



How Green Cup Design Recreated a FindLaw Website

FindLaw, a subsidiary of Thomson Reuters, is a marketing company for law firms and lawyers, that provides legal information and updates to both lawyers and the public. One of the most popular services FindLaw offers is website design and marketing maintenance for law firms. This includes the initial design and build, with blog post writing plus SEO and its corresponding analytics ongoing. Today I am not here to opine on the services FindLaw provides, but to describe what happens when a law firm chooses to leave FindLaw.

Research & Analysis

It is important to note that any website FindLaw designs remains on their server as proprietary information. When I began working with Velzen, Johnsen, and Wikander, PC (hereafter VJW), they informed me that FindLaw would send along 'design files' on a CD-Rom so the firm might hire a website designer to rebuild the site - from scratch. There would be a month overlap between the reception of that disc and the end of service, at which point the website on FindLaw's end would cease to exist online.



The question was, did VJW wish to keep the original design? The answer was 'sort of'. The firm was pleased with the color branding and general organization of the pages on the website, but it felt cluttered and looked out of date (it had been several years since the website was designed and built).

I knew I wanted to bring the site over to WordPress. It is the platform I use most to build websites, so I know its structure well and could build the site quickly. Speed was important both to race against the FindLaw expiration clock and to manage price. Since the website

had been in use for a few years, there was a good deal of content and pages to bring over. Typically, once the structure of the design is built it is relatively easy to import the content, but in this case it was a bit of a rush.

WordPress also performs well with regards to SEO ([Search Engine Optimization](#)). We didn't want to experience any setback in optimization, since FindLaw had ranked the site locally in competition against other law firms and it was already ranking well. While FindLaw wasn't going to hand over all the details with regards to keyword targeting, they had used meta keywords on the web pages, making it easy to search the existing code and bring over some of the structure. This served as another reason I wanted to build the website while the old one was still live.

Execution

I started by rebuilding the look and feel of VJW's website. A popular URL choice for law firms is using a simple phrase rather than the name of the firm itself, which may be comprised of difficult to spell last names. VJW was using westmichigandivorce.com and wanted to keep the URL. In order to do so without creating conflict with the existing site, I built the new website locally on my computer under a fake URL, and sent them updates of the design process in the form of screen shots.



The the most important part of the design process was to reduce clutter. VJW has a lot to offer and, like many law firms, provides a lot of information for public awareness. The original website had two sidebars on every page, which left the viewer feeling claustrophobic and overwhelmed with text. I reduced the sidebars to a single right sidebar, except on the home page. I made the decision to present the home page in full width since the firm's name, slogan, and a group photo of the Partners all displayed above the fold (before scrolling), and important items

such as these should be prominent. The logo file the firm had on hand was too small to display well on new retina displays, so I updated that, too.

Once I had the layout completed, I began to insert content from the old website. Since the original website was still live and its pages arranged with some basic organization, I chose not to draw up a brand new site map. Rather, I made tweaks where necessary to clean up the structure.

The process of bringing over the information from the old website was actually quite fun. I was worried there would be some ugly code that might come over, but for the most part, things were pretty clean. WordPress does a good job of clearing out embedded code from other platforms, but there were some pages I wanted to save some of the original code in order to format the page. That retrofitting was a little tedious, but much less so than anticipated.

The images FindLaw sent over on the CD-Rom, however, were really small, so we chose not to use them. Instead, I found some really nice stock images to act as placeholders until I was able to photograph the office (a service we provide in-house). That way we could offer high quality images throughout the process.

We met the deadline with five days to spare. Since the new website was built locally on my computer as opposed to live on a server, I met with Erica Wikander, the Partner spearheading the update, to show her the new site and get notes for final changes. Overall, she and her Partners were pleased, and changes were minor.

I wanted to hijack their web address from FindLaw before they could take the old site down so clients wouldn't see any interruption. In order to do so, we launched two days ahead of time.

Moving Forward

As was initially mentioned, FindLaw was providing three ongoing services.

- Blog Posting
- SEO Maintenance
- Analytics

It was important that VJW work with a website design firm in Grand Rapids that could provide these so there wouldn't be an interruption of service after the move. Luckily, Green Cup Design had extensive history in all three (myself having been the Director at a formerly local SEO firm).

Green Cup Design continues to write weekly blog posts for VJW. This is important for two reasons. The first is humans – if nothing ever changes on the website, people are less likely to be driven to it. In this case, the services the law firm provides are always in demand, so the blog posts are likely not the compelling source of visits, though they provide important information regarding updates in the field and preparation for a divorce.

The second reason ongoing blog posting is important is for Google and SEO ranking. Google's bots (aka. crawlers or spiders) are simply robots that are reading your website. The more content one provides these bots, the better understood the website is. With that understanding, Google can then send you targeted clients through its search engine, ones that are more likely to convert (purchase services).

Inquiries



SEO Maintenance is offered quarterly. This keeps us up to date on competition, as well as latest marketing trends. Tweaks are made to the site accordingly in order to continue ranking for the target market.

Analytics plays an important role to both. They help us know if our blog posts are hitting their mark, or if we need to hone in toward a certain demographic. They may surprise us by pointing out a demographic that stumbled upon the site by accident that could play an important role, and they help us stay up on maintenance by watching those trends with a detailed lens.

Conclusion

All in all, the move was a success. Velzen, Johnsen, and Wikander, P.C., now has a clean, modern, and organized website that resembles the old site nicely. We also photographed their space to update the images on the site, completing the look. We were able to capture all pages and content before the old website was taken down, including the original keywords. Since the move, the site has only grown in prominence, and they've doubled their monthly visits.