiety in the lead-up to stating their preferences that it’s something they may never forget.

I have visions of skinny 12-year-olds slouching in the hallway outside the courtroom, staring down at the floor and trying to control their emotions. Too often, one or both parents have talked to the child about their preferences or even coached them into stating that they want to live with one parent or the other. We hope our judges are able to discern what is coaching from what is genuine feeling (and most of our judges seem to be OK at this, but no one is perfect).
Children in Court: The Positives

I have tried to find positive sides to the inevitability of teens coming to court, whenever possible. This is an opportunity for children’s voices to be heard – the only time most of them have their voices heard and considered by someone “official” in the divorce proceedings.

This is what I mean by “rite of passage.” There is something powerful about letting children come to the courtroom and describe their experiences, wishes, hopes, and fears to the judge in the case; it can also be helpful for parents who are so caught up in their own experience of the divorce (including emphatically stating what is in the children’s “best interests,” which is usually whatever that parent wants) that they sometimes forget about their children’s wishes.

In some sense, it is the most “authentic” action that happens in an entire divorce case, because even the children who have been coached end up telling the whole story to a judge – who is (hopefully) paying close attention and knows how to ask the right questions.

This can be empowering for the teenager whose voice is often so lost in the divorce process that their needs become almost invisible to their parents. The parents become so intent on “winning” or “sticking it to the other side” that they forget (not always out of malice or neglect, often out of sheer overwhelm) that the children have deep feelings about what is going on – feelings beyond anger or sadness.

I remember feeling embarrassed, hurt, and guilty among other emotions. Mostly, I just wanted things to return to normal again.

Although I am a strong advocate for keeping children out of the courtroom at almost any cost, I do think that this particular rite of passage can have a positive effect on the self-esteem of the children who are sharing their feelings with the Court. If the judge gives them at least some of what they want, it can be an empowering experience for them.

Making Monsters: The Dark Side of the Teen Courthouse Visit

Easy access to Google has made teens more aware of their power in the courtroom. A teen who has gotten their way from a judge – or one who knows they can address the court if they wish – can sometimes become an 800-pound gorilla, making demands and forcing (almost extorting, really) each parent into greater and greater permissiveness. We see this playing out as disciplinarian parents find themselves on the pointy end of the teen-age stick – saying “she wants to live with her mom because we have rules at my house.”

I had a case a year or so ago where the 12-year-old began cutting herself. That got her into the judge’s chambers quickly. She was getting As and Bs because her stepmother was a teacher and her dad took her phone away until her homework was done. The mom did not care about her grades or her phone. She quickly told the judge that her stepmother was “such a bitch” and that led the father to go from 50-50 custody to the every-other-weekend plan. The daughter’s grades fell to Ds and Fs and she felt free to try to push her dad around mercilessly.

The Dad fought on valiantly to have the Court reinstate 50-50 custody for a couple more years. When his daughter was 15, however, he had a baby with his new wife and told me that “if she doesn’t want to come with me, I’m not going to try to make her.”

What Judges and Lawyers Can Do

We can hear teenage voices and work toward giving them some of what they want with more of what they need. I think some judges and lawyers already do this, but in order to avoid cases like the one I described, lawyers and judges should take a close look at not only what young adults say they want but also their reasons for wanting it. A balance can be struck between letting the teen voice have a place in the courtroom, but not control all of the adults in the room.

They can do this by granting teens some of their requests and dangling carrots for other things – such as having relationships with both parents. I have seen successful parenting relationships with teens that amount to Wednesday dinners...
Relevant, high-quality content has never been more important — and the lack of it will cost you clients. Here are easy ways to add effective attorney profiles and content to your website without taking much valuable time away from your practice.

By Diana Shepherd, Family Law Marketing Expert and Divorce Financial Analyst

Posting fresh, unique, relevant content allows you and your website to stand out and be chosen by Google and your visitors. In this article, we will be focusing on the two most important types of website content: the resources you offer to potential clients, and your attorney profile page.

The Problem with Most Attorney Bios
Frequently, an attorney’s bio lists where and when they finished law school, previous employment, memberships, badges, and — very occasionally — articles they have written. That’s a resume suitable for your next job application — but not for your website profile. Potential clients will choose you because you connected with them on an emotional level. According to Harvard professor Gerald Zaltman, consumers choose one product or service over another because of their subconscious mind. In his book, *How Customers Think: Essential Insights into the Mind of the Market* (Harvard Business Review Press; 1st edition, 2003), Zaltman reveals that we are not nearly as logical when it comes to making a decision as we think we are. In fact, our emotions drive our decision making — which has significant implications for marketing, sales, and branding.

So your education and awards will resonate with potential clients far less than hearing you say: “As a parent, I know how important your children are to you, and I will work tirelessly to protect your bond with them.”

To make that connection with your website visitors, you need an attorney profile, not a bio.

See Your Attorney Profile Through Your Prospective Clients’ Eyes
Your potential clients are trying to assess what you can do for them; how you will address their concerns, whether you have been successful with their type of case in the past; how much it is likely to cost; will they feel comfortable working with you; and can they trust you with their future. Most of all, they need to know why they should choose you over another family lawyer.

Your prospects and clients are not lawyers, so keep unnecessary jargon out of your profile. Use “we” and “you and your spouse,” instead of “the parties” and “the file.” Try for a more compassionate and authentic tone in your videos, podcasts, blog posts, etc. If your site’s content makes an emotional connection with your visitors, that content will convert visitors to clients.
Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

A USP is a clear and compelling statement that spells out what you do, your desired clients, how they will benefit from retaining you, and what is unique and sets you apart from your competition. Your USP has to align with your personal and business objectives. Creating a compelling USP takes both time and an authentic and in-depth examination of yourself and your competition. It often involves a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. Unless you have carefully considered your USP any content you create about yourself and your law firm is like throwing darts in the dark and hoping one sticks.

Too frequently, we see law firms using the same, generic messaging:
• “Our lawyers work hard for you.”
• “We are a boutique family law firm founded in 19xx.”
• “Our attorneys have X years of combined experience.”

There’s nothing wrong with these messages, but not one of them is a USP. Instead, consider this: “Run by women for women, our female-only family law firm is one-of-a-kind in Houston. We have a proven track record of successfully helping women in high net worth divorce protect their assets and get their fair share, giving them the settlement and closure they need and deserve.”

The Problem with “Thin” Content

At Divorce Marketing Group, we are often asked to redesign family law firms’ websites. One of the most common weaknesses we observe is that the content is very thin. There is not enough content to tell visitors what the firm/lawyer does and why they should be chosen. I have seen websites that only list what they do; others offer a short paragraph about each practice area. Most law firm websites offer very few resources to help visitors who have lots of questions.

Both Google and your potential clients prefer websites that offer plenty of helpful content: 1,000 words of helpful information about how child support is calculated in your state, or the difference between marital and non-marital property, or the Dos and Don’ts of divorce, for example.

Q: Why do most family lawyers’ websites have such thin content?

A: Most lawyers prefer to spend time practicing law – not writing about it for laypeople.

Few lawyers have the time, desire, and/or expertise to write website content that appeals to both potential clients and search engines.

Content Creation Simplified

We came up with a simple solution: record an interview with our clients over the phone, transcribe the interview, then turn the transcription into content. One 30-minute interview will produce 4,000+ words that can become content for five practice areas pages, or blog posts, or answers to ten FAQs on their website. Voilà! We also multipurpose the recording into a podcast for their website and post it on Podbean.com, which “broadcasts” the podcast to its wide network of platforms, including iTunes, Spotify, and Google Podcasts.

Are Videos Necessary?

Videos are more memorable, engaging, and easier to consume than any other type of content. Using videos as “edutainment” (educating and entertaining) is absolutely crucial to attract potential clients.

By 2022, Cisco predicts that online videos will make up more than 82% of all consumer internet traffic. Viewers retain 95% of a message when they watch it in a video, compared to 10% when reading it in text. And 72% of customers would rather learn about a product or service by way of video.

Since COVID, we have been recording high-definition videos remotely, thanks to technology. Once edited we post them on the client’s website, DivorceMag.com, YouTube, and Facebook. This latest approach has become our clients’ favorite way to generate content that can go viral.

Not only are they unique and relevant content that family lawyers can call their own, these lawyers are also front and center with their potential clients.

Of course, we also multi-purpose the videos: turning them into podcasts and text to enrich our clients’ websites with the type of content prospective clients want and need.

Create a “Resource Center”

Once your website has enough content we recommend adding a “Resource Center” tab with the following categories: Videos, Podcasts, FAQs, Articles, Blog, Newsletters. To supply Google with fresh content, “drip” your FAQs onto your website – one or two a week – rather than posting them all simultaneously.

Client Testimonials are Crucial!

93% of consumers read reviews before choosing a product or service,4 so you should ensure that they will find plenty of glowing client testimonials on your website. Testimonials from other respected divorce professionals will reinforce your client testimonials, so ask for reciprocal reviews from the professionals you work with frequently.

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2 www.insivia.com/50-must-know-stats-about-video-animation-marketing-2013/
3 blog.hubspot.com/marketing/state-of-video-marketing-new-data
4 www.podium.com/resources/podium-state-of-online-reviews/

Diana Shepherd (CDFA) has over 30 years’ experience as a marketing, branding, SEO, copywriting, editing, and publishing expert. As Family Lawyer Magazine’s and Divorce Marketing Group’s Editorial Director, she oversees all corporate content development and frequently creates SEO-friendly videos, podcasts and copy for family law and financial firms. www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com
Why We Mentor Our Associates

We value developing each associate and partner such that they grow as individuals, as members of our firm, and as well-respected family law practitioners globally.

By Joy M. Feinberg and Gia M. Conti, Family Lawyers

In a world where everything is going digital, mentorship in the law remains relevant and continues to evolve. Mentorship is more than just teaching someone how to be a “good lawyer.” Feinberg Sharma mentors the attorneys in our firm so that they take pride in themselves, their work product, and our firm.

Beginning with our younger associates and law clerks, we mentor internally and encourage associates to seek additional guidance outside of our firm. Internally, we train our associates on how to think critically – which involves learning the law from the bottom up, not just reading the statute. We want our attorneys to understand how laws are crafted such that they will eventually want to take part in bar associations in order to provide valuable input regarding the legislation that governs our day-to-day practice.

Mentored Associates Become Respected Members of the Community

Being a well-respected member of the family law community is just as important as understanding the law. We guide our associates on how to mingle with their peers and the judiciary. Our associates learn the importance of knowing their colleagues in a collegial setting and how it may ultimately enhance their ability to foster creative and unique resolution.

We want our lawyers involved in educational endeavors: from attending programs to writing and speaking. We also support our attorneys to become involved in non-legal organizations, including local and national charities. The firm pays for our lawyers to attend full-day seminars and lengthier programs that focus on specialized issues such as negotiation or trial skills. All of the firm’s lawyers write blog posts on topics they are passionate about or that are assigned to them so that our website has fresh, salient content.

Mentoring Helps to Turn Individuals into a Team

Together, the sum is greater than any individual part. We have an open-door policy so that all lawyers in the firm are available to learn from each other. Our senior lawyers routinely advise other lawyers about what worked, what did not work, what they discovered about certain issues, and what they heard or learned on a case or from a judge.
We foster an environment where everyone is part of a team or “firm family.” No matter how busy our schedules, we all check in on one another from time to time. If one attorney is in the weeds, we all come together to pitch in. There is an unwritten understanding that the relationship is mutual and reciprocal.

Part of being a well-respected and talented family law attorney includes learning from lawyers outside your own firm. Joy had such a relationship with a very senior lawyer who is just now embarking upon retirement. He remains one of the best trial lawyers in our industry. She has tried cases against him and can say they each bear the scars of their encounters.

During a recent trial in Federal Court, opposing counsel – with no notice – advised that they would be producing their overseas expert within one hour for examination. Joy had seen his report four days prior and made a series of notes covering four categories of cross-examination. As her questioning began, Joy realized she had taken on the style of her former opposing counsel. “I was channeling him,” she says. “As I progressively took apart the opposing expert, I said in my head, ‘We’re doing this together,’ I could hear him doing this!”

After the remote witness dejectedly left the witness chair in Europe, our team was beaming. At the conclusion of the trial, Joy called her colleague and told him the story. “He said it was the best gift he had ever been given: to know that I felt he had been a mentor to me,” says Joy. “The feeling was mutual. I was grateful for lessons learned from this master of the courtroom because he had elevated my practice.”

Mentoring is Emotionally and Financially Rewarding
Once associates and partners take pride in themselves, their sense of business development comes somewhat naturally. Our attorneys understand that their behavior reflects on our firm – whether in a pre-trial or shopping at their local grocery store.

Our firm conducts quarterly “lunch and learns” that involve questionnaires and check-ins to promote business development among our associates. Encouraging business development among younger attorneys creates an invaluable sense of empowerment that is of little cost to a firm but pays big dividends – both immediately and into the future.

There is nothing more rewarding than asking a senior lawyer for help. Similarly, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing how their help has impacted another attorney.

Mentorship is a win-win for everyone – including our family law clients! – and a true learning experience for all involved. We have so many talented colleagues. It is important that we all learn from one another’s diverse backgrounds and continue to teach and support one another.

Google / Cont. from page 29

At Divorce Marketing Group, we have taken over PPC campaigns that were costing a family lawyer $100+ per click and reduced the cost to $2 to $4 per click with better results. This has happened far more often than we thought it should have happened; we have seen incorrect campaign focus, shoddy set-up, poor landing pages, and a lack of communication/reporting with clients.

PPC and PPL are both a science and an art. You must apply advanced PPC marketing and technical skills, monitor the results (including ROI), adjust the campaign if necessary, and improve on your best efforts. Running Google advertising campaign is definitely not something a lawyer or paralegal can take on in their spare time. This is where time + money + expertise = quality leads.

Speak to a marketing agency who specializes in working with family lawyers to get the best return on your advertising investment. Whatever agency you choose, make sure to ask for references from other family law clients outside your area (not your competition); then call and listen to what they have to say about their experience.

Dan Couvrette is a marketing expert for family lawyers and divorce professionals. He is the publisher of Family Lawyer Magazine, and CEO of Divorce Marketing Group, a marketing agency 100% dedicated to promoting family lawyers and divorce professionals. www.DivorceMarketingGroup.com
have a lot of California buyers right now. They are fleeing their state, particularly Southern California, and coming this way. There are certainly income tax incentives as a result of that. Tracy, isn’t there about to be a tax hike in California?

Tracy: Yes. In the last month, I have had three separate clients who are working to establish residency outside California because of the upcoming proposed tax hikes, which would raise taxes about 17%.

Jason: Now that many people are working remotely – and can essentially live anywhere without changing jobs – we’re seeing people flee from places like that. With high property values, and with essentially free money to borrow, it is definitely a seller’s market. I think real estate as an asset is actually holding its value at a minimum if not appreciating in value.

However, if you live in an area where property prices are dropping, that is a concern in terms of distributing the assets in a divorce. One strategy is to hold on to the property until the market in your area recovers. Conceptually, both parties maintain their equity in the property. Perhaps they rent it out, or perhaps one of the spouses lives in it post-divorce, and pays to maintain it while they’re there. Once the property sells, they can each take their equitable share of the equity.

There really aren’t a lot of options when dealing with a distressed real estate holding.

One worrying situation is if your client and/or their spouse owns some kind of multi-tenant residential property. In Nevada, our governor has issued a stay on evictions during COVID. If the property owner is not receiving the rental income that they relied upon to pay the mortgage, that’s problematic.

If they can afford to hold on to the property because they have other assets, I would suggest they do so and then wait to sell or perhaps buy out the other spouse when the rent starts to recover. Chances are, the property will hold its value because of the market and the low interest rates. You can agree to look at the situation in six months, and then again in a year, until both parties agree it’s the right time to sell. I would advise you not to make the deal contingent on the last true value, however.

Tracy: What about the rental situation in California?

Jason: Although real estate is doing well right now in this part of the country, we must expect that it is going to crash. When you’re looking at a divorce scenario, maybe now is the best time for the parties to maximize the equity in their home by selling it.

Tracy: Real estate is cyclical; it’s on a seven-to-10-year boom-bust cycle in most places. We all remember what happened to real estate in 2008, when we had our last big market crash. The real estate investors I listen to think that there is a downturn coming, so they are much more cautious about taking on debt.

Jason: This is really a case-by-case scenario. Even though the interest rates are low, and people are eager to borrow or refinance so they can buy out their spouse, the banks are way more critical right now because of the uncertainty. You might have an ideal credit score and the home equity and value to accomplish a refinance, but maybe your income has plummeted because of the pandemic, so you may not qualify. What do you do then?

Briggs: You may be in a situation where you’re going to have to wait for that to occur and figure out a way to stabilize this for some period of time. Where do you pull the money from for those stabilizations? Do you have to invade the retirement account?

Tracy: Last March, we were all riding the same rollercoaster with our portfolios. Things were very uncertain. They have obviously stabilized somewhat since then. Given the unemployment rates and what is happening globally, it’s interesting that the markets are doing this well.

We have to make sure we are protecting both spouses when dividing up the investment portfolios. Depending on what type of investor you’re dealing with, there are margin calls happening in a volatile market. I have clients who have really significant margin: some investment houses will allow you to
borrow up to 60% or 70% on margin. But whatever was an acceptable margin limit in a volatile market might not be an acceptable limit tomorrow, so people have to be really careful about that.

In the pending period, which could last months or even years, these margin issues are real issues, because they will last until the assets are divided.

On the investment side of things, this distressed market is not all bad news. If you own Apple or Chipotle stock, for example, you’ve been a very happy investor over the past few months.

I’ve had clients who have owned Apple stock since the early 1990s who have made millions in the last couple of months. At the same time, if you have appreciating assets sitting in your investment account, and you have the ability to borrow on margin, that’s a creative way for us to get through the next few months. We can figure this stuff out on the other side, so that nobody’s lifestyle really has to suffer. Is it ideal? No – but it’s a really good Band-Aid for plugging a sinking ship.

Briggs: When dividing that stock, be careful that you’re not just dividing the number of shares but the actual lots. If you’re doing a valuation, and you’re not dividing the specific shares, at least make sure you’re using the same valuation dates. When you’ve got these big swings in the market, you must be very careful about the valuation dates in these accounts.

Tracy: Let’s talk about distressed assets and their impact on support. Lawyers are now fielding calls from clients saying, “Hey, wait a second, I settled my divorce a couple of years ago, but the world has changed and now I can’t afford to pay the support order.”

We’re seeing a lot of post-judgment modifications and more support orders with percentage kickers. You start with a low base, and then as money gets made over and above that base, the increase is self-executing. It doesn’t require expensive lawyers and attorneys to come in. You’re paying support on a base of X dollars, and when you make more than X, you pay the agreed upon percentage. It requires the two ex-spouses to work together – or their personal accountants to work together – but it takes lawyers out of the middle.

You may have to be creative in the sources of funds to pay living expenses other than traditional support: for example, margin borrowing, or cash surrender proceeds from life insurance. Reduced cash flow from any and all assets impacts the ability to pay support; the supported spouse will not be living at marital standard until we recover from the financial effects of the pandemic.

Tracy Farryl Katz, Esq., CPA/CFF, is a partner in Gursey Schneider’s litigation support department, specializing in forensic accounting in family law and civil litigation matters. She is a charter member of the AAML Foundation’s Forensic & Business Valuation Division.

Jason Naimi, Esq., the managing partner of Naimi & Cerceo Family Law Group, specializes in litigation for contested divorce. Board certified by the State Bar of Nevada as a family law specialist, he is also a Fellow of the AAML and IAML.

Briggs Stahl, CPA, ABV, CFF, is a partner at Baker Tilly and a charter member of the AAML Foundation’s Forensic & Business Valuation Division. With over 30 years of court experience, he has over 600 testimony and deposition appearances in both state and federal courts.

Ron Seigneur (MBA, CPA/ABV, ASA, CVA) has more than 30 years of valuation experience and has testified as an expert witness in several jurisdictions. A Managing Partner of Seigneur Gustafson LLP, he is an author of valuation science who has also taught advanced level valuation courses in several states. www.cpavalue.com

Kim Willoughby (JD) has been practicing law in Colorado since 1994. She is frequently asked to teach seminars for judges, lawyers, and financial professionals at the state and national level. Her firm, Willoughby & Associates, handles complex financial divorces, estate planning, and administration. www.willoughbylaw.com

Price of Vice / Cont. from page 18

Other Liabilities
• Ancillary judgment creditors.
• Cannabis and landlords/other property owners.
• State excise and income taxes.

Potential for Post-Divorce Incarceration and Being Named Co-Defendants

Non-Disclosed Assets
How to check for non-disclosed assets after divorce:
• Income tax return exchanges.
• Website review.
• Social media monitoring.
• Business journals.

What to do when you find non-disclosed assets:
• Most states have a rule that gives a specific time frame in which to bring issues of non-disclosed assets to the Court. They vary from one to five years.
• Also, look to the state’s general rule for re-opening a judgment, often found at Rule 60.
• Finally, settlement agreements often include language about how to address non-disclosed assets.
Lawyers who have been hesitant to establish a presence on Twitter often cite how permanent that nature of a tweet is. The development team at Twitter often heard this, and not just from lawyers. Last November, the company unveiled Twitter Fleets (yes, it’s supposed to rhyme with Tweets), which can be a whole new ball game in establishing your law firm’s brand on Twitter.

What Are Fleets?
Think of Fleets as fleeting tweets (cute, no?). You can “Fleet” text, reactions to Tweets, photos or videos and they will disappear in 24 hours. If you’ve used Instagram Stories, it’s pretty much the same concept, just brand new to Twitter.

Why Did Twitter Build Fleets?
Twitter’s wanted to build something that could be part of their platform but as philosophically different as possible. So they went into some of their key markets (India, Brazil, South Korea, and Italy) to test the concept of Fleets.

Twitter observed that by creating a tool to share momentary (fleeting) thoughts, people not only found it an enjoyable way to share what was on their mind, but their level of Twitter engagement also increased, which is a clear win for the company.

By launching Fleets to a global audience, the real test comes now, along with real opportunity for lawyers and law firms who want to be early adopters.

Five Ways for Lawyers to Powerfully Use Fleets
First of all, if you don’t yet have a Twitter account, you should sign up for one today.

1. Fleet something fun you’ve been doing over these past few months. Have you improved at a sport, taken up a new hobby, or built something interesting? People like to see things that lawyers are passionate about. So maybe you’re fleetsing a pic of the running shoes in which you trained for a triathlon or the new cast iron pan you bought for your cooking lessons.

2. Fleet something people should know about your firm. Fleet some interesting fact about what you’ve achieved or what makes you different. Maybe a picture of your office view (home or the old office) or a nice team picture.

3. Be clever and play along with the idea of impermanence. Since Fleets are fleeting, why not fleet about fleeting things? See - this CAN be fun.

4. Fleet something informational based on your areas of practice. If you’re a motorcycle accident lawyer, maybe fleet an image of a rider using correct hand signals or doing end-of-season maintenance to ensure a safe bike season next year.

5. Fleet something inspirational. A picture is still worth a thousand words. Have a favorite inspirational quote? Fleet a screenshot of it or use a simple tool such as Over or Canva and first make a nice Twitter-ready image with your quote then fleet it.

Fleets Won’t Be New for Long
The fact that Fleets is being met with a lot of strong voices that think it’s great and at least as many who think it’s a terrible feature means it has a lot of eyes on it. A lot of eyes on Fleets could translate into a lot of eyes on your firm if you act quickly. Maybe this is actually the time you’ll jump in and be an early adopter of technology. We hope so.

Aron Solomon is the Senior Digital Strategist for NextLevel and an Adjunct Professor at the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University. He was the founder of LegalX at MaRS Discovery District in Toronto, one of the world’s first legal technology accelerators.

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Social Media / Cont. from page 33

based solely on your résumé. They probably came to your website to read a specific FAQ or blog post; if they find it useful, they will probably read another or watch a video before clicking on your attorney profile page.

It is crucial to share informative blog posts and latest industry news with your social media followers regularly – at least daily (once a week/month just won’t cut it). And don’t limit yourself to content from your own website or blog; make a habit of sharing content from other relevant sources and reputable industry blogs, such as those written by the financial or mental-health professionals you recommend to clients.

Respond to Comments and Queries

Social media provides you with a platform to build connections and engage with your audience. People going through divorce and those looking to hire a lawyer feel like everything is an emergency, so they appreciate/demand prompt responses.

Hire Someone to Plan/Design/Post Your Social Media for You

Our experience shows that family law firms have been slow to embrace social media in their marketing because they have neither the time nor the marketing expertise to handle it.

A social media marketing firm specializing in family law will manage your social media accounts, update content, and track the results, leaving you free to focus on your practice.

They will leverage social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. Family law social media marketing experts can create and manage a campaign that builds confidence by communicating your firm’s character and reputation to potential clients.

When put in the hands of an experienced social media marketing expert who understands family law, popular social networking channels can become powerful tools for boosting your online reputation, running targeted paid advertising campaigns, and connecting with prospective clients.

If you or your family law firm are not active on social media, you are missing a massive opportunity to promote your brand, drive potential clients to your website, and increase engagement.

Cathy Meyer is the Social Media Director at Divorce Marketing Group and the Managing Editor of DivorcedMoms.com. Before joining DMG, she spent 11 years as a content curator, editor, and social media marketing expert for The New York Times. She is certified by The New York Times in both Social Media Marketing and Search Engine Optimization.

www.divorcemarketinggroup.com
Grey Discrimination in Family Law

There is definitely discrimination against attorneys who are greying – from law firms as well as prospective clients. Like clients, most family law firms want attorneys who are seasoned but not over-ripe.

By Henry Gornbein, Family Lawyer and Author

Are aging family lawyers put out to pasture too soon? When is it the “right” time to retire?

These are interesting questions. Let’s first define what is meant by “aging family lawyers.” I have been practicing family law for over 50 years. Looking back on my career and those of many of the leading family law attorneys where I practice, some of the most productive years for family law attorneys are in their 50s and 60s. I believe that it takes at least 10 years to really know your craft in family law.

It is important to have an understanding of the law, but it is just as important to know the workings of the legal system where you practice. This takes time. The old saying that a good attorney knows the law and a great attorney knows the judge is very true! It takes time to learn the nuances of the city, county, state, province, or region where you practice.

Unlike medicine, the laws are different in every state or province. Practices differ from court to court and this can make a difference. I have learned over the years that a given set of facts can produce a different result depending upon the judge. This is true even in the same courthouse where there are several different family law judges.

In my experience, most family law attorneys enter their prime in their 40s and can still be excellent lawyers into their late 60s.

There is also a difference between working for a medium-large law firm and having your own small firm or individual practice. Many law firms in the past would have mandatory retirement ages. With some firms it might be 65, others might make someone step down at age 70.

In Michigan, where I practice, judges cannot run for reelection once they reach 70; they can finish out their term and then must retire from the bench. Many attorneys in firms will be put into an “of counsel” situation where they work fewer hours at a greatly reduced income. We are now living longer and things are changing.

Family Lawyers Must Also Be Rainmakers

The other key issue is that in family law, more than in many other legal specialties, bringing in new clients is critical. In most law firms, income and bonuses are geared towards those who are rainmakers more than those who are called the grinders. In family law, the ideal is to be able to bring in the clients and do the work as well. These attorneys are the most highly compensated and valuable to a law firm.

Family law diverges from other practice areas in many significant ways. Unlike many other practice areas, in family law we must reinvent the wheel every day. Whenever we close a case we must find a replacement. Unlike corporate or tax lawyers, for example, family lawyers do not have clients who will be staying with us for many years – or even for our entire careers. (We may have repeat clients for second marriages or divorces, but we certainly
Grey Discrimination: Seasoned vs. Over-Ripe

The 60s can also be very good years for an attorney who has an excellent reputation. Once you hit the 70s, however, it can be much harder to bring in business, and the grind of family law can also take its toll on the attorneys as well. The area of family law is not only physically demanding with the constant court and hearing dates and deadlines, but it can also take a huge emotional toll because of the psychological issues that go hand in hand with every divorce or custody battle.

During this pandemic, a family law attorney who is in his or her 50s or 60s and out of work or laid off is going to have a much harder time being reemployed, especially if he or she is no longer a rainmaker.

There is definitely discrimination against attorneys who are greying – from law firms as well as prospective clients. Like clients, most law firms want attorneys who are seasoned but not over-ripe.

Many successful lawyers have much of their identity wrapped up in their careers, and they cannot imagine themselves living a life that doesn’t involve practicing law. Unfortunately, some aging lawyers are not as sharp as they used to be; they do not have as much energy and they are often more burned out than their younger counterparts.

When to Call It Quits

A final issue is knowing when to retire. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you have enough money to retire?
2. Do you still have the energy to grind out the hours for hearings, depositions, and trials?
3. Do you still look forward to meeting with clients and trying to solve their family law problems?
4. How is your hearing?
5. Are you still mentally sharp?
6. Do you sometimes stumble for words?
7. Do you have “senior moments?”
8. Are judges and referees or other court officials still listening to you?
9. Are you losing patience with clients and their problems?
10. Do you find that you look forward to that hearing or trial or do you find it becoming more and more burdensome?
11. Are you still able to be retained by clients for their family law matters?

Henry S. Gornbein is a Fellow of the AAML and IAM and a past president of the AAML’s Michigan chapter. He is the author of Divorce Demystified: Everything You Need to Know Before You File for Divorce, and coauthor of Child Custody: A Complete Guide for Parents. He is also the founder and legal editor of Gracefully Greying. www.gracefullygreying.com

Rite of Passage / Cont. from page 37

or Saturday brunch or getting nails done twice a month. I have also seen judges order parents to get full make-up kits or extra sets of athletic gear to resolve teen worries about their “stuff” being at one or the other of their parents’ houses.

Orders or agreements that encourage visits with both parents, including orders that relieve one parent of “parenting” duties, can be useful: “Parent A, you are ordered not to discipline your child on your time; your only job is to have a good time and rebuild your relationship. Parent B, this is what you wanted, so you are now responsible for ensuring good grades and good behavior.”

Good orders give kids some voice in the outcome of their lives but also ensure that they understand that they will not be the only decision-makers. At some level, that’s probably just good parenting; if the parents are having a tough time doing it, this is the type of work that lawyers and judges can do for them.

M. Jude Egan, Ph.D., a California Certified Family Law Specialist, wrote his doctoral dissertation on Jurisprudence and Social Policy. Dr. Egan has litigated over 1,000 family law cases of all different types and has been published internationally in numerous legal, trade and academic journals. www.JudeEgan.com

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Cooking is about having fun – and the joy is the process, not the final product. There is no better way to get to know someone than to break bread with them.

By Steve Mindel, Family Lawyer

Outside of practicing family law, cooking and sharing meals with friends and families is one of my great passions. From that came *Cooking for Our Friends* (2009), a cookbook I published with encouragement and help from my family.

Sundays at the Mindel home are all about family and food. My mother and father always held open house on Sundays. You never knew who was going to drop in for dinner, and there was always plenty to eat. When I moved to Los Angeles to attend UCLA in 1978, I continued the tradition; everyone knew that there was a good meal and friends at our apartment on Sundays. I am still close friends with my neighbors from that building.

After our children Sam and Jake were born, Sundays became my day to cook for the week. To this day, I still make most of the dinners for the week each Sunday. (I figure that if you are going to make a mess in the kitchen, make it a big mess!)

Sharing a Joyful Meal Together

Some people collect objects – such as art or wine. I “collect” people, and there is no better way to get to know someone than to break bread with them. When you calculate your opportunity cost to prepare a dinner at home, dining out begins to look cheap. The problem is that no restaurant can reproduce the intimacy of a home-cooked meal.

Dinner parties are about getting your guests to feel like they are an important part of the event. In our house, everyone is welcome to help in the kitchen. Our guests really feel like family when they have the opportunity to chop a vegetable or stir a pot.

Cooking is about having fun, not getting it perfect. Life is a journey, not a destination – and the same is true for cooking. The joy in cooking is the process, not the final product. For instance, if you make a cake and it breaks in half, glue it together with some frosting. If your cake tilts to the left, call it the leaning tower of the Palisades. Whatever you do, don’t hide it because it doesn’t look perfect: embrace it!

Some parties can also be learning experiences for your children. We gave Sam and Jake budgets for their Bar Mitzvahs, and told them that they needed to make the parties – for 150 to 200 friends and family – happen within their budgets. We planned their menus, negotiated with the party rental store, interviewed mobile DJs, coordinated with the clergy, and cooked all of the food for the party together. Having Sam and Jake plan their parties was about letting them take control of their moment.

**Cooking During COVID**

During COVID, the challenge is to stay connected and feel together while we are social distancing. From virtual neighborhood potlucks to virtual dinner celebrations and networking events, there are still many ways for us to connect with each other over cooking. For example, Nancy and I hosted a virtual cooking class for the newly admitted AAML Fellows at the Annual Meeting. Even though we were meeting for the first time, this online event provided an intimate networking opportunity.

There are so many creative ways to virtually enjoy meals and strengthen relationships with cooking, and I encourage everyone to try something new with their friends and families.

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Steven Mindel (CFLS) is an AAML Fellow and Managing Partner of Los Angeles law firm Feinberg, Mindel, Brandt & Klein. He loves to cook for large parties, and his next cookbook will be coming out in 2021.

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