



# Voice search and law firm SEO

## The impact of Alexa, Siri and voice search on your cell phone on referrals from Google to your law office

BY TOM DESMOND

Gone are the days when clients only found your law firm in the yellow pages or a local ad. While traditional marketing methods are still valuable, online marketing has handily overtaken them.

Digital marketing goes far beyond creating a beautiful website and hoping people will stumble upon it. To thrive, law firms must show up in Google searches related to their services and practice areas. By now, even traditional search engine optimization (SEO) is old – or at least well-known – news.

Now, even showing up on the second or third page of a Google search isn't good enough to grab the attention of a

significant portion of the market – the portion that uses smart speakers and smartphones to conduct voice searches, specifically.

These voice searches, assisted by artificial intelligence (AI) assistants like Alexa and Siri, are changing SEO for law firms. Because some estimates place a smart speaker (Amazon Echo, Google Home, etc.) in one out of six American homes, it's critical for firms to adapt to AI-assisted voice search if they hope to capture leads from this growing portion of the market.

### Voice search is changing digital marketing for law firms

In the past, if your law firm was ranked somewhere on the first few search

engine results pages (SERPs) for a relevant Google search, you had a good chance of getting calls from potential clients. Now, ranking your website on the first page of Google's search results is paramount to getting leads from voice search.

This is due in large part to the way AIs like Siri and Alexa find and deliver answers to users' voice search queries. Unlike a highly engaged human Google searcher, Alexa and Siri aren't likely to look beyond the first SERP for a relevant answer, and they aren't going to take the time to list several search results in a row. They're looking for just one relevant and helpful answer.

According to 2017 data from the Pew Research Center, 77 percent of Americans own smartphones, and that



figure increases to 92 percent among 18- to 29-year-olds. Most of these phones – as well as the countless smart speakers in homes across the nation – come equipped with an AI assistant capable of voice search.

### Standard search versus voice search

What's the difference between voice search and standard search? The biggest difference between a standard search and a voice search is the number of results the searcher receives. That's why it's so important to rank as highly as possible, or else you'll be missing a large portion of search traffic as more people turn to voice search to serve their needs.

When a person types a standard search query into the Google app or a web browser, he or she will receive a list of results on an SERP, as well as the option to view several more SERPs.

The first page of results is where law firms want to be, of course, and a searcher will scroll through those first few results to find the firm that most closely suits his or her needs. If you're further down the page or on subsequent pages, the likelihood of getting a call diminishes quickly.

Even so, if the results on the first SERP don't work for the searcher, that person will keep scrolling until he or she finds the perfect match. With AI-assisted voice search, things work differently. When a person uses voice search, the AI assistant will try to find the very best match and will seek to provide only one answer – the most relevant one.

Here's an example:

*"Alexa, where is a top criminal defense law firm in Los Angeles?"*

The AI will usually provide the searcher with only one response – likely the criminal defense firm that's ranked number one in Los Angeles.

### Mobile search versus desktop search

SEO for law firms changes just as quickly as the SEO industry as a whole.

One big way things have changed in the field of legal digital marketing is that many people use smartphones for the vast majority of the time they're online.

Smartphones dominate a much larger portion of the AI-enabled device market than smart speakers, and that means voice searchers may come across your firm's web content via smartphone.

This is not a trend to ignore. Because Google gives a boost in rankings to sites that are mobile-friendly, and because so many voice searches are conducted via AI on smartphones, making your firm's website mobile-friendly should be more of a priority than ever.

You simply won't get the leads you're after if you only focus on reaching desktop and laptop users. You shouldn't ignore those users, either, but think about all electronic devices and how people use them when designing landing pages and when putting together your digital marketing strategy.

### Navigation and location (local) searches

It's always good practice to consider the ways and reasons people will interact with your website's content. For law firms, we know AI is enabling people to consume information about legal services without actually visiting the site the information came from, but why do people seek out legal information in the first place?

It's often because they need a lawyer or are considering hiring one. As you know, law firms are businesses. They have hours of operation, physical locations, lists of available services, and preferred methods of contact. This is all highly relevant information when it comes to AI-assisted voice searches.

That's because someone who asks Siri or Alexa to find a law firm for him or her is going to need to know where it is, how to get in touch, and when it's open. AI-assisted voice search is highlighting the importance of including all of this information in readily accessible locations on law firm websites.

It's also boosting the importance of making sure AI assistants can figure out how to tell searchers where to find you. By integrating your business with Google Maps, you can boost your chances of garnering local traffic and leads through voice search. When a smartphone user asks Siri for directions to a law firm while he or she is driving and unable to sift through pages of search results, the driver is more likely to end up at your door if you're ranking highly in Maps results.

It's easy to imagine the following voice search queries and see how it's going to be important that your firm is visible in navigation apps like Google Maps:

"Hey, Siri, find me a lawyer in northwest L.A. who specializes in divorce."

"Okay, Google, I need a criminal defense lawyer near me."

"Alexa, can you help me find a lawyer with good reviews in Orange County?"

"Siri, I'm on the corner of Broadway and Main in San Diego. Is there a personal injury lawyer nearby?"

Creating landing pages with content that contains location references will help Google – and the AI assistants that comb the search engine for answers to users' queries – know where you are. Additionally, it's more important than ever that law firms claim and maintain their Google My Business listings. Google My Business is an important factor in localized law firm SEO.

### The language of search has changed

Another key difference between a standard search and a voice search is that the language used is different. Take, for instance, a desktop search on Google. A searcher might use a non-sentence, such as "Riverside divorce lawyer," to find the information he or she is looking for.

With voice search, that type of language is out the window. Voice searchers are speaking to AIs, so they will use complete, grammatically correct sentences



with a conversational tone.

Examples:

“Siri, I’m looking for a lawyer in San Bernardino who specializes in divorce cases.”

“Alexa, can you help me find a criminal defense lawyer who specializes in drunk driving cases?”

“Okay, Google, help me find a tax lawyer near my home.”

“Siri, what kind of lawyer do I need if I’m making a will?”

Because voice search mimics the process of speaking with a real person, searchers will search for information via AI assistants using full sentences. Those AIs, in turn, will process the spoken query and use it to search for relevant content.

This will change the way you should write your content. Conversational language should be used and emphasized, with clear answers to searchers’ questions (who, what, when, where, and why).

Rather than just having landing pages optimized for keyword searches, landing pages should be created with both keyword searches and conversational sentence structure in mind. AIs are going to search your content for a complete, conversational sentence they can read back to the searcher.

### Smartphones and smart speakers

Today, most people are still using their smartphones to conduct searches; however, smart speakers have become very popular. These speakers have become so popular, in fact, that some people are getting several of them to position throughout their homes.

The main difference between voice searching on a smart speaker and typing a smartphone or desktop search is the number of results you’ll receive. When you ask Alexa a question, you will likely only receive one response.

Here’s an example:

*Hi, Alexa. Are there any law firms in San Diego that handle business valuation in divorces?*

Alexa will look for the keywords and phrases in the above sentence, and try to find matches on local law firm sites. If your firm doesn’t clearly and conversationally state that it handles that subject, Alexa will have no way of knowing that you’re the right firm for the voice searcher.

If he or she is not satisfied with the answer, the user may try asking Alexa the same question more than once – but certainly not a dozen times. If your law firm isn’t within the top results for the search phrases being used, you will likely never be the verbal response an AI assistant will relay to a voice searcher.

### Conclusion

It’s now more important than ever for law firms to take digital marketing seriously if they want to run a successful business. Getting into the top three search results – or at least on page one – on Google is necessary to grow your firm’s business when the world of online search is dominated by mobile devices and smart speaker-assisted voice searching.

While there are other ways to generate leads, such as law firm pay-per-click advertising, AIs will pull information from pages that rank organically in

Google when answering a voice search, at least for now.

Put simply, how can you make AIs like Siri and Alexa choose your law firm’s website and landing pages as the best results to display for consumers using the voice search option?

- You will need to ensure that your location is incorporated into landing pages.
- You need to claim your Google My Business listing and keep it as updated as possible.
- You should create content that uses conversational, FAQ-style language with complete, grammatically correct sentences.

AI-assisted voice search has quickly changed from a whisper to a roar in the world of SEO, and it doesn’t show any signs of stopping. Getting on top of voice search and how it will affect your firm’s SEO efforts now can prevent missed opportunities in the near future.



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*A jazz musician who jumped feet-first into New York City – if you can make it in the Big Apple, you can make it anywhere – Tom played all over town and toured the world, but he had a constant craving for business development, so he created several large directories in competitive markets. Tom’s passion for SEO drove them to the top of the SERPs, where they were eventually discovered and bought by a larger company. Looking for a bigger challenge, he co-founded the law firm SEO company ApricotLaw. Since then, he has been helping law firms climb the ranks in Google and capture big leads.*