

As editor of a newsletter and a website for corporate lawyers, I am always on the prowl for information and ideas. One great source is the attorney-authored articles posted on law firm websites. However, many of these sites have frustrating design flaws. Having mined dozens of publications pages, I have some ideas about how firms can make their information repositories more appealing.

**Don't hide them.** I presume you want people to look at the articles your firm posts, so put them someplace obvious. A home page link to "Publications," or perhaps "Resources," is good. Burying publications behind "News and Events" or "Practices" is not so good.

**Forget "publication type."** If a visitor wants to learn about, say, internal control audits under Sarbanes-Oxley, she probably doesn't care whether she reads a "client alert," a "newsletter," an "article," or a "bulletin." Your search feature (you do have a search feature, don't you?) should permit visitors to plug in keywords or select a likely practice group and search "all publications." Someone who has to search each type of publication individually—or worse, visit a different "home page" for each publication type—may move on to another firm's site.

**List publications chronologically.** You may think this is obvious, but I found two firms that organize their publications alphabetically by title. While it may be nice to see every bulletin entitled "New SEC Rules Regulating \_\_\_\_\_" in one place, visitors are more likely to care about the rules the SEC adopted last week than the rules adopted four years ago. Another firm's publications are not organized chronologically, alphabetically, or in any other way that I have been able to discern. And the firm whose invitation to "view all bylined articles" generates a list of attorney-authors—not article titles—is really missing the boat. Make it simple: put the newest information at the top of the publication list, and date everything so visitors understand the system.

**Keep it current.** There is no shortage of topics to write about in my field. Between new rules, enforcement actions, litigation, governance initiatives, and scandals, firms easily have fodder for half a dozen bulletins a year. When I search "all Corporate publications" and the most recent item is from 2004, I assume article writing is not a high priority for the firm. Either that, or the firm doesn't have a good system for getting articles posted promptly. It isn't worth offering a search category that generates only dated material.

**Limit your topics.** It seems so promising when a search menu offers "corporate," "corporate governance," "corporate compliance," "securities regulation," "securities litigation," "white collar crime," "business transactions," and "capital markets." What a letdown when there are "no results that match search criteria," or the results for each topic are substantially the same! One firm has 11 subcategories in the drop-down menu under "corporate," and 13 under "litigation." I doubt each of these subcategories holds enough unique material to warrant a separate search.

**Keep that search tool handy.** This is especially important if you have divided your publications into so many categories that visitors are likely to search under three or four

topics. On many sites, a visitor must run a search, check the results, and then go back to “Publications Home” to run another search. It would help to have a search box, or a navigation bar listing all available topics, on every page. Firms with a drop-down search box get bonus points if the box holds the place of the last search so the visitor doesn’t have to scroll through all the topics she’s already checked or passed by on her way to the end of the alphabet.

**List the articles in your multi-topic newsletters.** If I want information on majority voting, I’ll click on your article entitled “Trends in Majority Voting.” I’m less likely to pull up your “December 2005 Corporate Bulletin” unless I know it contains a pertinent article.

These suggestions all address minor annoyances, but enough flaws could dissuade a visitor from returning to your firm’s publications page. If the next memo someone reads may inspire her to call the author for individualized advice, don’t you want that memo to come from your firm?

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