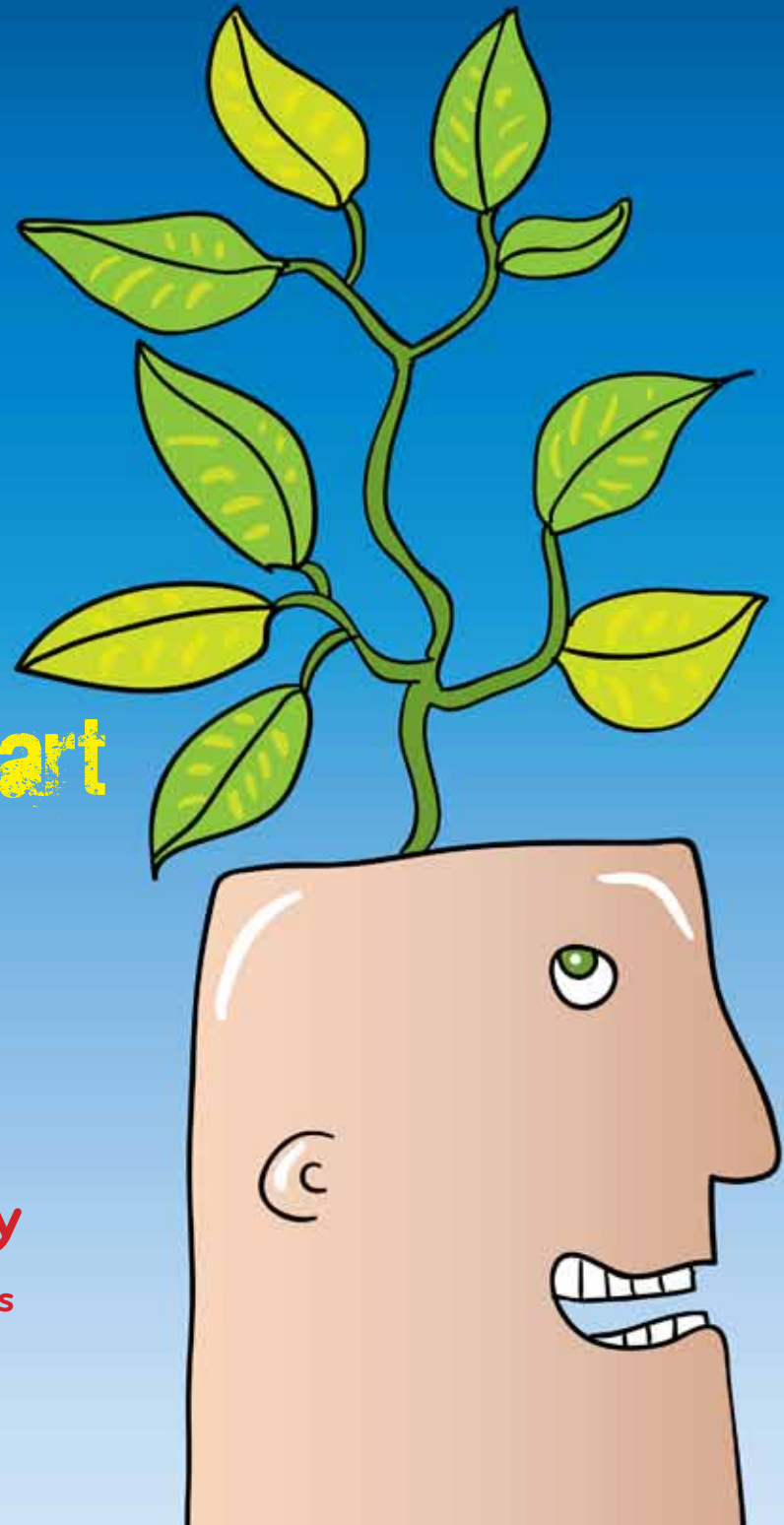


Is your website letting you down?

Three strategies to kick-start
your online presence

Daniel Barnett & Eugenie Verney

authors of *Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers*

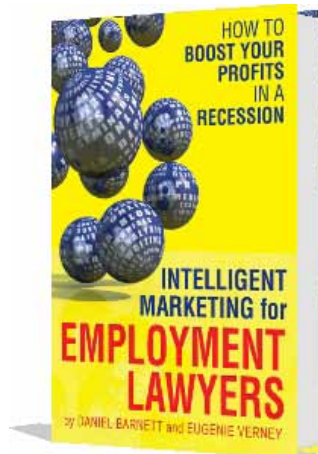


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Is Your Website Letting You Down?

Three strategies to kick-start your online presence

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Introduction

A decade ago, all a legal website did was act as an online brochure or shop window. There'd be a bit about the firm's services, a bit about the history, a few contact details, and that was largely that. It didn't actually *do* anything.

Now that's changed.

Having a strong online presence is no longer a luxury—it's a must.

Consider what *you* want from the websites *you* visit. You expect to find a great deal more than the equivalent of a Yellow Pages listing, and it's the same with clients looking for your legal services. Yes, they want to know who you are and what you're offering, but you'll really grab and hold their attention if you make your website a valuable resource they'll want to return to again and again.

Transforming your website into a serious marketing tool can be a real challenge and it's easy to get confused and distracted. Get the basics right, though, and you'll find the rest starts falling into place...

Before we go any further, we must stress that you need to know who it is you're talking to. Your website won't reach your target clientele if you haven't properly identified who they are and what they want.

If you're not sure where to begin, have a look at the first ebook in our Intelligent Marketing series,

Top Ten Mistakes Lawyers Make

Strategy # 1

Understanding ‘permission marketing’

Old-style marketing is largely about one-way traffic. You tell, your audience listens. That’s changing, and changing fast. The Internet is redefining how we all do business, and the emphasis now is on starting conversations and building relationships.

So what do we mean by ‘permission marketing’ and what does it bring to your website?

At its simplest, it’s this:

1. You’re on a website, having a look around.
2. You’re offered something—a report, an ebook, a video, or the option to sign up to a newsletter.
3. You quite fancy that, so you click on the link.
4. You’re then asked for your contact details—always your name, always your email address, and sometimes more.
5. You complete the form, click send, and then get a message thanking you and asking you to go to your inbox where you’ll find a message.

6. You go to your inbox, and there's the message. It more often than not asks you to click on a link which takes you back to the website (this is called double-opt in, and is to ensure that you do want to subscribe and have not either made a mistake or your email address has been harvested).
7. Once back at the site, you can download whatever it is you signed up for, or just await the arrival of the newsletter in your inbox or through your letterbox.

By following this process you're giving your consent to be put on a database and contacted again. From being just an idle onlooker, you've been invited to begin a relationship—and you've agreed. It's these websites that are most likely to draw you in further by offering interesting content and it's this fundamental paradigm shift from the passive to the active that's the real key to your own website's potential as a powerful marketing tool.

The principles of permission marketing are not new. They're tried-and-tested features in long-established practices such as direct response advertising, telemarketing and direct mail. However—telephone marketing apart—what makes online permission marketing so effective is the immediacy and accuracy. You know right away who wants to find out more, when they clicked on the link that launched their relationship with you, and even how they found you.

Should you, though, use permission marketing right across your website?

There's a strong case against putting a gatekeeper on everything you offer your visitors. You'll inevitably get a higher response if you don't ask for anything in return—indeed, this and our other Intelligent Marketing ebooks are all entirely unfettered and free to download. The argument is that the viral nature of today's Web 2.0 social media platforms does the job of spreading the word for you, and there is no need to keep tabs on your website visitors as they will return to you organically—bringing others with them.

There is a downside, of course—if you're not asking for any contact details, you're not growing your database, you've fewer people with whom to start building a direct relationship, and you can't so easily monitor who accesses what.

So which works best?

The jury is still out, and we suggest that you compromise. With something that inherently involves two-way traffic, like a newsletter, you clearly need your visitors to sign up. The same with podcasts—you can't receive a download unless you've provided details of where it has to go.

With everything else, we recommend making at least some of it completely freely accessible—and then see what happens...

Strategy # 2

Going all out for 'content'

To make either permission marketing or unfettered access work you need what's known as 'content'. Along with the copy that appears across your site, this is the material your visitors sign up for or just take away, and there are two reasons why it's a vital factor in making your website work:

- a large library of relevant, regularly updated and free content turns your website into a valued resource. It helps you build your personal and corporate reputation with existing clients, prospective clients, other lawyers and the media
- a rich stream of content is essential for driving visitors to your website. The more material you have that meets the search engines' criteria, the higher you'll climb in their listings.

We recommend you use a mix of content. These are some of the most popular types:

News releases used to have a very limited lifespan. They'd be written, sent out to the media, read, responded to (or not), a story appeared (or not), and that was the end of that.

Now, not only can they live indefinitely online, they can also give your website visitors a good overview of your firm's achievements and aspirations, as well as providing a pool of practical information. And Google and Co

love them! We suggest creating a specific area of your website and linking to it from your home page—but don't post actual releases or extracts there unless you're updating regularly. Old news is a very significant turn-off, as is any other time-sensitive material placed in a prominent position.

Access: we suggest you make it unfettered!

Updates and newsletters are not only ideal vehicles for permission marketing, they're also another easy way to build up website content. So if you're already emailing out a client newsletter, create a section for them on your website and post them there as well. If you're making them available as downloadable PDFs, make sure you carry web page summaries too so that the search engines can find them.

Access: a mix—use permission marketing for the latest (and perhaps the previous two) and make the archive freely available.

Guides do just that: they guide. They're something really straightforward that throws light on a topic, most usually a piece of legislation or a process, and how it works. Guides are not discursive; they lay out the facts rather than provide analysis or advice. They can be presented as web pages or as a PDF for download, or both.

Access: either permission marketing or unfettered access as part of a mix.

White papers have become very popular. The term has its origins in Whitehall, typically as a government paper arguing a specific position or offering a solution to a problem. Over the past decade or so, the web has seen new definitions emerge, and now the white paper format is used to meld the objective and educational with a corporate message. Your principal aim is to give your readers something of factual, practical use—information they'll then want to act on by engaging you as the firm best matched to their needs.

Best presented as standard A4 PDFs for download, you can label them as a ‘briefing paper’, or ‘discussion paper’, or ‘special report’. Include web page summaries as well.

Access: either permission marketing or unfettered access as part of a mix.

ebooks are less formal than white papers and are often presented—like this one—in landscape format. They’re generally written in a more conversational style than a white paper and they’re often professionally designed—like this one—and edited. They take longer and cost more to produce as a result, but as most of us find an ebook highly appealing, it’s generally a worthwhile investment.

Only publish one PDF ebook at a time to make maximum impact, and be sure to give it plenty of attention across your website and your other marketing initiatives.

Access: we say go for unfettered access, but ebooks also make excellent permission marketing content.

Video is, as you’ll have no doubt noticed, *the* fastest-growing medium on the web. YouTube now gets more than a billion hits a day. *A billion*. And the reason? We all love video and used well it’s the best way of connecting with your website visitors. The emphasis does have to be on ‘used well’, however—amateurish video can do you a major disservice and may bring you entirely the wrong sort of attention.

The law—and employment law in particular—lends itself well to video if the focus is on story-telling and not on facts and figures. However, a cursory look at what’s already on YouTube reveals a lot of talking heads and very little action, so here’s your chance to make your website shine! Use video to bring a scenario to life—for example, a woman returning to work after maternity leave whose employer wants to assign her to different duties. The narrative could highlight the potential minefield the employer was entering, leaving a significant number of viewers sufficiently unsettled to want to find out more.

This will, of course, cost you money. Unless your practice includes an unusually high quota of talented amateurs happy to get involved for free, you can't expect to put together a convincing drama on a DIY basis. Only you can decide whether it's worth investing in something more professional. If that is out of your reach, experiment with Q&A sessions featuring those team members most comfortable with public speaking. You can also record your training events, but be careful—without intelligent editing, these can be monumentally tedious, even with competent speakers!

When it's a wrap, post your video on YouTube and link back to your own website for maximum impact.

Access: we say unfettered and on your home page!

Podcasts are all about delivery. You can make both audio clips and videos available as delivered podcasts, a concept with which you'll no doubt already be familiar through broadcast media—particularly the BBC.

The term 'podcast' derives from a conjunction of iPod and broadcast, reflecting the fact that it was Apple's pioneering MP3 player for which the first podcasts were originally formatted.

Providing clients with a podcast service has two main benefits:

- it's permission marketing-based, so it's an easy way to build a relationship with anyone who signs up
- you're offering your website visitors another valuable resource.

Audio podcasts are by far the easiest to produce and deliver, and because they can be made quickly you can use them to react to breaking news as well as for routine Q&A sessions and interviews. You can more confidently take the DIY route with audio—we're much more likely to overlook any quality shortfalls than we would with video.

Access: permission marketing for the most recent, but unfettered for archive audio clips.

Strategy # 3

Laying down the key foundations

You may still be thinking that none of this applies to you—your practice is different, your clients are different, and they're not bothered as long as they know where you are.

Well, there are always exceptions to every rule, but generally speaking you will pay a price for continuing to ignore the realignment towards permission and unfettered marketing and good content.

You will also be punished for including any of the following—in any combination:

- bad aesthetics
- poor layout
- dull, ungrammatical, feature-heavy copy
- complex navigation
- slow-loading pages
- old 'news'

- out-of-date or no people details
- broken links
- ‘splash’ pages—the introductory pages (often animated) where you’re invited to click ‘enter’ or ‘skip’ to get to the real home page.

That old cliché ‘You never get a second chance to make a first impression’ could not be more apposite when it comes to websites, and here—as with all your marketing—you need to give your visitors what they actually want, not what you *think* they want.

So start by taking a step back and approach your website from the perspectives of:

1. your existing clients
2. somebody who’s reached you through a search engine and is looking for information
3. somebody directed straight to your site
4. somebody looking for a job.

Your existing clients already know who you are, so they’re looking for something specific. It could be the new ebook or video you emailed them about, or it could be something in your newsletter archive. Even if you’ve given them a direct link, they may head for your home page rather than delve in their inbox. So whenever you post anything new on your website...

- include a short summary and link from your home page

On the other hand, it could just be that they want your phone number. Yes, as simple as that. So make it easy for them and always

- display your main contact details on every page

Somebody looking for information wants to lay their hands on it quickly. Perhaps they want to know if they have grounds for a claim, or how to defend one. They may be ready to seek your advice; they may not. Either way, give them as many reasons as possible to stay and find out more—about what's troubling them and about you. To do this you must...

- ensure your site is rich in valuable content and signpost it from every page

If they find your content useful, they'll want to find out more about you—and one of the most clicked links on any site is the one leading to Our People (or Our Team, or Who We Are, or however you label yourselves). You must therefore ensure that you...

- clearly signpost your people section from every page

Somebody directed to your site via a third party arrives with a very different agenda. Perhaps they're a referral from an existing client, or they've been forwarded one of your newsletters, or seen something on your site mentioned on somebody else's and followed a link. They're not there for general employment law information, nor have they reached you via Google.

Clearly our first four suggestions apply here too, but they now also need know more about you. Do this with...

- a brief home page overview with clear signposting to where they can find more

Somebody looking for a job sees your website through the eyes of a potential team member, so make sure they can quickly find out about your recruitment procedures and whether you have any vacancies. The best way to do this is to

- create a section—labelled, say, Recruitment, Careers, or Working For Us—signposted from your home page

Finally, let's return to that list of things you want to avoid and turn them into positives. What you should be striving for with your website is...

- attractive aesthetics
- a logical, easy-to-follow layout
- attention-grabbing, benefit-led copy
- simple signposting and navigation
- up-to-date news
- an interesting About Us section
- well-maintained people details
- no broken links
- no 'splash' page.

Add to this the following and you've got all the basic essentials for a website that really earns its keep...

- a 'call to action'—something that gets your visitor's attention and spurs them into starting a relationship with you—and preferably on every page
- a detailed Contact Us section, including maps and directions
- a straightforward inquiry form, which a visitor fills out if they want you to contact them.

4

Leading by example

So how does the legal profession measure up? In our book **Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers**, we look at a range of legal websites chosen largely at random to find out how well and how quickly solicitor practices are embracing permission marketing and broadening their online horizons. To round things off, here are a few examples...

Hitting Home

You must get your home page right. It has to look good, perform well, and give your visitor answers quickly and effectively.

This home page from Employee SOS has clean lines, makes good use of colour, and has benefit-led copy.

The signposting is clear, there are prominent contact details, and two calls to action: 'arrange a callback', 'ask a question'.

The banner is an animated Flash feature which flags up other benefits, such as 'covers whole of England and Wales' and 'direct helpline'.

www.employeesos.co.uk
Telford, Shropshire



Colemans-ctts has chosen a stripped-down home page, which can be risky as there's a fine line between this and a splash page.

The design is good, though, and you'd be a churlish visitor not to click on one of the clearly-labelled links...

The copy in both boxes could be lighter and less predictable, especially given the 'we're people too' theme, which begins here and continues through the site.

The box at the top of the page is a Flash animation. The first message says: 'We may be one of the best UK law firms...', and the second '...but we're people too'.

We're not quite sure what to make of the third (right): too much money spent on image consultants?!

www.colemans-ctts.co.uk/
Kingston, Surrey



Quite unlike any other site we feature, solicitor Dean Morris's got-the-boot.com home page is striking and straightforward.

You can see what they do at the top, and the copy is generally clear and almost all benefits-led (see below).

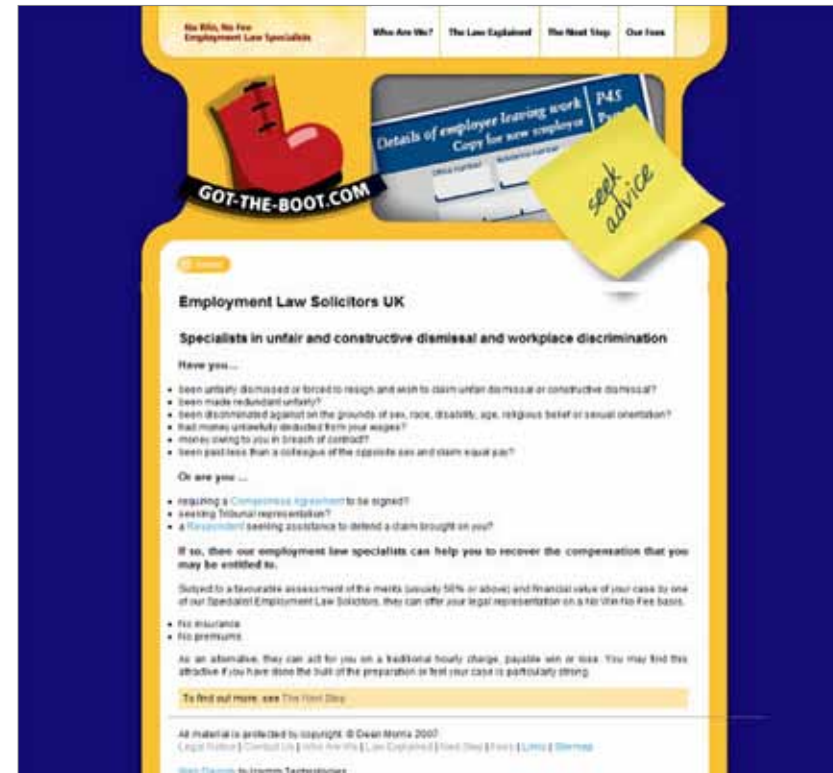
There are no contact details for a reason. Enquiries are all funnelled through the site via a comprehensive form, which initiates the relationship.

The nature of the site and the business—one-off claimants—doesn't lend itself to other types of permission marketing. However, home page pointers towards something to download and take away might not go amiss, perhaps versions of some of the wide selection of guides found within the site?

www.got-the-boot.com
 Solihull, West Midlands

Have you...

- been unfairly dismissed or forced to resign and wish to claim unfair dismissal or constructive dismissal?
- been made redundant unfairly?
- been discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, disability, age, religious belief or sexual orientation?
- had money unlawfully deducted from your wages?
- money owing to you in breach of contract?
- been paid less than a colleague of the opposite sex and claim equal pay?



Who are you?

Your visitors need to know who you are and a bit about your pedigree—but not at great length, and, other than a brief overview, not on your home page! For some examples of how *not* to tell your story, have a look the third in our Intelligent Marketing ebook series, **Copywriting Is Not a Gift**.

Here's one way of doing an About Us page well:

Ashby Cohen's text is succinct and tells the visitor what they need to know:

- Who founded the firm
- What they did previously
- When the firm was founded
- What it does.

The copy also reiterates a key benefit—the free telephone consultation—and includes a link to Contact Us.

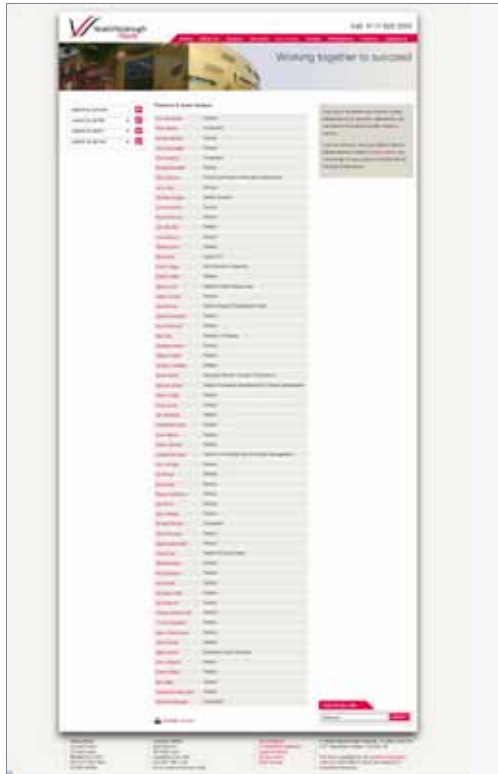
www.ashbycohen.co.uk/about.html
London



Putting faces to names

After your home page, the most visited part of your site is likely to be where you put the spotlight on your team. Our People pages work best if you use photos, include everyone (not just fee earners), and keep everything regularly updated.

Here's a beautifully designed Our People section:



Veale Wasbrough Vizards' design lets you search by name, job title, industry sector, and service as well as just clicking on a name in the list (left). Do that and you get another nicely-designed page (above) with all the basic information you need, a professional photo, and clear contact details.

www.vwv.co.uk/site/people
Bristol

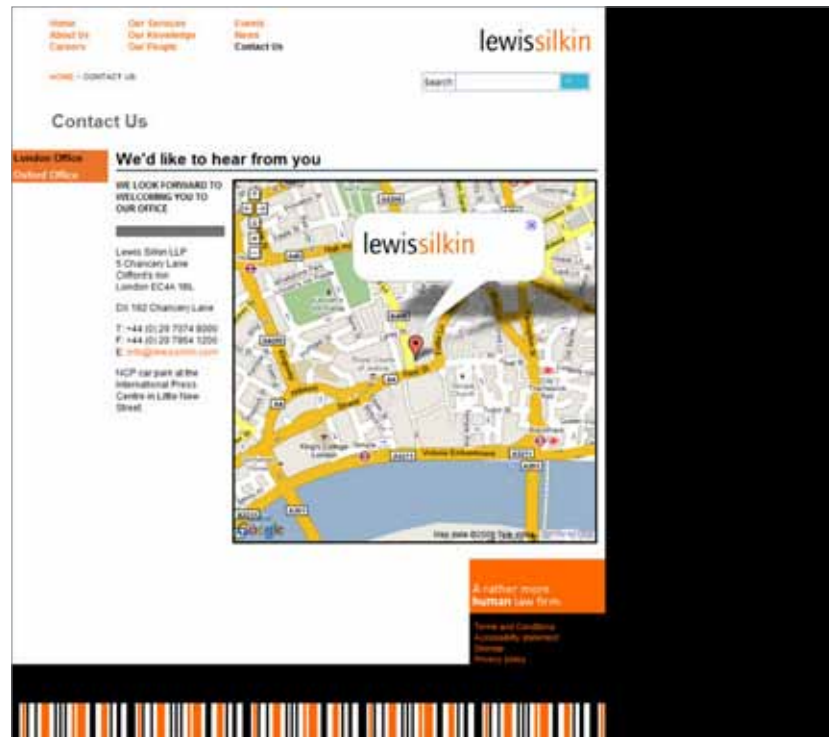
Where can we find you?

Your existing clients and prospective clients want to know where you are, how to contact you, and how to get to you, so make sure you tell them! We recommend embedding a map (from Google Maps, for example, or Multimap), and providing details of travelling to your office by car (and where to park) and all forms of relevant public transport. Include the main elements in a PDF.

Here's a neat and tidy example:

Lewis Silkin's design is simple, with full contact details and embedded interactive maps for both the firm's offices, and details of where to park.

www.lewissilkin.com/contactus/Pages/default.aspx
London and Oxford



About the authors

Daniel Barnett

Daniel Barnett (www.danielbarnett.co.uk) is a practising employment barrister widely recognised for his marketing skills. In 1999, he launched the Employment Law Bulletin mailing list and was the first UK lawyer to make widespread use of email for marketing purposes. The following year, he launched the UK's first legal email content service (www.emplawservices.co.uk), helping many firms of solicitors build up a substantial employment law practice. In 2006, he was the first UK lawyer to make use of telephone and video webinars, going on to co-found CPD Webinars (www.cpdwebinars.com) in early 2007.



Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers is his eighth book.

Eugenie Verney

Eugenie Verney (www.eugenieverney.com) has a Masters degree in employment law and is a professional mainstream and online communicator. Her extensive experience spans print and broadcast journalism—including The Guardian, Daily Express, Granada TV, and the BBC—commercial and public sector marketing, PR, copywriting, and corporate communications. She works with businesses and individuals to identify how best they can reach their clients using a mix of traditional and web-based marketing methods and guides them through putting theory into practice with tailored communications training and support.



We hope you've found this ebook useful and you've taken away some ideas for your website you can start implementing today to give your business a boost!

But we've only scratched the surface here.

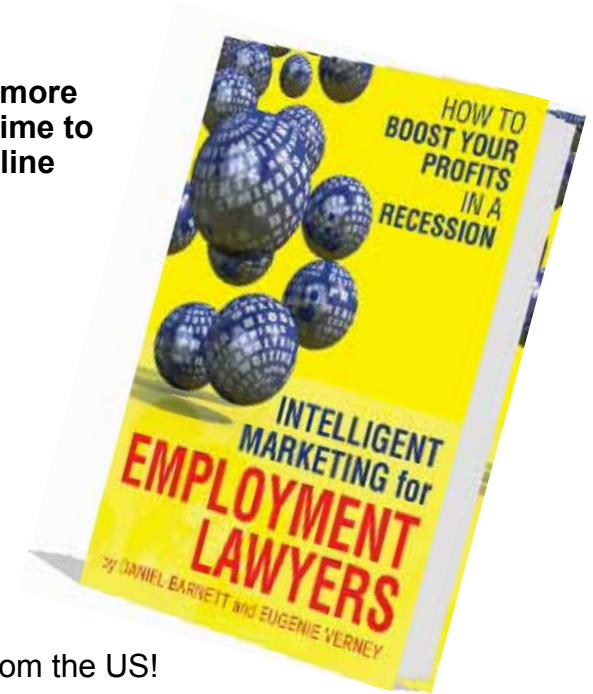
In our book *Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers* we not only share more ideas about **how** to write great copy, we also show you **why** this is exactly the right time to raise your marketing game by blending a range of tried-and-tested tools and new online strategies to give you an **unbeatable edge**.

With action points throughout putting theory into practice, *Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers* reveals

- how to **really accurately** refine your market and defining your message
- the **complete secrets** of writing copy people will read and respond to
- **the truth** about what the media really wants—and how to deliver it
- more **smart ways** to advertise in the 21st century
- all the **insider knacks** of successful networking—online and face-to-face

PLUS invaluable insight from **eight high-profile employment law firms**—including one from the US!

PLUS comprehensive online **Resources** for each chapter with active links to even more great advice!



Order your copy NOW from our dedicated website!

www.intelligentmarketingforlawyers.co.uk