

# GOOGLE

## have you Googled yourself lately?

When was the last time you Googled yourself? You may want to make it a monthly habit. Googling yourself is a good way to let you appreciate how the rest of the world sees you through the eyes of the World Wide Web.

For the uninitiated, you Google yourself by searching your own name on the Google search engine site.

- Go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com).
- Enter your name in the search box, and then hit the Enter key. It is important to put double quotes around your name ("Dan Pinnington"). This forces Google to search for pages that include your exact name, as opposed to pages that contain both your first and surnames, but not together.
- Search the different variations of your name, for example, Dan and Daniel, as well as your full name with middle initial(s), and again with your middle name(s) in full.

### Why do you need to know how Google sees you?

Google is currently the world's most popular search engine. It is used by several hundred million people everyday to search more than eight billion Web pages. In among those millions are people looking for a lawyer. You can almost guarantee that every new client Googles you before he or she makes an appointment to see you. In all likelihood, even your current clients have Googled you, as have the other lawyers and staff at your own firm, and even your friends and neighbours.

Potential, new and current clients are going to judge you by what they find on the Web. Hopefully you are easy to find, and there is information that portrays you in a positive light. You also need to be aware if there is any information on the Web that reflects badly on you. If there is, you need to take corrective action to minimize any damage caused by it, and take steps to have any erroneous or dated information removed from the Web.

### Whom else should you Google?

Don't just Google yourself. Google your firm name as well. This is especially the case if your firm name has established its own identity and is commonly used and recognized. In the same way that you need a personal presence on the Web, your firm should also have a presence, ideally in the form of a Web site.

You should Google your clients as well. It never hurts to know more about your client, and it is quite likely you will find interesting facts or current news about them that you didn't know.

Lastly, Google your competitors. This can give you information about whom they are doing work for, how they are marketing themselves, and whom they are marketing themselves to. Odds are your competitors have Googled you.

### What did you find?

By default, Google presents its search results in groups of ten, with the first ten being the best "hits".

The best hits are the Web pages that Google has determined are most relevant to the search terms you entered. Relevance is determined by dozens of different factors, and is reviewed in more detail below.

Ideally your name will appear first, or in the very least, in the first 10 results, along with informative content. Why is this so important? Most people won't look much further than the second, third or maybe fourth page of results. Think about your surfing habits. How many groups of ten do you review before you try a different search?

The worst case scenario is that your name doesn't appear at all. Essentially you are "invisible" on the Web. This is a problem. More and more people are using the Web as their primary and first source of information. In a matter of minutes they can find far more about a lawyer than any yellow pages advertisement will tell them. Remember, many people aren't inclined to use a phone book anymore, or use it only if they can't find a number on the Web.

## How do you make it easier for Google to find you?

Obviously, having a strong presence on the Web is important. Unfortunately, like anything worthwhile and valuable, building a strong presence on the Web will take time and effort, and quite possibly, some money. There is no silver bullet. You must start with posting good content on both your firm site, and on other sites. Using various Search Engine Optimization techniques (see below), including using keywords and establishing links, can also help.

## A firm Web site

A firm Web site should be the cornerstone of your Web presence, and work as a complimentary part of your overall marketing strategy. You can establish a Web presence without a firm Web site, but it will not be as strong.

When building a good firm site, nothing is more important than the quality and quantity of the content that appears there. Practical and informative information will bring people to your site, keep them coming back, and will encourage them to tell others about your site.

Content demonstrates the intellect, skills and experience of the individuals within your firm. Identify the content that will help and impress current and potential clients in your area of practice. This can include copies of your articles, papers, presentations, and reported court decisions you acted on, as well as newsletters, bulletins, and links to content on other sites. With permission, you should include the text from articles or other items that have appeared in other online or written publications.

Don't forget to use links within your site to cross-market the other services you and your firm offer. Also consider including

content from other lawyers as this can help build your credentials, and lead to referrals.

## CONTENT ON A FIRM SITE

A detailed biographical page should appear on your site. Don't stop at mentioning your law school, year of call and affiliations – most lawyers include this information and by doing the same you aren't distinguishing yourself from them. Include content that will help clients evaluate if you can really help them.

For example, list details of your special skills and experience, the type of work you do, a list of existing clients (if they consent), and links to online articles (on your firm site and elsewhere). Make it easy for people to get in touch with you by including full contact info, including name, title, full mailing address, phone and fax numbers (with area code), and an e-mail address.

You should also include a current photo on your "bio" page. Allowing people to put a face to the name makes for a far more personal and credible connection than a page full of only text. Your dress and pose should suit the image that you want to project: Wear a nice suit against a neutral background for big corporate clients; something more business casual would be suitable for a general practice.

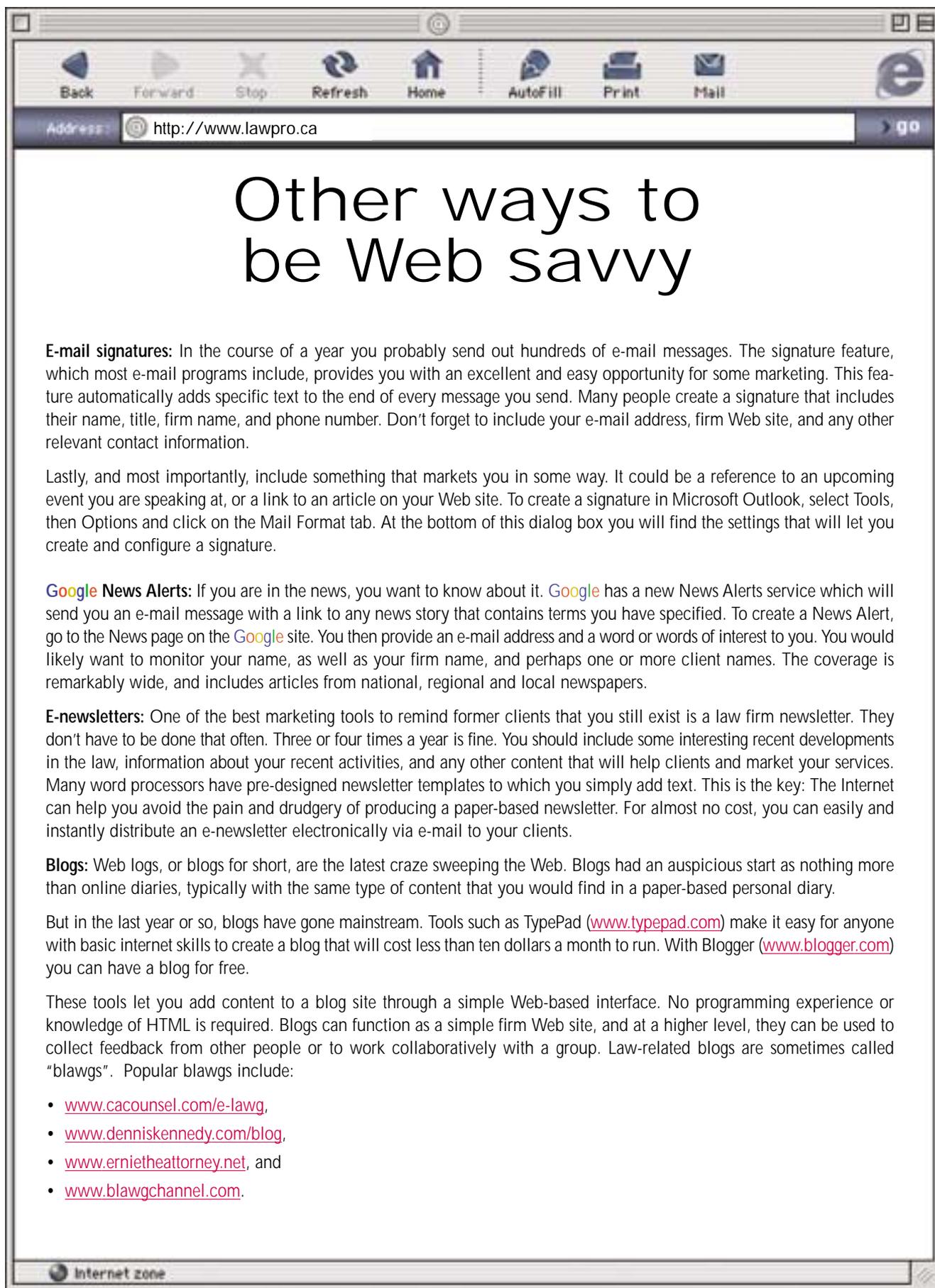
Ideally you want your bio page to appear in the top ten search results. People with less common names have a big advantage as they can rise to the top of search results with just a few online articles. Those with very common names will have to work much harder.

While content is king, a professional looking site is also critical. You can build your own Web site, but do so with caution. Remember that first impressions are strong and lasting ones, and a professionally designed site will stand out from one designed and built by the son or daughter of one of your partners.

Content and presentation will vary greatly from firm to firm. The content, look and feel of an elite corporate firm will be very different from a small general practice firm. Good sites always have a simple and obvious navigation system, and download reasonably quickly. Spelling and grammatical errors, broken links and "under construction" signs present a very poor image and should be avoided at all costs. Flash animations can be effective, but should be used in moderation, be short in length, and give viewers an obvious link to bypass them.

## MARKET YOUR SITE

Once you have a site up and running, you need to let people know about it. Make sure your Web address is in a prominent location on your letterhead and business cards. Include it in any other marketing materials you produce, including copies of papers or presentations that you give (and don't forget to add these to your site to increase the content there). If there is a new article of interest to clients on your site, mention it in correspondence you are sending to them.



# Other ways to be Web savvy

**E-mail signatures:** In the course of a year you probably send out hundreds of e-mail messages. The signature feature, which most e-mail programs include, provides you with an excellent and easy opportunity for some marketing. This feature automatically adds specific text to the end of every message you send. Many people create a signature that includes their name, title, firm name, and phone number. Don't forget to include your e-mail address, firm Web site, and any other relevant contact information.

Lastly, and most importantly, include something that markets you in some way. It could be a reference to an upcoming event you are speaking at, or a link to an article on your Web site. To create a signature in Microsoft Outlook, select Tools, then Options and click on the Mail Format tab. At the bottom of this dialog box you will find the settings that will let you create and configure a signature.

**Google News Alerts:** If you are in the news, you want to know about it. Google has a new News Alerts service which will send you an e-mail message with a link to any news story that contains terms you have specified. To create a News Alert, go to the News page on the Google site. You then provide an e-mail address and a word or words of interest to you. You would likely want to monitor your name, as well as your firm name, and perhaps one or more client names. The coverage is remarkably wide, and includes articles from national, regional and local newspapers.

**E-newsletters:** One of the best marketing tools to remind former clients that you still exist is a law firm newsletter. They don't have to be done that often. Three or four times a year is fine. You should include some interesting recent developments in the law, information about your recent activities, and any other content that will help clients and market your services. Many word processors have pre-designed newsletter templates to which you simply add text. This is the key: The Internet can help you avoid the pain and drudgery of producing a paper-based newsletter. For almost no cost, you can easily and instantly distribute an e-newsletter electronically via e-mail to your clients.

**Blogs:** Web logs, or blogs for short, are the latest craze sweeping the Web. Blogs had an auspicious start as nothing more than online diaries, typically with the same type of content that you would find in a paper-based personal diary.

But in the last year or so, blogs have gone mainstream. Tools such as TypePad ([www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)) make it easy for anyone with basic internet skills to create a blog that will cost less than ten dollars a month to run. With Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) you can have a blog for free.

These tools let you add content to a blog site through a simple Web-based interface. No programming experience or knowledge of HTML is required. Blogs can function as a simple firm Web site, and at a higher level, they can be used to collect feedback from other people or to work collaboratively with a group. Law-related blogs are sometimes called "blawgs". Popular blawgs include:

- [www.cacounsel.com/e-lawg](http://www.cacounsel.com/e-lawg),
- [www.denniskennedy.com/blog](http://www.denniskennedy.com/blog),
- [www.erniethattorney.net](http://www.erniethattorney.net), and
- [www.blawgchannel.com](http://www.blawgchannel.com).

The importance of content can't be overstated. New and refreshed content will keep people coming back. You should also monitor your site with Web site tracking software. This software will tell you which content on your site is most popular, and what search terms people are using to find your site. This will help you identify the content and keywords which are drawing people to your site, and provide a better idea of what you should add to your site.

## Get content on other sites

Regardless of whether you have your own site or not, you should look for any and every opportunity to get your name and content published online. Consider sites that will make the strongest impression about your credentials to current and potential clients.

For example, having your name listed as a speaker at a Law Society CLE program or writing an article in an OBA or CBA Section newsletter builds your profile. Writing an article for an online industry or trade publication is also a good idea. In all cases, try to include a detailed byline that has your full contact information, some background information, and a link to your Web site.

## Search engine optimization

Putting up a firm Web site and posting content online (will help you build a presence on the Web) is just the start. You need to increase your Web presence by taking extra steps to improve your search engine rankings. Search engines are the primary way that Internet users find content on the Web. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of designing, creating and updating your Web site so that search engines will give it a higher search ranking. SEO has become more of a challenge as search engines now use complex algorithms to rank sites, and the factors that are considered and their weightings are closely guarded trade secrets. Two of the most important factors are keywords and link popularity.

The actual text on your site and in other online content is key in several ways. To draw people to that content, it needs to be of interest to the reader, and to communicate information in a way that markets you and your firm.

It is equally critical that your content includes appropriate "keywords." Keywords are the words and phrases that are specific to your law practice, and are the terms which people are most likely to search for when they are looking for you. If they already know you, this will include your name or your firm name. However, you also need to consider those that don't know you personally or by name. Try to anticipate the more generic vocabulary that this audience may use in terms of area of law, industry, geographic region, etc. For example, "Windsor family law lawyer" or "Niagara wills estates lawyer." Make sure you incorporate these terms in the first few paragraphs of each page, and in particular your main and bio pages, and in the detailed bylines of other online articles.

## LINK POPULARITY

Link popularity is currently the most important weighting factor for SEO. Link popularity refers to the number and quality of links that point to a site, and how often people click through to it.

The ability to link to other sites is one of the core functionalities of the Internet. A large number of links to a site is considered to be a good indication that the content of a site is of high quality. Larger sites with more links to and from them tend to rank higher.

Click-through popularity measures the extent to which users click visit and stay on a Web page located with Google. Google actually watches whether searchers come back to Google, and how long they stayed at a particular site. Sites that are popular in their own right, measured by the number of links and click-throughs to them, will rank higher in search engine results. By monitoring link popularity and click-throughs, Google is able to dynamically evaluate and rank pages for relevant and quality content on a minute-by-minute basis.

Therefore, you want your site to link to sites with high link popularity, and ideally have them link back to you. This will increase the link popularity of your site, which will in turn improve its search engine rankings. Posting your content on high popularity sites can also help, especially if that content also has links back to your site (remember that link to your firm site in your detailed byline).

Obviously, building Web sites and SEO are complex topics that require some technical expertise. Don't believe the promises of vastly improved rankings from submissions to 1000 search engines for \$29.95. If you want to take it to a higher level, consider hiring a consultant, and ideally one that is familiar with legal services. This may not be the same person who built your Web site. Ask for references, including a list of clients and the their designated search terms. You can also test promises of increased ranking by searching for the consultant's site. A high ranking goes a long way to proving they actually know what they are doing.

## Your marching orders

Personal and business clients are often technology savvy and Web literate. In a matter of minutes, they can find out everything they need to know to decide if they want to retain you, all without personally contacting you. To survive and compete, you and your firm need to establish a strong presence on the World Wide Web. This presence should include informative content that helps people find you, impresses them with your credentials and ultimately leads them to retain you. Get Googling.

---

*Dan Pinnington is Director of practicePRO, LAWPRO's risk and practice management program. Dan can be reached at [dan.pinnington@lawpro.ca](mailto:dan.pinnington@lawpro.ca).*