

Targeting Legal Content for the Web

The way I look at web copy and search targeting is "50/50". 50% of the copy's focus is set by the firm and what they say they do. The other 50% is my manipulation of those statements to coincide with the top search phrases for their areas of practice and geography. For search occurrence numbers, use either:

<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>

Or

<http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword/>

I use the Overture tool (the SEOBook tool is simply a version of the Overture numbers). These tools aren't for precise traffic estimates but, rather, to set trends and comparisons. It's also important to know the words may be returned in a mixed up order or with the plural form "cut off".

Four things I check:

- Search for "[geo] lawyer" and note whether the city statename or city statecode is more popular. For example, search "Houston lawyer" and you'll see that "Houston Texas lawyer" is far more popular than "Houston TX lawyer". Remember that. Also make sure the firm's address line uses the more popular of the two formats.
- Next note the search occurrence of "Houston lawyer" itself and compare it to "Houston attorney". This will tell you if you should lean toward using lawyer or attorney in your tags.
- Next, I'll search for the root form of the firm's [geo] + [AOP], for example "Houston injury" or "Houston malpractice" or "Houston criminal" or "Houston divorce"/"Houston family law" and note what combinations are the most popular. Remember that.
- Finally, I'll note the popular keyword "modifiers" like *laws/case/benefits/charges/claims*. For example, it seems wrongful death keywords often use "claims" as a modifier: "wrongful death claims". "Divorce law" may be as popular as "divorce lawyer". "Disability benefits" may show up and "disability claim" may not. Remember that.

Other things that influence my keyword target selection:

- Is law, law firm, lawyer or attorney in the domain name? Follow that lead.
- Does the word "Attorneys" or "Law Firm" or "Lawyers" appear in real text in the site's navigation, footer or other sitewide element? Follow that lead.
- Is the market a large one and the firm's site a new/small site? Choose mid-range keyword targets – "Houston law firm" instead of "Houston lawyer".

How I put these targeting notes to work:

- I usually take content that's already been developed and "massage" the copy to include the keywords I've found are the best targets. *We're not trying to fool anyone* or say the firm does something they don't really do... that's why I like to start with fact and work backwards to precise keywords. Perfect example: a firm may like to say they handle Matrimonial Law. Keyword research would show Family Law to be a better target.
- TITLE, META description and META keyword tags come after the body copy has been refined and should speak directly to what the content discusses, often using fragments of that copy. (see other doc on Tags for Copywriters)

- I like to have a <h1> or <h2> paragraph header above the body copy. That real-text paragraph header should reinforce the primary page keyword discussed in the content and established in the TITLE and META tags. For example: "<h1>Houston Family Law</h1> " or "<h1>Family Law & Divorce</h1>"
- Don't be too heavy handed with the use of the target keyword or keywords. I might have the top keyphrase listed verbatim only **once** on the page but then re-state the keywords and/or variations like injury/injured/injuries or bankruptcy/bankrupt or litigation/litigator. For example, "The Houston trucking accident lawyers of Smith Jones and Smith offer legal help to victims of truck and tractor trailer underride accidents. Attorneys of the firm are focused on helping those with injuries sustained in commercial trucking accidents blah blah blah...".
- Physical placement of the page's top keywords within the content is also important. Try to get the firm's top keyphrase or a variation of it in the first paragraph.
- If writing one of the copy endings for a firm like "If you've been a victim of a crime such as this, contact our attorneys...", work in a keyphrase and link it to the contact form instead of just the word "contact". For example, "Contact the [Houston personal injury attorneys](#) of Smith Brown and Smith for help with..."

How to write Web content for a busy audience

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/officelive/FX102178021033.aspx?xid=aub0540003060mrt>

Maybe you're not a writer – but you do have a Web site and you do need to put some words on it. Ideally those words will be compelling enough to attract and retain the attention of people who visit your site.

The good news is you don't have to be a Steinbeck or a Hemingway to write content for the Web. But you should know a few basics, since people typically don't read online the same way they read a book or a letter. Instead, they tend to scan Web pages to find the information they are looking for quickly.

"People come to Web sites to find the answer to a question or to complete a task," notes Janice (Ginny) Redish, President of Redish & Associates of Bethesda, Maryland and author of the forthcoming book, "Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content That Works" (Morgan Kaufmann/Elsevier, 2007). Put yourself in your visitors' place, Redish suggests. What are the questions they are asking? What are the tasks they want to do?

Redish says to think of your Web site as your side of a conversation with a very busy person.

"Break up your information into small pieces to help them easily find the answer to their question or the steps to do their task," she says. But she does not recommend turning your entire Web site into one big set of frequently asked questions.

"That list would be far too long and unorganized to help people," she says. "What I am suggesting is that for each topic on your Web site, you should think about your content from your site visitors' point of view. If they called instead of going to the Web site, what would they ask? What would your answer be?"

Use bold headings and lists

You can help them find what they are looking for easily by using bold headings that match what your site visitors are most likely seeking. "Realize that these busy people coming to your Web site do not have time to read much," Redish adds. "They want only the information that satisfies the need that brought them to your site."

Here are some other quick tips from Redish

- Write in a conversational tone and style
- Use personal pronouns
- Use short sentences
- Write as if you were answering someone's questions on the phone

Lists, like the bulleted list above, are commonly used on Web sites to organize information. There are a variety of ways to present lists effectively, but they will lose their value quickly if they are long and randomly organized. Include an introductory sentence or phrase above your lists to give readers a clue about how they are organized, for example by category, ranking or theme.

Follow these basics when creating lists:

- Keep them fairly short
- Use sentence fragments or very short sentences
- Capitalize the first word of every list, whether it's a complete sentence or not
- Use parallel construction

Know your audience

Redish suggested thinking of your site visitors as busy people who want to find what they are looking for or complete a task quickly. It is also important to remember when writing content for the Web that your site may attract visitors with a wide range of skills and abilities. For instance, some of those who visit your site may not speak English as their native language. Others may not be experienced Web users. To make sure your Web site is easy for anyone to use, keep the following tactics in mind as you create your copy:

- Use simple to understand words and sentences
- Eliminate unnecessary words
- Use active voice
- Avoid lengthy explanations; use links to point to more extensive resources

With Microsoft Office Live you can easily create and customize copy for some standard Web usages, which can be helpful to site visitors, especially those with limited experience navigating Web sites. Rather than creating new conventions that might confuse inexperienced visitors, using established Web formats to convey information is also a way to help busy visitors find what they're looking for.

In Microsoft Office Live Basics, Microsoft Office Live Essentials, and Microsoft Office Live Premium, you can take advantage of pre-designed blocks of content, called Modules, that can be accessed via the drop-down list on the Page Editor toolbar. A couple of examples include:

- **Contact Us** – which creates a simple form that allows your site visitors to e-mail you with inquiries. This is a basic Web convention your site visitors are probably familiar with.
- **Map & Directions** – you type in your company address to show the location of your business as well as driving directions. Again, this is standard procedure on the Web and something visitors will expect to find.

Using these Modules will not only help your visitors find information they need – but they can save you time.

Keep your copy fresh

Once you have your Web site up and running with words and images that you're happy with – it's time to start thinking about how you are going to refresh your site. Add a new image? Announce a new product? Provide a tip or special feature? To keep people coming back to your site, it's important to update it frequently so it looks like there's something new to explore every time they visit.

This may sound more daunting than it is. You don't need to refresh your entire site. A new headline and fresh introductory copy on your home page may be all that it takes to give your site an updated look. Rotating images is another easy way to give your home page a new look with minimal effort. Get more tips about why and how often you should make updates by reading, "[The art of Web site maintenance](#)".

Whether you're starting from scratch or doing a quick update, the busy people visiting your site will always appreciate content that is simple and straightforward.