

What Makes a Business Website Good?

Case Study: Tampa Bay Law Firms

By Joshua Candamo, PhD

You could have a very pretty website; however, if no one can find it, it is like it does not exist. A website without visibility typically indicates that a business is relying on word-of-mouth and offline advertising to find new clients. Websites that do not rank prominently in major search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Bing will not be much help to your business' top-line. It is no secret that a website is the most powerful marketing tool available to your business. In today's world, doing business without a good website is like digging a hole with your hands instead of a shovel.

About 78% of people will search online researching services before buying. This means likely most of your potential clients will look at your business website even before meeting you.

**We analyzed 100
business websites for
law firms in Tampa Bay**

We looked at 100 different law firms' websites in the Tampa Bay area. We divided the websites in two groups: websites that rank high for relevant searches (high visibility) and firms that do not (low visibility). The goal of this study is to find patterns and common characteristics of highly visible websites. You can use these findings to improve your website and make your business more competitive in the long term.

Making a CASE for a good website.

There are four main components that make a website good: Content, Aesthetics, Speed, and Ease of use (CASE). Contrary to common belief, improving a website is an easy, albeit time-consuming task. It is sufficient to look at the CASE

and improve each component one at a time. Focusing on improving CASE will produce more competitive websites with increased traffic and longer page visitation.

Content is king.

Bill Gates made the phrase popular in an article he published in 1996. That article is as relevant today as it was over 18 years ago. Content is the main driver for your website. It is what makes it unique. Potential clients will have access to your website's content 24 hours a day, regardless if your business is open or closed. The website's content also helps you establish credibility and trust. Content is king because the more relevant, the higher search engines are likely to rank you among their search results. If the content on your site does not provide the information needed by its users, they are not likely to stay very long, come back, or recommend you to other potential customers.

**Visible websites have 6
times more content**

In our study of Tampa Bay law firms' websites, we found visible websites have over 6 times more content than low visibility ones. Like Bill Gates said over 18 years ago, "No company is too small to participate." Nothing is preventing you from slowly adding relevant content to your site. Content can drive traffic, traffic drives clients, and clients increase your top-line and referrals.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

A positive first impression with a website is usually based on looks rather than interaction. More importantly, aesthetically pleasing websites are associated with credibility and trust. However, we all know that different people have different ideas about what is beautiful. So, under this context, beauty and specifically websites' aesthetics become a subjective matter. Any time you want to optimize

something using hard-data, you want to make sure you stay away from subjectivity. We like to take an objective approach by using a technical measure to correlate with your website aesthetics. We like to use a “clutter” formula to measure “visual complexity” of websites (for the more technically inclined, please read my book¹). The idea is simple; people don’t like cluttered (messy) websites. So, people tend to react more positively to visually simpler sites.

Law firm’s websites tend to be 20% to 30% more cluttered than what they should

In our study, we found visible law firms’ websites in Tampa Bay have website homepages that are over 6% less cluttered than their counterparts. This difference seems quite small, but there is a simple explanation for it. Companies tend to use the “no need to reinvent the wheel approach” when designing their websites. In other words, companies will look at larger competitors or established business within their area of expertise and create similar visual layouts for their websites. It is not to say this is a bad thing. In fact, this behavior is a common practice through corporate America. We found that most law firms’ websites, regardless of their search rankings, tend to be over-saturated with information, which makes them difficult to read and navigate and less appealing to the general public. When comparing to industries that have a large user base, high user loyalty, and high page visitation duration, law firms’ websites in Tampa Bay are highly cluttered. For instance, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are 20% less cluttered, and search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Wikipedia are 30% less cluttered. Given the general industry’s website poor aesthetic appeal, it represents an area where any law firm can easily focus to improve in order to gain a competitive edge.

Catch me if you can.

When it comes down to business, a website’s speed affects every performance metric you care about. Yes, that’s right. A website’s speed affects bounce rate (the percentage of visitors that navigate away after viewing only one page), affects your website’s visibility (major search engines like Google penalize slow websites in their search rankings), page views (1 second load delay means about 11% fewer page views), customer satisfaction (1 second load delay means about 16% decrease in customer satisfaction), conversions (retailers have seen a drop of 7% in customer conversions when experiencing 1 second delay), etc, etc, etc. Sadly, there is probably nothing more overlooked than a website’s speed when smaller businesses design their website.

Law firms’ websites load on average in over 10 seconds. That’s about twice the average for the rest of the Internet

In our study, we found that the majority of law firms’ websites are very slow. On average, law firms’ homepages take over 10 seconds to load. 40% of people abandon a website if it takes more than 3 seconds to load. This is an area for website improvement of utmost importance, and due to the slow speed of the entire industry, it is a perfect choice to focus on in order to gain a competitive edge. Make sure to read our article about website speed, [Is Your Business Website Fast Enough?](#)

More than meets the eye.

You want your business website to be a tool for sales, community contact, and to improve, rather than detract from the business’ image. A website that is easy to use is approachable; it invites potential clients to find out more about you. Frustrated users are likely to just move on and keep searching for a better alternative than your business.

User satisfaction is closely correlated to what we call the “user experience.” A good user experience comes from websites with an intuitive interface and navigation ease in both desktops as well as smaller electronic devices such as tablets and smartphones. Mobile devices currently account for more than 55% of Internet usage in the United States. Most mobile users are unsatisfied with their mobile web experience as 18% of smartphone users say their recent mobile browsing experiences have been frustrating, and 70% describe their experiences as “just OK.”

Visible websites have a 35% better user experience on mobile devices

In our study, we found that user experience of visible law firms’ websites are comparable to non-visible firms in desktops. However, visible sites have an outstanding 35% better user experience than non-visible sites, when using small electronic devices such as smartphones and tablets. Smaller business’ websites are getting left behind in the website optimization race to cater to small electronic devices. For a business website, it is imperative to adopt fluid responsive designs to ensure a good user experience both on desktops and smaller device such as smartphones and tablets.

What to take-away?

A website is a like a business card, and most likely the first impression potential clients will have of your business. Users’ first impressions can be influential for the website's usability and your brand’s trust. Improving your business website is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Understanding a business’ online presence is more valuable than ever. If there is one important thing to take away from this article, it is that there are four main components that make a website good: Content, Aesthetics, Speed, and Ease of use (CASE).

Improving CASE improves your business’ online competitiveness, and a competitive website will drive business and help grow your top-line.

About the Author



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¹ J. Candamo “Boundary profile representation for objects and their surroundings in outdoor videos,” 2011.