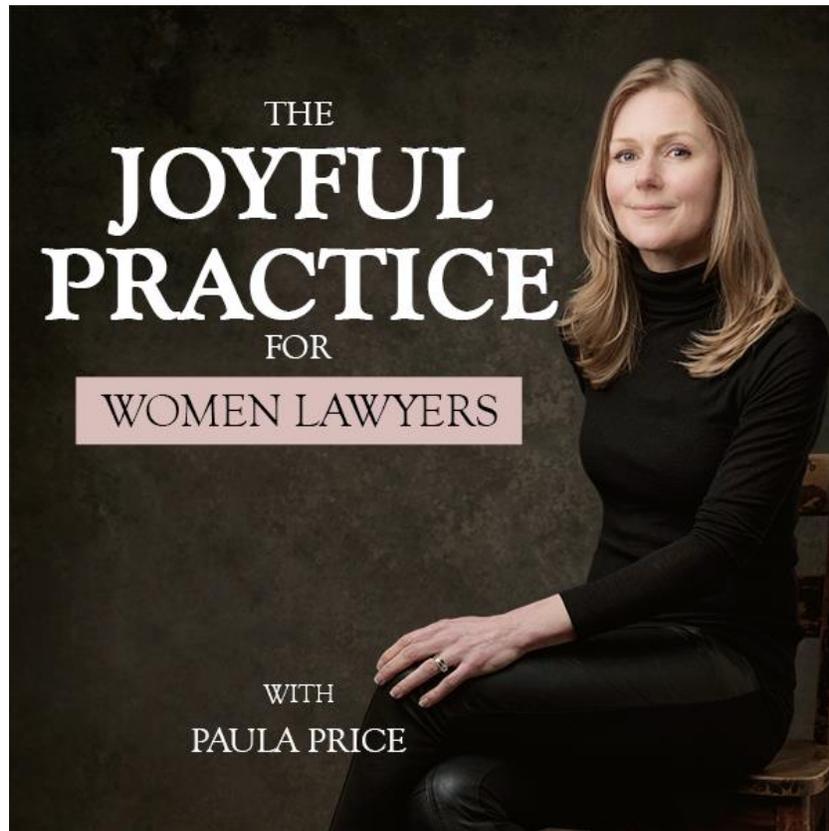


Ep #53: How to Take a Career Leap of Faith with Founder of Law Quill, Annette Choti



Full Episode Transcript

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You're listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast episode number 53.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, lawyer turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. Join me every week for a break from the hustle so we can focus on you, what you truly want, and how you can create it.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hi, everybody. Welcome back to the podcast. Paula here. So excited to have you back. Thanks for joining. I think you're going to love today's episode. It's an interview with Annette Choti who is a lawyer and digital marketing expert. Annette is going to share with us her story of transitioning from lawyer with a side hustle to pursuing that side hustle full time.

You're going to love hearing about how she did that. You're also going to love hearing about what it is that she loves about marketing, and her views on marketing and how that might impact on how you view marketing in your own practice. So without further ado, I'm going to dive into that interview. Thanks again for joining us this week. I hope you love today's episode, and I'm excited to reconnect with all of you next week. Bye for now.

Paula: Hello, everybody. Welcome back to the podcast. I'm so excited to be introducing you to this week's guest. Her name is Annette Choti. Annette is a lawyer. She is also the founder of Law Quill, which is a company through which she does digital marketing for lawyers. She is also a podcaster. You may have heard Annette on her podcast *Legal Marketing Lounge*. She's an

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author and a speaker. We're just so, so happy to have her here this week. Annette, welcome to the podcast.

Annette: Thank you so much for having me. It's an absolute honor. Thank you.

Paula: Oh my gosh, it's such an honor to have you. For those of you who don't know you, Annette, can you tell us a little bit more about who you are and what you do through Law Quill?

Annette: Sure. So I am an attorney of 20 years, United States attorney. I worked for the federal government for almost two decades. Then I pivoted because that was enough of that. I decided to start after—I started working in digital marketing. I worked for very large digital marketing agencies for law firms.

Then I really decided that smaller law firms, midsize, smaller, and solo law firms didn't have as much of an opportunity to grow online because the larger digital marketing agencies simply were not providing them services that they could afford. So then I created Law Quill in order to be able to do that.

Paula: Beautiful. If we go back a little bit into the 20 years, right. It's like in conversation. I spent 20 years practicing law and then...What exactly were you doing during those 20 years?

Annette: That's a great question. I actually worked as an investigator for the US Department of Labor. So a lot of ERISA work, retirement work, retirement plans, health plans, retirement employee benefit plans. I worked with all of those within an investigative capacity. I worked with our civil and criminal attorney teams when necessary to first of all help people be compliant with those laws administratively. Then if they had violated any

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law, civil or criminal, then we would move forward with that as well. So that was what I did for the Department of Labor's for two decades.

Paula: Amazing. I understand, I mean I've listened to some of your podcast episodes. I've listened to you speak. I mean it seems like you really loved what you were doing. Then it reached a point where you found this other passion, this digital marketing, and it's such an interesting story. I would love to hear how you made that transition from practicing law to doing more of the marketing piece of it.

Annette: So I wasn't actually practicing law. So I was using my, obviously, legal knowledge within the context of investigations at the US Department of Labor. But over time I felt a little overlooked in that capacity. I didn't feel like I had been given as many opportunities as I had wanted, that I had been reaching for. There are sort of cultural, I guess, reasons behind that, and I was very frustrated with sort of the landlocked position and the non-ability for me to move forward or upward.

So it had been several years that I had been frustrated with that. I didn't really want to put out my own shingle and start a law firm. I didn't really know how to do that, frankly, in my mid-40s. I really didn't know what to do. There was another attorney that I'm friends with. She casually mentioned in conversation one time, why don't you just write blogs for law firms? Why don't you do something—You know because you love to write and all that. I'm like I don't know what you're talking about. She said, “Well, it's like SEO.”

I remember when I went to the internet and looked up SEO because I had no idea what it was. I was like well, this sounds kind of interesting. I started learning about it and then that was it, Paula. I was completely hooked. I absolutely loved it. There's a bit of a gamification to it. Like sorry, there's winners. There's losers. I'm type A personality. I'm an attorney. I like to win.

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So the gamification of digital marketing was really, the whole idea of it, the fact that it's a little bit of a science with the data. Then it's also there's an art form because you have to be writing and creating content that is for real life human beings and bots. Just a whole construct of it, I love.

So I started doing that on the side. I got that approved by the ethics committee. So it was all legal on the up and up that I was able to do that. The more and more I did it, I was then eventually working two full time jobs because I loved doing it so much. Then I completely switched and I left the Department of Labor.

I started doing that just on my own, and I worked for a lot of different very large legal marketing agencies. I became frustrated with all of them because I felt like some of their tactics were a little bit shady. Of course, an average law firm is not going to know that because they don't really disclose or sort of demystify the entire SEO process.

The long story short is I just really decided that I wanted to provide a lot of value and information and education regarding digital marketing for small, solo, and mid-sized law firms that were not being captured and educated by these larger digital marketing agencies. So that was my progression over from a government employee to founding and owning my own digital marketing agency.

Paula: I love it. It's such a great story. I can tell as you started talking about the SEO and the bots and the marketing that is something that really lights you up. That you're really passionate about. It was a transition for you, right. It sounds like it started out as the side hustle. You got clearance to do it, you started doing it, and then you did more and more of that until it became the main hustle.

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One of the things that comes up for me in conversations I have with lawyers, they reach out to me. They are kind of maybe where you were at, right, after 20 years of practice. They were just finding that they are at a transition point, but they don't necessarily know what that next step is going to be. They haven't really explored options outside of the role that they had been in. So, for you, it was a suggestion by a friend to maybe start writing blogs. This kind of led from one thing to the next.

So a question I have for you, which I think a lot of people will be able to relate to is when did you go to turn the side hustle, this passion project almost that you had on the side of your desk. How did you know when it was time to leave the law, to leave that that sort of steady government job and make that transition into your hustle, right?

Annette: I am not a risk taker Paula.

Paula: Most of us aren't, especially lawyers where you've got laws and rules to follow. So this is a challenge.

Annette: Yes, I am a rules follower, and I was government employee for two decades. So to say that I was risk averse is to put it very mildly. So when all of this was happening several years ago, I got remarried. My husband is absolutely incredible. So he knew I was completely just miserable at my job, emotionally, even academically. I wasn't learning anything new, which I love to do. Creatively, professionally, like all those adverbs. I was not happy.

So when I found this, I had started to build this on the side. At one point, I loved it so much I was literally working 40 hours a week and then I was working 30 to 40 hours a week at home when I would get home on this. He was like, "You have got to quit."

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I was like I don't want to quit because what if, what if, what if, but I was clearly making enough just doing freelancing work at that time. I mean this was in infancy. I had no, Law Quill was not even an idea yet. He was like, "Listen, the amount of money that you're making is far surpassing what you're making it the Department of Labor. We will be fine. Just do it." It was so difficult. I mean so many mornings I was with a cup of coffee and a spreadsheet going can I really do it? Can I really do it? I don't know if I can do it. Maybe I'll wait another year.

Just finally my husband gave me the analogy. If you've ever seen *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, when he gets, maybe I'm just dating myself with this, but there's this part where he knows he has to step off of a cliff and there's no bridge there he thinks. He just puts his hands on his heart and trusts God, because the message is from God, the Temple of Doom, whatever. He literally just clutches his heart and takes that leap of faith and steps, and there is a bridge there that catches him.

I always have that image of me just saying that is there. You will be fine. Then after I did that, it was not long after I had left the department of labor that I realized that there was such exponential growth and potential for me to really help small and solo and mid-sized law firms that I was like this was the best decision I ever made. But it was a very calculated risk. It was not just jumping blind into anything. So.

Paula: Annette, everything you've just said like I literally have goosebumps. I think it's such a magical story. I love that idea of just stepping off the cliff because that's kind of what it feels like, right, when you go from the safe lockstep everything is there to doing something completely different. There's that moment of it's like your heart's in your throat, right? You feel like you're stepping off a cliff, and you don't know whether that bridge is going to be waiting for you or not. I think it's so interesting.

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There are a couple other things you said. You talked about all the adverbs. Can I just point that out and say that's really funny and like so apt? Because I think that's really how so many of us find ourselves at that point of wanting to make a transition, right? We feel like this is not for us and we're not—I can't remember the exact adverbs that you were using, but it's that feeling. Sometimes it takes somebody else looking at us and mirroring that back to us.

When you were talking about your husband before you got to the spreadsheets, it reminded me of my own husband. When I started my coach training, I was spending a lot of time on my laptop at the kitchen table. I would be in my coaching class smiling at my computer typing away on my assignment, and he's like, "I've never seen you smile like this at your computer before." I was like oh, really? Like I didn't even know I was smiling. He's like, "No, you're smiling."

Sometimes you need that external input to realize where maybe things aren't great, right? Like you kind of take it and grin and bear it thinking this is the right path. But when somebody else can actually step in and say well, what else right? Like you just don't seem happy. Is there something else? So I just love that story and how sometimes it's the people that are closest to you who are able to point that out, and that gets you moving. I love that you had a spreadsheet and you were all ready.

Annette: Yeah, I don't know how many times I redid that spreadsheet. I mean it must have been hundreds, literally. But my husband, I had just told him I said I'm just not happy sitting in this beige cubicle in this beige office in this beige world of just mediocrity where I'm not getting to do anything that really makes a difference. While I may not have my own law firm, there are a lot of law firms that I work with that are my clients that are making a real difference in the world. The fact that I can get their stories out there to more people so more people can get that help just, it fires me up.

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Paula: Totally. Totally. Annette, we've talked a little bit about like the spreadsheet, right. Like, can I make this work? That side of the transition. I think another element I'd love to explore is what else is going on? So as a lawyer, there's a certain roles that you play in society. It's very easy to define. I mean I don't know if—I mean people probably know now more what digital marketing means but not always.

I'd love to know what some of the questions were that you were asking yourself when you were about to make that that leap. As to the questions that you were answering, asking/answering for yourself before you made that transition.

Annette: For me, it was never about how I appeared in society. Like I don't really care what others think of me. I have done theater and comedy. So I'm not afraid to just be who I am. I'm Christian. I'm just kind of who I am. I find my worth in God. So that wasn't an issue for me.

But what was an issue for me were the real, fundamental questions of like, where the rubber hits the road. What do we do for health insurance? What are we going to do for life insurance? Can I transition that over? What are we going to do about the fact that you do have to wait a certain amount of time, in the United States, to even qualify for certain unemployment insurances if your business goes bad. Like, for me, it was a lot of rubber hits the road, what are we going to do?

Then all the contingency plans. Well, if this happens then this happens. I am guilty of, kind of the idle frankly, of self-sufficiency. That I try to think of every possible scenario and I try to think of every possible outcome knowing full well that there are scenarios I can't even think of or plan for or prepare for or be ready for. But I think as attorneys, especially, we do try to plan. We're all type A personalities, right. Not all of us, but a lot of us. So we all try to mitigate any kind of risk that we might have in a certain area.

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But I finally got to where I was personally comfortable with certain acceptable levels of risk and unsure-ity regarding taking that leap. Then that was when I closed out the spreadsheet, and I wrote my resignation letter instead.

Paula: Beautiful. I think it's really wonderful that you've highlighted the risk analysis because I think for a lot of lawyers who are thinking about making a transition, that is a real—This kind of number one sometimes, right? It's I'm used to receiving a certain level of income, and our family is set up based on that level of income. There's security in that.

So if you're thinking about doing something, it doesn't even necessarily mean leaving law or starting your own business, it means sitting down and evaluating what you've described, right? The practical realities of insurance. Who's going to pay for the medical insurance? How am I going to do the life insurance? All the kind of pieces we don't really want to think about on a day to day.

But that once you have those in place, that gives you the freedom, I imagine, to then step forward and get into that more creative zone of okay, now I'm going to build. Like I'm going to build this and I know that I have got my self-covered in all these different scenarios.

Annette: I think that when someone is trying to make the transition, I mean it's different. Risk levels are different for every person, obviously. But I think when you're trying to evaluate whether or not you should take that risk, I think the thing that benefitted me the most was there was no guesswork. That I knew that I was able to write.

It all started with content. That I would write search engine optimized content for law firms for these digital marketing agencies. Then I learned how to do social media, then I learned how to schedule it, then I learned

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hashtag research, I was learning and learning. I realized as more that I learned that like I loved it. It was so fun.

So if someone is in a particular like a big law practice or if they are in-house counsel or whatever they are doing, my best suggestion is to, if it's possible at all, try to do something else on the side first for a while to see if you even like it.

Or at least if you can't do it, because sometimes we can't, right? Like sometimes if you are part of big law, you are not able to go do something else within their non-compete clauses or whatever you've got going on. Is to talk to as many people that are doing what you want to do for a while. Because don't be impulsive about it.

I know that that kind of goes against the grain of what some coaches or business strategists would say. But I think that the more comfortable you are with making your decision once you make it, there's already so much anxiety about it that if you can just mitigate some of the parts that are scary, then that can help you feel more comfortable when you do finally take that leap into something completely different or at least law adjacent.

Paula: Yeah, I think that's such sound advice. Absolutely, warming yourself up to that. Something you said there too, it really struck me, which is that once you stepped into your new role, that it was like this whole other world opened up right? You had the list of like okay, it went from writing content to the SEO to the hashtags to the digital marketing or the social media, sorry. It's like once you step in, there's so much more to learn. There's so many places where you can continue to grow. That's what I think is really interesting.

You only learn that through actually putting your feet in and doing that work and learning and seeing how much more opportunity really exists there,

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right? I mean your initial step was the writing of the content and then working for other organizations. Then you saw that here's an area, the small solo firms, where there's a need, and I'm the right person to start helping this particular group of lawyers and law firms. But you wouldn't necessarily have seen that after writing your first blog article. So it really is a process.

Annette: No, it is a process. I realized as I had started Law Quill, before I even started, I knew a lot of small or solo law firms would not be able to afford any digital marketing at all. They just didn't have the budget for it. I made it my mission, it's a pillar of Law Quill, education and to demystify the entire digital marketing process.

That's the reason, as we visited before, I have over 150 blog posts on my website for free. I have a podcast now, which is so fun. I get to give information and demystify SEO there as well for lawyers. Then as I started putting together things over the years, I realized maybe I should put this all into a book. It was just an idea.

Then the very long and short of it was I saw the books that were out there. I'm sure your audience will know what those are. There's very few. Every one of them seems to be a bit of a sales funnel to just hire the digital marketing agency that wrote it. So I said well, I want really truly an ultimate guide that will help law firms. So that is what I did. I created a guide for that. So.

Paula: I love that. I can see. Those listening, you don't have the benefit of seeing Annette. I do. There's a *Click Magnet* book behind her. Annette is sending me a copy, which I'm so excited about. Thank you Annette. I think maybe what we'll do is we'll chat a little bit more. We'll link to that in the show notes because those of you who are out there wanting to know, I would love to have you able to access it. So we'll do that.

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But before we get there, I just wanted to have a little bit more of a chat about Annette transition because, to me, this is one of the most—I love this part of her story. Then we're going to talk a little bit more about the SEO and the work that she's doing, the actual writing of it. So before we get there, just a couple more questions Annette.

One of them is when you were making that transition, what were some of the things that you found challenging? So you have the spreadsheet, you wrote the resignation letter, and then you're about to set up Law Quill or maybe we didn't know yet that's what was coming. But what was challenging about making that transition for you?

Annette: I think other than everything I've already said, it was the fact that my friends and family, other than my very, very close friends and my husband, they did not understand what I was doing. They could not wrap their head around the fact that I would have a 20 year, like in I don't know how many years it was. I think it was like four or five years, I could have retired with a pension. I mean I still have a pension but you know, a better pension. Right?

That I could just write it out. I could just write out this gig with Department of Labor, and why in your mid-40s are you completely pivoting to a completely different career choice that is entrepreneurial? Why would you do this?

I think that that was a challenge as well to try to not feel defensive when people were like, “Well, I don't get why you're doing this.” It's hard to explain in an elevator pitch why you are transitioning your entire life, but you know that it's the right decision. It was the right decision.

The people at work certainly did not understand it, and I think, frankly, felt a little bitter that I was leaving. They couldn't quite understand it. Because once you stayed with the government that long, you're really not expected

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to leave. So I was going against the grain with a lot, with my colleagues at work, with some friends who didn't understand, who still don't understand, frankly, family that did not understand and thought I just needed to put my head down in my beige cubicle and just put the rest of my time in and kind of be quiet about it. That was emotionally difficult for me.

So I'm very glad I had a really good supportive system of some people who did understand. So I would say that is really important as well. If you are going to make any kind of a transition, just make sure that you've got a good support system because pivoting, especially later in life, and pivoting to something completely new, there can be some turbulence in that. So it's really great to have a good support system.

Paula: I totally agree with that. I resonate with that description of trying to find people who understand what you're doing because sometimes you're just getting it clear in your own mind. Sometimes you have to protect your own mind a little bit while you, yourself—I mean this is me speaking about me more than—I don't know if this is your experience, but I found there was definitely that period of having to really think it through for myself and get comfortable with what I was doing.

Because it can be a big transition. It can be quite different from what you're doing before. So from the outside looking in, it may not make as much sense as it does to the person who's in it, if that makes sense. Which I'm not sure if I'm making any sense.

Annette: I agree with that. I'll say that, frankly, some of my most challenging times because there are challenging times as an entrepreneur. So during my most challenging times, I often found, other than my husband who's amazing and my daughter, online communities actually filled with female founders or not just female founders, but also like male and female both entrepreneurial groups. People that can immediately resonate and

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understand and nod their head and say, "I get you. I'm with you. Either I'm in it with you right now, or I was just recently there." So I feel you.

Paula: Totally. I am nodding my head as we're talking and similarly find reaching out and becoming part of certain communities online, in person, whatever it looks like, with like-minded entrepreneurs or people who are doing similar things. It just helps you feel like you're part of a community. It may be a community of solopreneurs, but you're within a community.

What would you recommend? So for lawyers who are thinking about leaving there, and you've already shared a lot. So I'm not sure. You may have something to add here. But what advice you might give lawyers who are thinking about leaving their jobs as lawyers or doing something traditional to do something different?

Annette: I think it's really important to figure out whether or not what you want to do is another career choice or whether or not it's something that could fulfill you perhaps as a hobby. So for a while, I was very interested in doing some other very artistic. I do theater, musical theater, and I used to do professional comedy. So those were things that I was very interested in doing. But that was not bringing me out. It wasn't enough for the fact that I was still going to work 40 hours a week in my beige cubicle.

But I think that if you are truly going to turn your entire career or your professional life on its head, that maybe a first step is to figure out whether or not there's something that you can do on the side that would bring you as much joy as complete upheaval of your professional life. In my case, the answer was no. I needed to do this in order to be completely happy.

Although I will say I was very blessed to have a job with the Department of Labor for two decades. It's a great job. It's full of benefits. I was able to not have to work 80 hours a week. So I was always there for everything for my

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daughter. So I don't want to disparage that. I was just not completely fulfilled professionally.

So I do think that one thing that I hadn't mentioned was perhaps there's something else that you can do. Maybe it's pro bono work. Maybe it's working on the side with different charities. Maybe there's something else that you can do that will relieve that feeling of frustration professionally. But then if you get to a point where it doesn't, then that might be the time to go a little more nuclear on it and say no, I think I have to change. I'm really ready to make a more definitive and holistic change.

Paula: Yeah, and I'm so glad you shared that because I think that's really where a lot of professionals, lawyers in particular, are finding themselves at that crossroads right. It's they feel unfulfilled potentially in their work. They've started or they have other interests that they're looking to for fulfillment outside of work. Then, how you describe it, I think is really helpful because it's—I like how you described going nuclear because it can kind of feel like that.

But for some people, they may be able to find the balance of fulfillment by supplementing what they're doing. Whereas for others, that will not be enough. They're going to need to do something that deals with or that alters, perhaps quite dramatically, the main hustle we can call it in exchange for something else. Annette, you mentioned earlier that one of the driving values in your organization is education. I'd love to know how your values have helped you shape the career choices that you've made.

Annette: I really believe that we are on this planet to try to make it a better place. So whatever you need to do in order to make that happen. That's a little woo-woo, and I get that. But I really felt like if I'm going to make this transition and I'm going to do it to fulfill my own personal and professional

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goals, that I can do that while also helping other people achieve their personal and professional goals.

I realized that listen I know for a fact that I can help law firms grow online. I know that I can do that. The problem is that some of the smaller or solo law firms simply do not have a digital marketing budget that is capable of seeing anything. Like their marketing budget is zero.

So I felt like one of the things that was happening when I was working for very large digital marketing agencies was that they were letting a complete segment of the law firm population, they just completely ignored that population. They want the law firms that have 50 plus lawyers, that have multiple locations, worldwide locations.

I really felt like the law firms in the United States and Canada—That's mostly what I work with is the United States and Canada. Although I do overseas as well. But this is the primary. Is that smaller and solo law firms have such a challenge because they want to grow. It's like the chicken and the egg. What do you do first? You want to grow, but to grow, you have to market. But then you can't market because you don't have the money because you're still small. It's just this sort of cyclical thing.

I thought I can break that cycle by providing law firms with free information or very inexpensive information to at least get some traction in one or two of the digital marketing areas so that they can start growing, so that they can get more clients, so that they can have more money. Then they can start outsourcing all of the things that are not within their zone of genius, that are not within what they want to do, which is practice the law and help people.

So I have like 150 articles on my website that's free. I've got a podcast that's free, and a book that's not that expensive. Then I'm always available

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on LinkedIn for people who have just quick questions to ask me. I think that that is something that I did not see in the larger digital marketing agencies. They were like, "Oh, well you don't have 10 grand to spend a month? Well, then there's the door."

The other thing that I did was also make sure that lawyers would be educated enough to know what services they were ready for, what they were not ready for, and then they could make educated smart decisions regarding whatever digital marketing dollars that they had. That was whether they hired me or somebody else. That they would be able to take that information and say, "Okay, now I have enough knowledge to know whether or not I'm getting my money's worth from a digital marketing agency or how to do this myself."

For me, that was really important to empower small law firms because I am also a small business. I know how that struggle is to try to succeed, and I want that for them so badly. So it was just a fundamental piece of creating my business along with being completely transparent about prices, about not having packages that you have to be forced into. Everything that we do is bespoke.

So from start to finish, I wanted to be the digital marketing agency that helps you before you can afford me, and then slowly grew with you until you become maybe someone with 5, 10, multiple lawyers, multiple locations. That was my goal. Not just to forget about you until you have 50 lawyers and 10 locations.

Paula: Yeah, I think what you've described is so key, and it's something that resonates with me as well in terms of my practice and the work that I do, which is here's information that can really help you. There are ways of gaining access to that information. Or in your case, and my case too. There are services that require a certain threshold of investment.

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But to be able to share that information, and as you said, empower your clients, like empower lawyers and law firms to, number one have access to the information so that they can do it themselves to some extent. Also to know that if and when they're ready to bring on someone to help them with their digital marketing, for example, that they know what they're looking for. That they understand how it fits into their overall strategy.

Because really, as lawyers, I mean I love the digital space, but I don't know how many lawyers are wanting to make that—What percentage of their practice they're wanting to spend doing their marketing. My guess is their marketing is a way of bringing themselves into connection with their clients who they want to help in their capacity as lawyers. So being able to have enough information to make good decisions, I think, is in itself such a valuable service to be providing. So that just really resonates with me. So thank you.

In terms of the digital marketing and in talking about how it went from the side hustle to your main hustle or practice, what was it that you loved about it? I mean it sounds like you kind of took on a content writing assignment and it really just grew from there. What was it and what is it that you love about your work?

Annette: I like to win. I am an attorney, and I am competitive at heart. I am also creative. Like I said I did theater. I write was a comedian. I don't know. Some people would say I'm still a comedian. So digital marketing for law firms allowed me to do all of that, allowed me to be creative. You know we do branding. How creative is that? How fun is that? We do websites for people now. We do their complete websites or refreshes. How creative is that? How fun is that?

Then we do the content, which is obviously create a little bit of creativity. But then also it's formulaic as well. I won't lie that there's certain formula

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that the Google bots love. They're not our robot overlord yet. You have to explain to them what this content is about. Social media is incredibly informative and educational, but also creative, right. Backlink strategy.

All these things combine all of that together, and then it puts it into an ecosystem where there are winners and there are losers. I love it when I can get a law firm that is a small practice to be on the first page ahead of these huge, huge law firms. It is such an amazing feeling when I get where my clients will tell me, "Oh, we're on the first page of Google. Or oh now we have a lot of clients that are coming in. They saw the last blog post." Whatever it is.

Every time that's happening, it's like an adrenaline rush of we're winning. I'm winning for them. Then that's just cyclical. I just want to do it again and again and again, because it's so much fun, and I feel like it's so creative. But then also there are statistics and data to show you that your creativity is winning.

Then I'm getting to do that for a lot of law firms that are incredibly important. I work for everything, in Canada and the United States, everything from you know personal injury, of course, criminal, of course, help defending people's rights. I work with special education attorneys. I work with employment attorneys that help people who have been harassed or discriminated against. I work with so many law firms that are so dedicated to helping people and their lives be better and to get justice.

So, for me, that just fuels the fire to do even more to get them even more online visibility, to make their digital footprint bigger so that they can win. Because at the end of the day, nothing matters except more clients, right? I mean that's the point of all of this. So I just like helping law firms. I just like being the assist, right? Like I'm on the court. I'm the assist. Then they get to make the basket, the touchdown, whatever sports analogy, whatever kind

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of sport you like. I'm just the assist in that, and then they get to make the slam dunk by getting the client. I just love it. I just love my role in that.

Paula: I love that. That's so great. When you're thinking about marketing, what elements do you think are most important for lawyers?

Annette: So, lawyers, they are no different than any other business online. Except for, I will put a footnote, that Google wants lawyers and other professional organizations to have a strong EAT score. EAT is expertise, authority, and trustworthiness.

That means the stuff that goes on your website has to be linked, outgoing links and ingoing links, to authoritative sources, .org, .gov sites, things like that. It needs to showcase a strong keyword strategy that showcases that you know what you're talking about in the area of law that you're talking about. Ultimately, that is because, here's another acronym YMYL. It's the practice of law or accounting or being a medical professional is your money or your life.

So Google holds law firms, chiropractic offices, medical facilities, tax accountants, CPAs, all to a higher level and standard because people are going to rely on the information on that website to make decisions about their money or their life. But other than that, that just means that you're held to a higher standard.

So there is a very formulaic strategy that every law firm needs to follow in order to grow online. We talked earlier, Paula, that a lot of times when lawyers come to me, they have a little bit of PTSD from dealing with other digital marketing agencies. That's okay. We can work with that. I understand.

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Then the other part is they don't know where to start first. Am I supposed to be on TikTok? Am I supposed to be on Clubhouse? What do I do? This is the very easy roadmap. I talk about it in my book as well, which is that first you need branding. How are you different than other law firms? That can be not just a logo, but it can be a tagline. It can be colors. I know you're best. Like, I get it. Whoever's listening right now, you are the best lawyer ever. I know it. I know it, but nobody else knows it. You can't just have a gavel and the navy blue color. You've got to do something different.

So your branding, your tagline, what's setting you apart. Then it's your website. That's your real estate on the internet. Instead of people being distracted by cat videos or whatever on Facebook, they are on your website. So put really good stuff on there and make it easy to navigate, make it visually appealing, and put great content on there that's interesting.

I will say that most people don't go to law firm websites for fun, right? They're going because they're freaking out about something. So put interesting information but also valuable information so that some of their fears are assuaged when they get to your website. Then they feel like they can trust you to pick up the phone, make an appointment, or email you. So those are the first few steps. You've got branding. You've got website.

Then you've got content. You cannot just build it and they will come. Your website has got to have consistent content on it. Google rewards websites with consistent content. If you do not have an article coming out every week on your website, other people are beating you online. I mean I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but that is what it is.

However, the great news, less bad news, good news is that once you get really great content on your website that's like 1000 words, it's key worded right, now you've got something to say at step four, which is your social media, right? If you have great content on your website then you have

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something to talk about on social media or in your email list. Or you can create a podcast out of it. Or you can write a small eBook, put a few blog articles together and make an eBook out of it. Once you have content on your website, then you have something to say.

That's the next step, which is social media. You should not be writing articles on LinkedIn. You should not be writing newsletters on LinkedIn because then you are supporting their platform instead of yours. So you always want to get people back to home base, which is your website, your digital real estate.

After you have all of that and you are solid on LinkedIn. Every lawyer should be on LinkedIn, and it should be you. It should not be your law firm. It should be you because people do business with people on LinkedIn. Then if you decide to do Facebook or Instagram, those are great. TikTok if you're so inclined, but that should be the towards the end of your strategy, not the beginning of your strategy. And only if you are exceptionally creative and bored and really, really want to be on TikTok.

Paula: I love it. I'm not getting the impression that we need to be on TikTok.

Annette: You really don't need to be on TikTok. Now there are lawyers who are doing well on TikTok. I'm not sure how much that is converting to actual clients. But there are some lawyers out there that are definitely using it in a very influencer kind of way and are not afraid to be very aggressive and abrasive and confrontational and a little edgy on TikTok. So if that is kind of not you, if you're just kind of a high net worth divorce attorney or if you are an estate planning attorney, that may not be the place for you.

The very last thing, after you've done all of this, you've done your branding, website, content, social media is to consider backlinks. Backlinks are where other websites that are more popular than you, that Google likes better

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than you, that have a higher domain authority than you, that are more authoritative than you are linking back to you.

The way that's done is you can do this yourself or you can hire an agency to do it. You always want to make sure it's white hat. You don't want to do anything spammy or creepy because that will hurt your score overall. But what that is, is you put content, like The 10 Ways to Avoid Declaring Bankruptcy if you're a bankruptcy attorney or The Five Steps to do After You Declare Bankruptcy. That article goes on a different website and links back to yours.

Just one little, small tip anyone that wants to do this themselves for free. There is a website called HARO, H-A-R-O, that is Help a Reporter Out. You get two emails a day and a lot of times there will be—Listen, it's a lot of emails. I got it. It's like 14 a week, right? Not all of them will have anything that will relate to you, but once in a while a reporter will be looking for a personal injury attorney or a criminal defense attorney to make a comment or statements about something that is in the news or about a certain new piece of legislation. Then you give that, and then they link back to you. That's a free way to get backlinks yourself. So that's the strategy.

Paula: That is super helpful. Annette, I'm loving this conversation. I'm also realizing that I'm taking a lot of your time. So I only have a couple more questions before we wrap up today, and I'm having a hard time deciding which ones. One question that I have is for the lawyers who are just starting to think about this, what are some of the initial—I love how you've outlined the five steps. I think that's fabulous. For anybody who's just getting started, what are one or two kind of quick wins that you would recommend just to kind of jump in there?

Annette: I think the very first thing is branding because you have to love what your brand, what your law firm or business looks like on the

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interwebs. You have to just love it. It's like when you redecorate a room at home, and you just are in love with that rug or you are just in love with that piece of artwork. You can't stop looking at it. You just love it. You're like that is me.

When you find the right tagline or the right logo or the right color that really resonates with you, it's so much easier to put it all over social media or your website because you're like yes, this is me. This represents how I help people. So I think that's a really quick win.

There are ways to create these things yourself for free. Canva is a tool you don't have to pay for it. You can create—You have to be a little careful with their licensing if you decide to use some of their images or art that they have. So just be careful with that because they have some licensing restrictions regarding logos. Or you can pay someone to create a logo for you or a brand palette, but that is a great quick win.

Then the next step I really believe is to create a website. As easy as Wix and Squarespace are to create, I typically recommend against those. Because while they are easy to create, technically nothing you put on there as your property. You will have to then eventually move it off to WordPress. It's like taking a house and digging up the foundation. You see this houses that are going down the street, right. Like that's what it's like.

So I would say invest some time or invest a little bit of money into getting just a bare bones WordPress website. Then I feel like once you have that, you have your digital business card with your logo that you love and your tagline and your colors and at least just a bare bones website, which you can start to build and refurbish and redecorate over time. So that would be, I would say, the most effective quick win. There are other quick wins, but these are the ones that would be the most effective.

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Paula: Beautiful. Annette, I would love to ask you before we wrap up some other resources that you offer personally for lawyers who have taken those first steps or who are well into the process and they want to learn more. How do they benefit from your work? How do they learn more about you and potentially also reach out to work with you?

Annette: So I think the first step every lawyer, or business because we work with businesses as well. So you need to sort out where you are in the process. Some people are at the very beginning and some people are in the middle where they've created, they've written some content on their website.

Then they're realizing that while they may be a prolific writer or may have a lot of really great ideas, they either don't have the time to do it. Or their efforts are going a bit to waste and they're wasting their time because frankly, they're not keywording and doing all the SEO formatting correctly. I usually say that submitting something on a website to Google is similar to submitting something to the court. It's got to be in a certain font, it's got to be certain spacing. This page intentionally left blank.

So I think that's typically where I meet a lot of law firms is that they kind of have their branding or they might have their website and they've already put a little bit of content out, but they're just not seeing the results that they need. Or maybe they have that and now they're ready for social media. Or backlink strategy.

We work with anyone wherever they're at in the process. We have actually no packages. Everything is ala carte because I want to make sure to only give the services to law firms or businesses that they need. We don't have long term contracts. We don't hold anybody hostage, Paula. We don't do that either.

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So we really want to be the sort of kinder, gentler digital marketing agency for law firms. More than anything, we just really want to help educate law firms so that they know where they're at in the process and what their next step should be. Whether or not that's to try to do it on their own or whether or not it is now time to probably outsource that.

Paula: Beautiful. Annette, you've got a ton of resources. I think we mentioned them a bit at the beginning. But your own podcast, the *Legal Marketing Lounge*, where you dive into SEO and the Google things. I've looked through and I've listened to some of them. I've looked through the index. So for anyone who's wanting to have more of the substantive how to, you've got that on your site. I understand you write weekly articles, and you'll have to remind me where are they found?

Annette: So they're on my website, lawquill.com. I have a blog. I practice what I preach. I put out at least one or two new articles per week. I think that there may be like 150 on there now. So anything that you want to know about whether or not it's how to get more five star reviews for your law firm, what to do if you get a bad review, how to write content, how to do social media, hashtag research, whatever you want, there's a search bar there. So you can search for either written content or podcast content.

Then eventually what I did was just write a book because then people will have an actual guide, start to finish, that they can work through over months or years to get to where they need to be online and be successful. So that book probably is the best linear. That is organized very linearly regarding like this is what SEO is. Now here's your first step. So that book can absolutely help. Then, of course, my blog articles and my podcasts can supplement that, but everything that somebody would need would be actually in the book. So.

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Paula: Beautiful. Annette thank you so much. We're gonna have to wrap up because we're at time, but I just wanted to thank you again for being here. I know everyone who tuned in is just loving everything that you had to share. Your story of your transition and the how to in the land of the marketing and the SEO. So thank you so much for joining us today Annette. Really appreciate it.

Annette: Thank you. I really want to encourage any lawyer out there, but especially, I think, my heart goes to those who are in the middle of their careers, maybe in their 40s or 50s, and have still a desire to pivot into something new that I just want to encourage them that it can be done successfully. So.

Paula: I love it. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Annette: Thank you.

Paula: Conversation to be continued.

Annette: Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

Paula: Thank you so much.

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