Web Law Predictions for 2014

Steve Matthews | December 2013

It's getting down to the final few weeks of December. As some Slaw readers might remember, my year-end focus is on two activities: 1) the Clawbies [http://www.clawbies.ca/], and 2) forecasting trends and making predictions about where the Internet is heading.

(If you're interested, you can look back to see how successful (or how terribly wrong) I've been in prior years. Here are my crystal ball attempts for 2013 [http://www.slaw.ca/2012/12/19/web-law-predictions-for-2013/], 2012 [http://www.slaw.ca/2011/12/19/web-law-predictions-for-2012/], 2011 [http://www.slaw.ca/2010/12/30/web-law-predictions-for-2011/], and 2010 [http://www.slaw.ca/2009/12/20/web-law-predictions-for-2010/].)

So without further ado, these are the trends that I see emerging in 2014:

1. Biometric Authentication Finds a Market

Other companies unsuccessfully tried to launch tablet computers before Apple broke through with the iPad. Similarly, even though other attempts have been made to replace the hassle of password authentication with something simpler and easier, I think Apple's inclusion of **TouchID** in the most recent iPhone will start us down the road to biometric identification for all our devices.

In 2014, we should see this trend really get underway with the emergence of competing touch technologies from other vendors. Eventually, I expect an "Open Touch" authentication standard to emerge, one that's perhaps less closely tied to the big tech companies and their platforms. Once this becomes available, web publishers and CMS products should move quickly to adapt this next generation of authentication. Password free!

2. Private Sharing for Businesses

Not every web user wants to consume or share his or her content publicly on social media, yet "private sharing" happens all the time. Web tools like **Snapchat** have inspired individuals to think in smaller, more local terms for their messaging and social sharing needs, but there remains obvious room for

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'Building Web Profile for the Legal Industry'

growth in supporting key business relationships.

Smaller client-driven social sharing is going to happen. Perhaps it will be achieved by isolating key decision makers by industry, or even focusing on those highly valuable firm-to-client relationships. But either way, **navigation in smaller circles** will become far more important in 2014.

3. The Slow Death of Autopilot Client Service Technology

There seems to be a commonly held belief that all support services must eventually be replaced by web technology. It's true that web services can streamline requests, and solve many users problems along the way. But what happens when the answer isn't satisfactory? In my view, there needs to be a recourse. There should always be an option to call someone. While online tools have a critical role to play in supporting human service, the cracks in "autopilot" web support are starting to show.

I think 2014 will be the year we see a more "human touch" in business support services. SMEs and virtual law firms will succeed in large part by being accessible. Perhaps a little less Google in their approach, and a little more **Zappos**. Want to talk to a real person? Firms will engage the web in ways that help client communication, not put up barriers.

4. Lawyer Directories Become Price Comparison Tools

A recent Canadian startup named FlatLaw that lists fixed rate legal services [http://www.flatlaw.ca/why_flat_rate.php] has inspired me to declare that the gauntlet has been thrown at legal directories, especially those with a longstanding and substantial user base. Simply listing the names, addresses, and practice areas of lawyers isn't good enough anymore. Imagine visiting a hotel comparison website that had no information on rooms or prices; would you bother returning to that site again? Similarly, lawyer directories will start to publish rates, prices, and costs — perhaps using direct client input to do so.

Consumer law practices are going to become more transparent with their numbers in 2014: the market is going to require information that helps clients make a purchasing decision, and simply providing a lawyer's daytime phone number is not going to cut it. The question is: Who's going to deliver the breakthrough web product that helps deliver this transparency?

5. Web Design in 2014: Bigger Fonts, Simpler Presentation, Final Dagger for Flash

What's on deck for 2014 web design? For starters, visual design is set to become simpler. Expect individual web pages to become longer, simplifying navigation and reducing the number of clicks needed to navigate somewhere. Typography choices have advanced significantly in recent years, so expect to see bigger, cleaner, more professional font choices.

With the rapid growth of mobile surfing, older websites will finally need to embrace "responsive

design," making their content accessible on any device or screen resolution the web can throw at them. And you can expect the use of older, browser-plugin animation technologies such as Adobe Flash to finally die. Apple's lack of support for these plugins has pushed most web developers in different directions. 2014 should mark the end for Flash.

6. Substance Trumps Stunts in Digital Marketing

We've all become sick of the one-upmanship attempts [http://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/the-winner -for-2013s-worst-law-firm-mar-87054/] of attention-starved digital marketers in 2013. Next year, I believe, will push our patience even further.

With so many agencies, companies, and even law firms looking for online attention, our tolerance for deliberate pranks and offensive messages, especially those crafted purely for effect, has been exhausted. But it doesn't have to be that way, as I was recently reminded watching WestJet's remarkable Christmas marketing initiative [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIEIvi2MuEk]. Substance, execution, real people…. Maybe if a few more web marketers get this message in 2014, my faith in this line of work can be restored.

Happy holidays to all my friends here at Slaw!

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