

Low visibility for Toronto lawyers on Internet

BY ROBERT TODD
Law Times

Toronto sole practitioners and small-firm lawyers need to do a better job marketing their services on the Internet to grab the attention of potential clients, according to a new report.

"The majority of lawyers, just typing in their name [on a web search tool], you can find them," says Michael Carabash, a Toronto lawyer and president of *DynamicLawyers.com*. "The problem is that just having their name and contact information alone doesn't cut it for the average Torontonian who wants more information."

Carabash and *DynamicLawyers.com* vice president Joseph Khlaif prepared the report and posted it on their web site. Carabash says they plan to produce a series of studies and statistics relevant to the Toronto legal community and general public.

Anecdotal evidence that lawyers have failed to gain a strong foothold on the Internet was the motivation for the web site's first report, says Carabash. The pair prepared the study by researching the web presence of 1,000, randomly selected Toronto lawyers,

he says. The survey was conducted earlier this month and in January, and targeted only sole practitioners or counsel in firms with no more than 15 lawyers.

The results produce a bleak picture of the group of lawyers' visibility on a medium that many of their clients now use to obtain the bulk of their information, suggests Carabash.

Specifically, the report found that 98 per cent of those surveyed could be found on the Internet; 78 per cent had a web site; 52 per cent post substantive content — such as articles, cases, or commentary — on their site; and two per cent have a blog. The report also indicates that 97 per cent of those surveyed indicate their area of practice on their web site.

Carabash suggests potential clients want their lawyers to provide a better taste of the expertise they are offering.

"They want their lawyers to have a really robust presence online; they want to see meaningful content through blogs, articles, cases, commentaries," he says.

"Unfortunately, from the sample that we surveyed, it's not really being done to the extent



Michael Carabash says Toronto small-firm lawyers and sole practitioners lack presence on the Internet.

that it should. There's a lack of meaningful content, and a lack of promotion and presence."

Carabash acknowledges that there is a long list of excuses for many lawyers' paltry web presence — a lack of time and technical expertise, along with a disbelief in the benefits, all factor in, he says.

"You can always make time — it doesn't take much time to write up a blog entry," he says. "Secondly, it's not that difficult to start up a web site or start blogging."

In terms of benefit, Carabash notes that many lawyers don't want to include meaningful content on their web sites for fear of giving away their expertise for free.

"The big problem with that is, if you're not going to do it, somebody else will," he says. "And how can you give people a sample or taste of your expertise without having an online presence? And your online presence can spread all over the world. If you're just keeping your knowledge internal, because that's what your service is, then unfortunately that's the day of the dinosaur."

Sharing some of your knowledge online also is a way of building goodwill, creating new opportunities, and developing a reputation as an expert in your field, says Carabash.

"If you want to survive and promote yourself, and you want to make a name for yourself and build new business, get yourself out there, promote yourself," he adds.

Carabash says there are many

places lawyers can go for some advice on how to expand their web presence, but says they can get in touch with him at michael@dynamiclawyers.com for tips.

In terms of *DynamicLawyers.com* itself, Carabash says he was motivated to start the site after reading Richard Susskind's book *The Future of Law*, and watching the success of web sites such as free classified site Craigslist and auction site eBay.

"I said to myself, there's got to be something like this for lawyers, especially sole practitioners who may not know where their next client is coming from, and for the average person who just has a whole bunch of difficulty getting the right lawyer to handle their case or facilitate a transaction," says Carabash.

He came up with the idea of a "specialized form of Craigslist for the industry." The site allows people seeking legal advice to log on and post their legal problem freely and anonymously, and get quotes and information without charge. Lawyers pay for the right to respond to posts on the site.

"People really love the idea that I can get a specialized lawyer and I can actually have lawyers compete on pricing," says Carabash. **LT**