



# The Xs and Os of Online Marketing

BY JAMES FITZGERALD

**A**s you create your online marketing strategy, keep in mind two important things. First, you will need a comprehensive plan to address the many factors involved in marketing. And second, things change quickly and often, so your plan must start with the here-and-now. Here's how to assess how well your firm is doing—and where you can improve.

The online marketing playing field covers the media channels that consumers use, such as search engines and social



someone else is taking care of it or that the details aren't important. But if your firm really wants to know how well it's competing, consider these questions: Is the content on your website—and you should have only one website—organized,

tablets. The margins for online marketing error are literally shrinking. Ensure that your offensive and defensive efforts work together—because today's online consumer is equally likely to respond to either approach.

Both human users and search engines get signals from organic listings that influence paid campaigns' effectiveness. In Google AdWords terms, this is known as a "Quality Score"—combining several factors such as webpage quality, load time, and click-through rate, the Quality

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networks. You face the same challenges and limitations as your competitors, so your position relative to them is important. Several factors—including your search ranking, practice area, and specialty—affect this position. To use a football analogy, your defense is the territory you must protect, and your offense is what you do to grow your online presence.

**Defend your position.** Your defense incorporates each aspect of your digital footprint that you control. Some of these elements are so fundamental that they often are overlooked: your website's design and content; your brand impression and message; your mobile site design; any social media accounts; directory listings and citations—that is, how your name, address, and phone number appear throughout the web; and any consumer reviews.

Firms can get into trouble by believing there is no trouble. People assume that


structured, and labeled in a clear and intuitive way?

Does your site contain any non-original content or content duplicated from another website—potentially hurting your site's search engine performance? And is your firm's street address consistent across all social media accounts, directories, and basic business listings?

**Go on the offense.** For years, so much emphasis was placed on search results that outreach became an afterthought—but times are changing. Unlike defensive efforts, this outreach comes at a cost. But when done properly, it is an investment that can yield dividends. These methods include pay-per-click advertising, social media ad campaigns, banner display ads, and paid directory listings—such as a premium listing on Avvo.com.

**Put it all together.** Even as web use increases, more consumers are using smaller screens—their smartphones and

Score affects which ads display above organic results and above competitor ads. By aligning your efforts in ways that improve your Quality Score, you gain a tangible, cost-efficient advantage over your competitors. Conversely, if you ignore these seemingly minor details, you may feel like you are paying through the nose for minor results.

If you give up too many points on defense, you can put a lot of effort into offense and still lose. The key to winning in 2017 is having a fully integrated and efficient game plan. 

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