



RFP Guide for Law Firm Websites

Request for Proposal (RFP) Guide & Template
for Law Firm Website Projects



Is your law firm issuing a request for proposal for a website redesign?

This comprehensive RFP guide will help ensure you are providing the right information, and asking the right questions, when you approach marketing agencies.

At fSquared Marketing, we have a track record of designing and building award-winning law firm websites.

Over the years we've responded to over a hundred RFPs for website projects. Back when we worked in-house at major law firms, we wrote our fair share as well. Website design projects are complex, and if you feel overwhelmed by all the details you're not alone!

Fortunately, we can help you simplify the complexity and keep pace with industry standards for top-tier law firm websites. In this free RFP guide, we offer you the benefit of our experience on both sides of the process.

Our complimentary RFP template for law firm websites is available as a Word .docx file that you can modify to suit your project.

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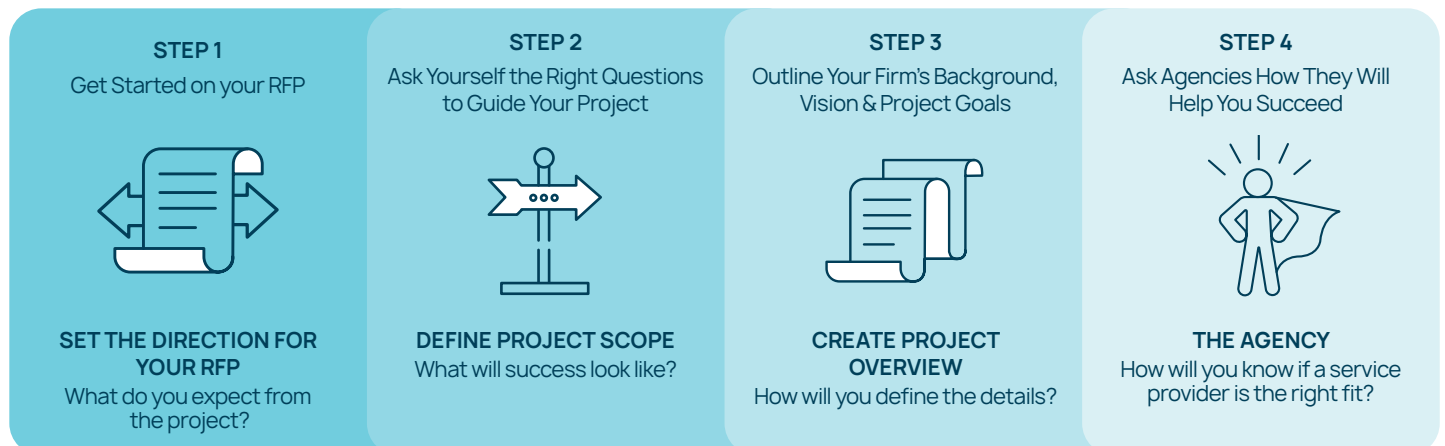
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REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL TEMPLATE & OVERVIEW

Step 1: Get Started on Your RFP

Your RFP defines the scope of your website design project, your desired timeline, and the outcomes you are hoping to achieve. It is essential to get this right, and we're here to help. Your firm's website is a significant investment. Your new website will form an essential part of the brand experience, becoming the online command centre for your firm's marketing and business development initiatives.



SET THE DIRECTION FOR YOUR RFP
What do you expect from the project?

USE YOUR RFP TO SET THE DIRECTION FOR YOUR WEBSITE PROJECT

The RFP process can be a little like dating. You share some information about your firm, as well as your hopes, needs, and aspirations. Then you ask your vendors about themselves. To ensure a good match, you'll need to ask thoughtful questions, but you'll also need to know what you want from this partnership.



FIND A DEPENDABLE SERVICE PROVIDER
Experience with law firms matters!



ENSURE A GOOD MATCH
Is the marketing agency the right fit for your firm?



AGENCIES ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL



PRICING



CAPABILITIES



EXPERIENCE

NOT ALL AGENCIES ARE CREATED EQUAL

The RFP process is how you'll meet different agencies, learn about their approach, and ultimately select one as a partner for the duration of the project (and ideally beyond).

There are significant differences in the capabilities, pricing, and experience levels of service providers. Some are groups of loosely aligned freelancers. Others are competent general marketing agencies without significant experience in legal marketing. Then there are service partners dedicated to serving the needs of law firms, and a rare few that can also provide strategic consulting services to augment design work.

WE RECOMMEND FINDING A SERVICE PARTNER YOU CAN DEPEND ON.

A service partner you can count on to deliver exceptional results will make you look like a superstar to firm leadership.

Ideally, you want a service partner who can accomplish every aspect of the project, from design to build, through launch and beyond. It's important to look for a service partner to support your firm with ongoing hosting, maintenance, and website enhancements.

It's also worth considering whether agencies can also support your firm in other marketing initiatives, through consulting, designing and content writing – which can improve efficiency for website design projects and create synergies between all your marketing projects.

Step 2: Ask the Right Questions to Guide Your Law Firm Website Project



DEFINE THE SCOPE AND SET YOUR TRAJECTORY
Guiding questions to help your team succeed

You don't have to have all the answers at this early stage, but keeping certain questions in mind can help you define the scope and set the trajectory for your law firm website project. These guiding questions can also help you communicate with your law firm's leadership team, to shape expectations for the website design project.

WHAT WOULD SUCCESS LOOK LIKE TO YOUR FIRM?

How will your firm determine whether a website redesign is a success? What benchmarks can you set to gauge effectiveness? These might include key performance indicators, website analytics metrics, or performance measurements related to site speed or search engine optimization. Your metrics may include more visitor traffic, increased user engagement, and greater numbers of high-quality leads.

Think about which colleagues will be part of your project team. Ask them to help you consider how the new website can help your firm achieve its marketing and business goals.

PARTNERS, MARKETING, IT AND ASSOCIATES: WHO WILL BE ON THE PROJECT TEAM?

While every firm partner is a stakeholder for website design projects, not every partner needs to be involved with all aspects of the project. Some partners may be too busy to provide timely feedback and approvals. Having "too many cooks in the kitchen" can significantly slow down the process and increase the risk of internal disagreements.

At the same time, it's important to secure firm-wide buy-in for large marketing projects. The best approach is often to select a team of decision-makers who can represent different groups and interests. The firm's marketing team should absolutely be on the project team, along with at least one partner.

A designated member of your IT team should be assigned to the project for technical support although realistically for most projects they may only be needed closer to launch, for example, to facilitate DNS changes. You might also consider including a representative associate, as this can help to ensure that your website reflects the future of your firm.



WHO IS INVOLVED?
Partners, Associates, IT,
Marketing



DETERMINE BENCHMARKS OF SUCCESS
How will you gauge effectiveness?

Your project team needs to be vested with the authority to make final decisions, so the project team should be clearly defined and approved by firm stakeholders.

It's best to avoid a situation where a partner decides to take an interest partway through the project. The risk is that they may override previous decisions by the project team, which will inevitably create delays and increase costs. If you know someone is likely to add bumps in the road, consider in advance how you can involve them in the process.



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN YOUR NEW WEBSITE?

An agency's job is to help you find out exactly what you want in a redesign, by guiding your project team through an iterative process of discovery sessions, consultation, design and approvals.

By considering some of these elements now, you'll be able to provide some details in the RFP:

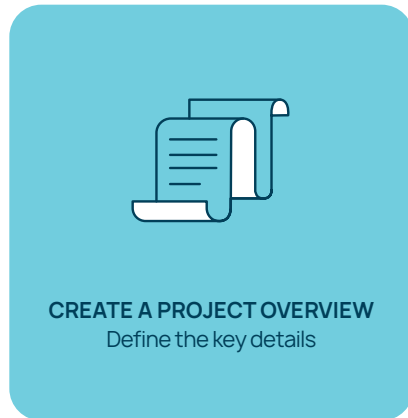
- **User Experience (UX):** What do you want the user experience to be like on your new website?
An enjoyable brand experience encompasses design, writing, and functionality.
- **Branding:** Do you need a brand refresh, with a new logo, brand graphics, colours, or messaging?
Are you looking to rebrand?
- **Design Aesthetic:** What image is your firm is looking to portray?
Are there websites that grab and hold your attention?
- **Content and Writing:** What content will be migrated from the current website?
What new content needs to be written or rewritten?
- **Insights, Blog, White Papers, and Client Resources:** What helpful resources will your website offer visitors?
- **Demonstrating Expertise:** How will your website show that your firm is the best choice?
- **Lawyer Bios:** Do you need help creating outstanding lawyer bios?
These are the most viewed pages on law firm websites, and vital for generating leads.
- **Photography:** Are you looking for new photos of your lawyers and team?
Your chosen agency should provide art direction to ensure they match the website design and preferably, photographer resources, to ensure consistency.

- **Videos:** Are looking to integrate an existing video library or create new video content?
It's important to provide this information in the RFP.
- **Functional Requirements:** Does this website require specific functionality, such as event scheduling, calendars, or .pdf versions of lawyer bios?
- **Capturing Leads:** Will your new website capture information about leads through email sign-ups, form submissions or resource downloads? Your website will need to comply with data regulations such as The California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL).

				
PHOTOGRAPHY	LAWYER BIOS	CAPTURE LEADS	CONTACT FORM & DETAILS	NEWSLETTER SIGN-UP
				
RESOURCES Firm News, white papers, infographics	EXPERTISE Case highlights, lawyer insights	VIDEOS Interviews, guidance, media coverage	LANGUAGES Reach multilingual audiences	PAYMENT Online invoicing and payments

Step 3: Outline Your Firm's Background Vision & Project Goals

Providing the right details can yield great responses to your RFP.



Sending out an RFP with a concise overview of your firm, your goals, and key project details shows marketing agencies that you've given the project its due consideration. In this third step of our RFP guide, we walk you through responses that may not be self-explanatory.

Project Overview

Start by describing your vision for the project, with a succinct list of core goals. You may consider revisiting this step once the bulk of the RFP is complete.

MARKETING & BUSINESS GOALS FOR THE NEW WEBSITE

The more agencies know about your goals, the better they will be able to outline a plan in their response. Goals can be quantitative (e.g., increase newsletter subscribers by 20% by end of next year) or qualitative (e.g., offer visitors a better mobile experience), and they should also be as specific as possible.

Example goals include generating leads, brand awareness, market positioning, attracting students and recruits, thought leadership, and supporting other marketing activities such as events. Every law firm prioritizes these goals differently.

Your firm might also have unique goals around growing a practice area or industry group, rebranding after a merger, or breaking into a new market.

Your Firm's Project Budget & Timeline

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Letting agencies know your budget helps them to set realistic goals. When we know a project budget, we have a better understanding of the project scope and can advise clients on their options. Providing a budget range can also be helpful.

Whether you choose to include a budget or not, you should provide enough details to ensure that agencies can adequately scope the project. Otherwise, you will end up with proposals for websites of wildly different levels of sophistication.



BUDGET



PROJECT
TIMELINE



EXPECTED
LAUNCH DATE

It can be difficult to understand the reasoning behind differences in pricing, or to dissuade partners from simply going with the cheapest option. If an agency is offering to build a website on the cheap, they are likely using a pre-built template. This could be a reasonable option for a solo practitioner, but most law firms can benefit from investing in more powerful functionality and customized design.

RFP & PROJECT TIMELINE

Creating a timeline for the RFP process will set expectations both internally and with agencies, and will help keep everything moving along. Here's what to define in the timeline:

- The date by which any questions should be submitted and to whom they should be sent
- The date responses to service provider questions will be sent, and give them adequate time to respond
- Where agencies should direct their questions and when the question period begins and ends
- When the firm will make a preliminary decision
- When interviews will be conducted, if applicable
- When a final decision will be made
- The kickoff date for the project

WHEN DO YOU ENVISION LAUNCHING THE NEW WEBSITE?

Do you want the launch of the new website to coincide with a significant event, like a firm anniversary or a move to a new office? Communicate this in the RFP. Include a reasonable buffer in case unforeseen events create delays, such as a major case or a change of leadership. Getting an RFP out the door takes considerable work. But getting this right will save you time in the long run and ensure that you get a website that you, your firm, and your clients will love. Once the RFP is out in the wild, and you start getting smart responses from great agencies, you'll be well on your way to an exciting and successful launch.

Your Law Firm

Provide a background on your firm, including key practice areas and industries, your firm's personality and approach, your firm's history, as well as awards and recognition. Describe your law firm's trajectory, and where you hope to be next year and in five years.



TARGET MARKET

+



AUDIENCE

+



MAJOR
COMPETITORS

Include as much information as you can about your target markets, audiences and competitors.

YOUR FIRM'S BRAND

Is your law firm's new website part of a larger rebranding project? Should it be?

A website redesign involves re-engineering your firm's website to help your firm accomplish its business goals.

Rebranding involves a more comprehensive re-visioning of how your firm presents itself to the public through every channel, including but not limited to your website. Rebranding involves strategic considerations, along with visual design and messaging to better represent your firm:

- Strategic considerations: In-depth rebranding exercises, legal market positioning, etc.
- Visual brand elements: Design aesthetic, logos, color palettes, photography, etc.
- Brand messaging: Verbal brand, unique value propositions, taglines, content, etc.



As law firms respond to and aim to reposition themselves in shifting, competitive marketplaces, website redesigns and law firm rebrands are often integrated into one project.

Combining a firm rebrand with a website redesign project is typically the most efficient route. It also ensures that your new website will reflect your firm's values, personality, and strengths. Whatever you choose, we recommend detailing in the RFP whether you are looking to rebrand, refresh your existing brand, or integrate your existing brand with the new website.

WHO ARE YOUR CLIENTS?

- **Current Clients:** Name some of your top clients, if appropriate, as well as the industries and regions of clients you represent.
- **Prospective Clients:** Describe your ideal prospective clients, including specific examples of the types of people, companies or organizations you'd like to represent.

WHAT AUDIENCE ARE YOU TRYING TO REACH?

- **Referral Sources:** Anyone who elevates your brand through word of mouth is considered a referral source. Referrals may come through conversation, social media, text messages, blogs, websites, and more. It's important to reach your referral sources through the platforms they're most likely to use for recommending your business.
- **Lateral Hires, Associates, Students & Staff:** Are there specific firms or schools, industries, regions, or organizations you look to for lateral hires, or for hiring students, associates or staff?
- **Media:** Do you approach specific publications, media outlets, or social media channels to raise awareness about your firm? Which media sources could help elevate your firm's brand?
- **Additional Audiences:** If any additional audiences come to mind during this part of the RFP process, name them here. Examples include community organizations your firm supports.

WHO ARE YOUR MAJOR COMPETITORS?

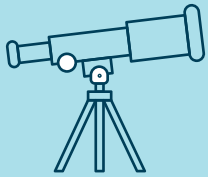
Naming your competition can help marketing agencies better reach your prospective clients and target audiences. Your firm may compete with others for clients, hiring, awards, or media attention.

Your Firm's Current Website: What Works & What Doesn't

This part of the RFP is an opportunity to provide some background information about your current website, including when it was launched and any significant updates since then. By letting marketing agencies know what's working and what isn't, you'll provide valuable information about how a new website can better meet your firm's needs.

Every law firm is unique, so it's important to outline your understanding of how your website currently functions, and what kind of functionality is needed for your new website. For example, your website may have a contact form for client inquiries and a newsletter signup form that you'd like to keep or update. Your new website may require multiple languages, payment integrations, podcast and video libraries.

You don't need technical expertise to answer this question. Later in our RFP guide and template, we outline the functional requirements for top-tier websites, which experienced agencies will be able to address. The RFP template provides the opportunity to ask marketing agencies for details about how they will address your functional requirements.



THE AGENCY'S
VISION FOR CONTENT
CREATION



WEBSITE
FEATURES



WEBSITE
FUNCTIONALITY



PROPOSED
TIMELINE & BUDGET



DESIGN & BUILD
PROCESS



ONGOING
MAINTENANCE

QUESTIONS FOR MARKETING AGENCIES

Step 4: Ask Agencies How They Will Help You Succeed



THE AGENCY
Finding the right fit
through RFP responses

Asking marketing agencies the right questions can yield great responses to your RFP.

Once you've provided all the necessary information about your law firm in the RFP template, it's time to ask service providers to answer questions about their background and experience. In this fourth step of our RFP guide, we walk you through responses that may not be self-explanatory.

About the Agency & Experience

BACKGROUND AND COMPETENCIES

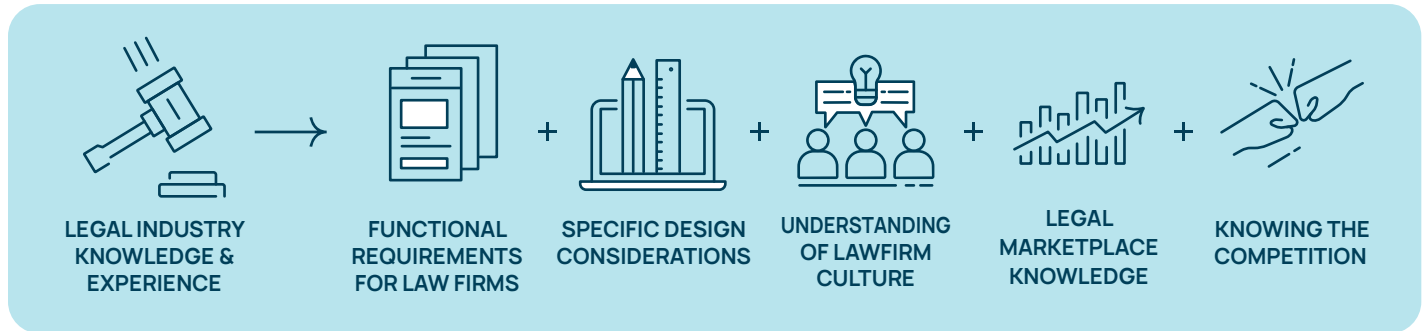
Ask the agency to outline its background. When was it founded and how has it evolved to serve clients? Does the agency have the competencies required to complete every part of the project? Some design agencies may not be able to provide development services, and some web agencies may not be able to provide strategic branding or copywriting services.

It is always easier to work with an agency that can handle 100% of your project requirements.

LEGAL INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Does the agency have experience working with law firms? Does agency leadership have experience working in-house at a law firm? Law firm websites have different functional requirements and unique design considerations compared to other types of websites.

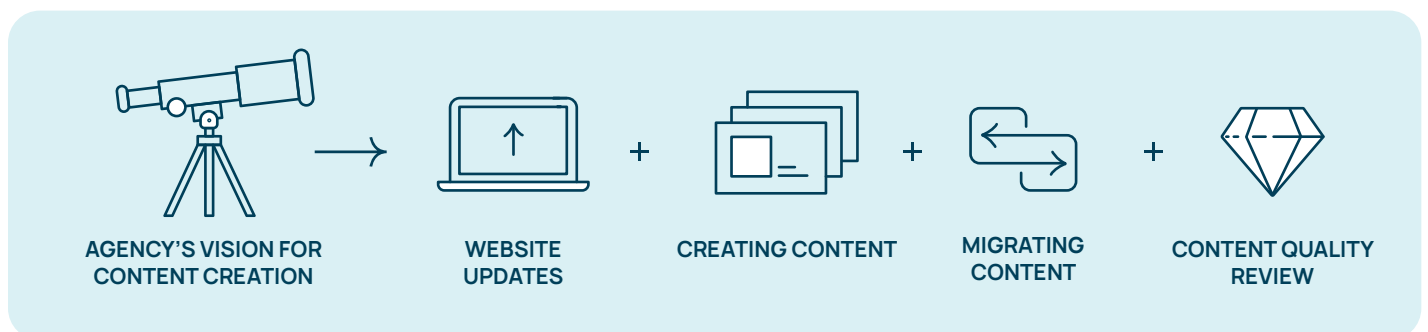
An agency with extensive legal industry experience will understand law firm culture, the ever-changing market for legal services, and what your competitors are doing. They will be well-positioned to make sure your new website is beautiful, functional, and strategically aligned with your firm's goals.



- **Portfolio:** Ask for examples of the agency's work with other law firms, especially of a similar size or with a similar client base to yours. Have they won any awards? Do you like their previous work?
- **Project Team:** Who are the key members of the project team? Ask for a brief bio that outlines what each person's role would be in the project.
- **References:** Ask for at least three references, ideally from the legal industry.
- **Supporting Services:** What other services does the agency offer that might benefit your firm now or in the future? Working with an agency that provides comprehensive marketing and design, and website related services can increase efficiencies and avoid the headaches that come from having to manage multiple vendors.

The Marketing Agency's Vision for the New Website

You can ask the agency to outline their vision for the new website, specifically related to content, features and functionality.



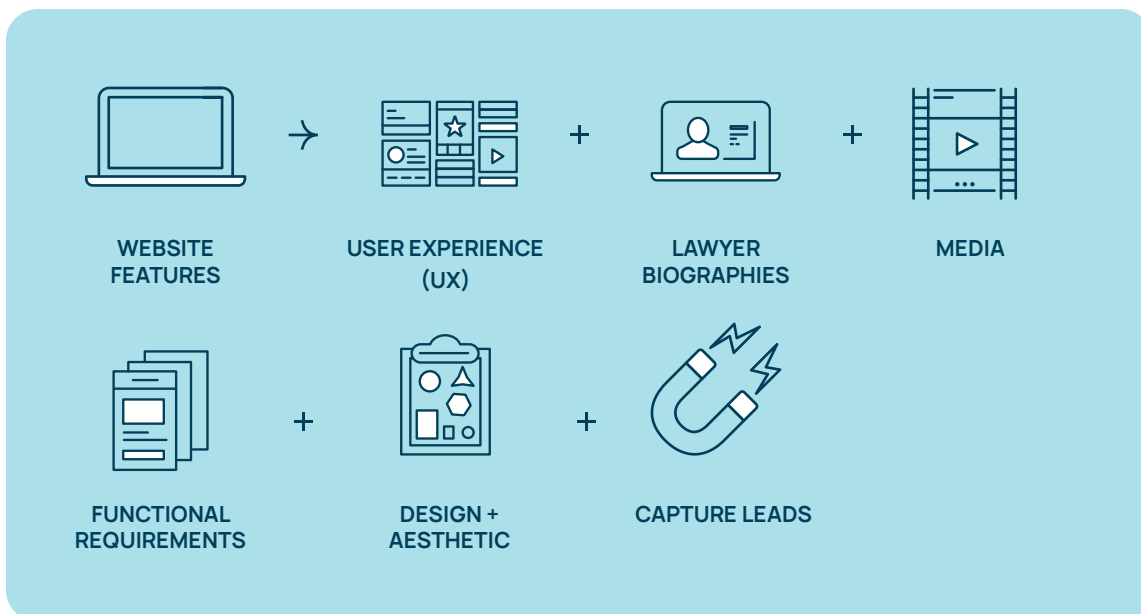
WEBSITE CONTENT: WHAT IS THE CONTENT STRATEGY FOR THE NEW WEBSITE?

Law firm websites tend to be content-rich. Most project delays on website projects involve the migration, creation, and approval of content. We recommend selecting an agency that can articulate a plan for each of these factors, as needed:

- **Content Quality Review & Guidelines:** Can the agency work with you to review the quality of existing content, and create guidelines for key content types?
- **Migration of Existing Content:** Who will manage the migration of existing content to the new website, you or the agency? Is the migration going to be simple or will a script need to be written?
- **Content Creation:** Who is responsible for writing new content, the firm or your agency partner? We recommend a combination of the two, since effective law firm content almost always requires lawyer involvement. Your agency partner should be able to write new copy and provide editorial services and direction as needed. Writing new content can be time-consuming, so you should have a plan in place to ensure it does not delay the launch. (In case you haven't guessed, the majority of law firm website project delays are caused by content issues.)
- **SEO (Search Engine Optimization) Content Strategy:** If improving SEO performance is a goal for this website, you should explore including an SEO audit and strategy with your agency as part of the website project. SEO and content are interconnected, and a website redesign is a good opportunity to make improvements for both.
- **Ongoing Content Updates:** After launch, who will be responsible for content updates and publishing? Your chosen agency should provide your team with training to make routine updates, and offer support for more in-depth changes.

WEBSITE FEATURES

Ask the agency how they will approach each of these features—and any others you'd like to specify.



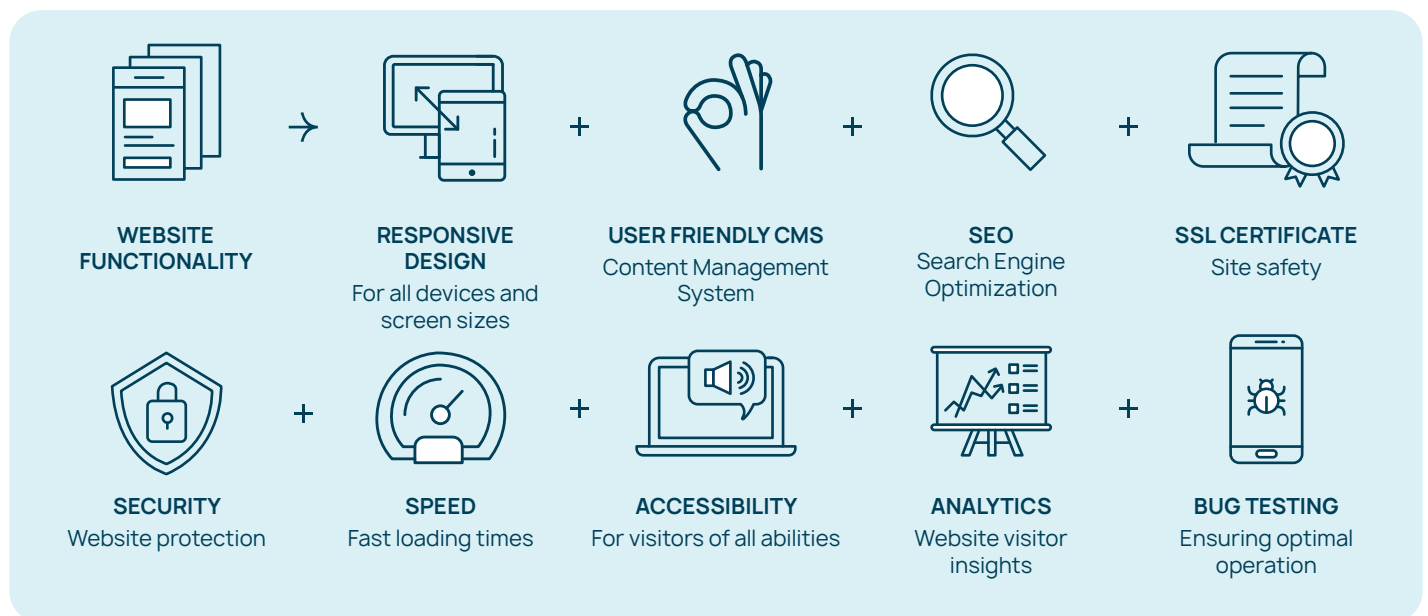
- **User Experience (UX) – Site Architecture, Navigation and Search Features:** Intuitive navigation and search features should be employed to help users find the person or resource they need in as few clicks as possible. Users should not have to hunt for information on your new website.
- **Design Aesthetic:** Can the agency give examples of other law firm sites they've designed? At this stage it's too early to ask for design concepts, since these should reflect your firm's strategic goals and business requirements. More detailed recommendations will emerge from discovery sessions.
- **Lawyer Bios:** How do they present the lawyer bio and the information it may contain?
- **Media, Photography & Videos:** Does the agency provide these services? If not, how will they liaise with other service providers?
- **Flexible Design:** Your new website should be built with growth in mind. It should be possible to add new content such as lawyer bios and practice area pages, without requiring additional development.
- **Capturing Leads:** There should be a plan to gather contact information from website visitors through features such as contact forms, newsletter signups, and content downloads.

WEBSITE FUNCTIONALITY:

WHAT FUNCTIONALITY SHOULD BE INCLUDED AS REQUIREMENTS?

The following are essential attributes for any modern law firm website, and should be included as functionality requirements in your RFP.

- **Responsive Web Design:** With smartphones accounting for more than half of all website traffic, you can't afford to neglect mobile design. Responsive web design ensures your website looks great and functions seamlessly on



all devices—including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktops.

- **User-Friendly CMS (Content Management System):** This is a core aspect of your website, impacting performance, functionality, and the admin experience for users such as your firm's marketing team. An agency's chosen CMS should prioritize performance, flexibility, and usability. It should be easy for your firm's marketing team to make changes to the website's content, including adding new pages (such as firm news announcements) and update existing content (such as lawyer bios and homepage messaging). Your firm should not need to involve an agency every time you need to change something on the website. It should be easy to upload and feature media on the website such as images, videos, social media, forms.
- **SEO (Search Engine Optimization) Performance:** Your website should have search engine-friendly architecture. It should also have, at a minimum, unique title tags for each page and meta descriptions for all key pages. Your chosen vendor should have a plan for preserving link equity from backlinks. The vendor should also be able to ensure proper indexing with search engines. There is a great deal of overlap between SEO and website accessibility and your chosen vendor should be able to support you with both.
- **SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) Encryption:** Securing your new website with SSL encryption ensures that data passed between a web server and a browser remains private. Having an SSL certificate helps to protect your visitors' data and privacy. This is also important for search engine optimization (SEO), since Google penalizes websites without SSL encryption.
- **Site Security:** In addition to SSL encryption, your website should have protection against hackers, bots, and other bad actors. There should also be an option to restore an earlier version of the website if necessary.
- **Site Speed:** Google takes site speed into account when ranking search results. Studies show that people spend longer on faster websites, and return to them more frequently. Your chosen agency should design for speed, ensuring that graphics, images, and videos are optimized, and that code and plugins are streamlined to minimize load times.
- **Website Accessibility:** This should be a priority for every law firm. Law firms operating in the United States and Canada need to comply with evolving accessibility legislation including Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and, in Canada, The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), provincial acts in Manitoba and Nova Scotia, and requirements emerging out of The Accessible Canada Act (Bill C-81).
- **Analytics:** Your website should have analytics built into the backend dashboard and, at minimum, should have Google Analytics installed to track visitor traffic and interactions and Google Search Console to check indexing status and optimize visibility. Depending on your needs, your firm may require custom marketing tags to track events and conversions.
- **Bug-Testing and Quality Assurance:** Ensure that the agency has a process in place for bug-testing and quality assurance. The agency should ensure that best practices are in place and that testing is conducted on all modern browsers and devices.

Timeline, Budget & Project Logistics

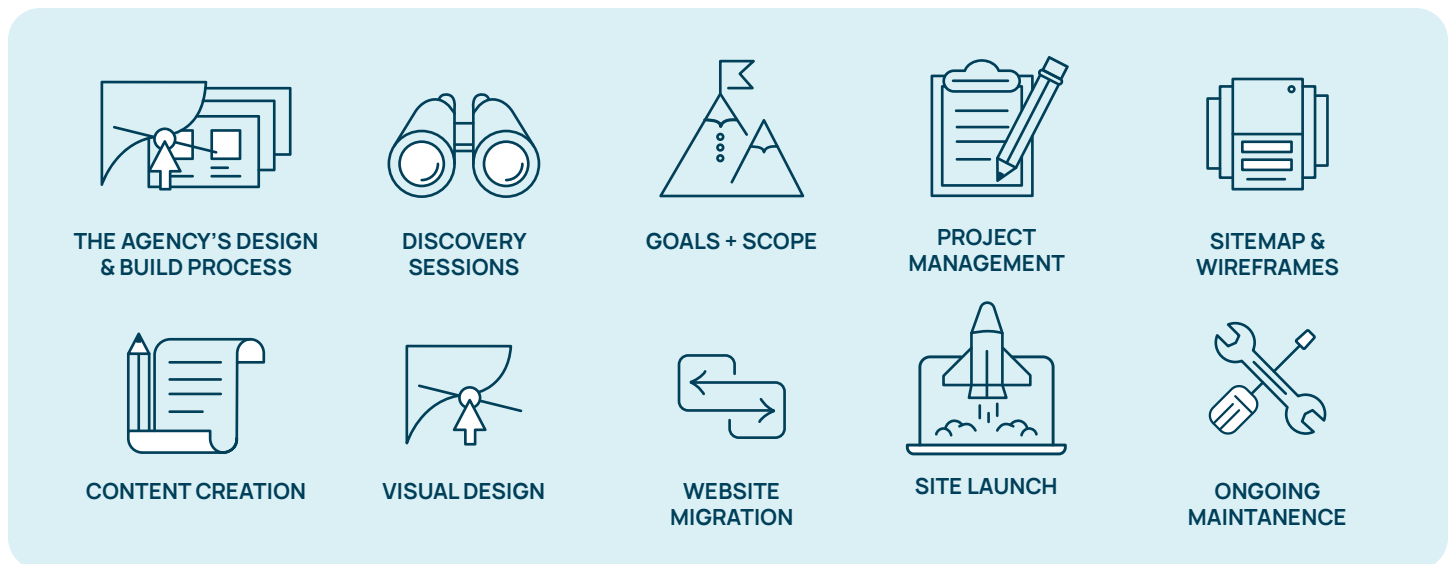
PROPOSED TIMELINE & BUDGET

It's important to find out if the agency's timeline for the project matches yours, by asking them to outline their proposed timeline and the factors that could impact delivery.

Asking agencies to outline their proposed budget will let you know if your project requirements can be met within your proposed budget (which is helpful to provide the agency). This is also an opportunity to find out the nature of the agreement (e.g., flat-rate, hourly, low-high estimate, etc.). Asking agencies to outline the payment terms will let you know what to expect, along with additional costs related to hosting and maintenance, and supporting services needed to accomplish the project goals.

WEBSITE DESIGN & BUILD PROCESS

Ask how the agency will design and build the website. This allows you to learn about their process and various project milestones including discovery sessions, goal and scope setting, sitemap and wireframe creation, visual design, content creation, migration, testing, launch, and post-launch.



ONGOING MAINTENANCE, HOSTING, SECURITY & SUPPORT: WHO IS GOING TO KEEP THE WEBSITE SECURE & OPERATIONAL?

We've heard horror stories of firms being left out to sea with websites that don't work and with service providers who can't or won't fix the problem. Put these questions to your vendors to ensure that they can provide you with ongoing support.

- **Secure Hosting:** Ask what security measures agencies will offer for the new website. A “Defense in Depth” (DiD) approach provides more robust security than a single system. Just as medieval castles were protected by watchtowers, moats, ramparts, drawbridges, and keeps, a DiD approach protects websites with Firewalls, Managed Host Environments, optimized Web Production Servers, and CMS-level protection.
- **Secure Server:** At the very least, your agency should offer hosting on a secure server environment with nightly backups, virus monitoring, and around-the-clock support. Additional tiers of defense, such as firewall protection, are highly recommended.
- **Threat and Breach Monitoring:** Ask your agency about their system for monitoring security threats and breaches including Malware Distribution, Phishing Lure Pages, Blacklisting Incidents, SSL Certificates, SEO Spam, and DNS Changes.
- **Updates:** For both security and performance reasons, the software and plugins that run your new website will need to be routinely updated.
- **Caching:** Your website should be hosted on a server that provides efficient caching to improve site speed and SEO performance.
- **Responsive Service:** You should choose an established agency that can respond to your requests promptly. You need an agency that will empower your firm, not slow it down.
- **Comprehensive Support:** Be sure to select an agency that can offer full range support, including assisting with evolving content, design, and technical needs.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Find out how the agency will keep everything moving along on budget and on schedule. Law firm websites usually have large amounts of content, which may create difficulties and delays for agencies who lack experience in the industry. Law firms also tend to make decisions more democratically than most organizations, which adds complexity to the project. Look for an agency partner with legal industry experience, and defined processes in place for managing approvals, content, and project milestones.

Get the RFP Template

download the Word document

Get started on your own request for proposal using our editable Word document. You can customize it with your firm's logo and brand colours.

www.fsquaredmarketing.com/RFP-Template-Law-Firm-Website-Projects.docx

