



.app Domain Names and Progressive Web Apps are Transforming the Legal Industry

BY RB TEWKSBURY

Two technologies you've probably never heard of are transforming the web and how we use it. Google's new top-level domain, .app, provides peerless security and speed by default. In combination, progressive web apps are the most significant advance in mobile web technology since Apple's release of the iPhone in 2007.

On March 26, 2018 Google began rolling out its mobile-first index, saying it has "started migrating sites that follow the best practices for mobile-first indexing."¹ Google's estimated share of the global search engine market is 77.7%.² It is also the largest recipient of online advertising dollars, with an estimated 37% share—\$42 billion—of the total online ad spend in 2018.³

Law firms that lack a mobile-first web strategy are at a competitive disadvantage to firms

that fully embrace mobile. Secure top-level domains like .app, along with progressive web apps, are replacing traditional websites and native mobile applications. This *is* where the web is heading next.

.app Domain Names

There are more than 1,500 top-level domains (TLDs) available for registration.⁴ The most common TLDs include .com, .net, and .org. There are country code TLDs like .us for the United States, restricted TLDs like .gov for the U.S. Government, and several attorney-related TLDs, including .abogado, .associates, .attorney, .law, .lawyer, and .legal.

Now there's .app,⁵ a new unrestricted TLD backed and managed by Google.⁶ According to Google Tech Lead and Senior Software

Engineer Ben McIlwain, .app is "the world's first entirely secure, all-HTTPS, open top-level domain."⁷ It is an excellent TLD choice for attorneys, offering better user experience opportunities and private, secure attorney-client communications.

Google explains: "A key benefit of the .app domain is that security is built in, for both you and your users. The big difference is that HTTPS is required to connect to all .app websites, helping protect against ad malware, tracking injection by ISPs, and spying on open WiFi networks. Because .app is the first TLD with enforced security available for general registration, it's helping move the web to an HTTPS-everywhere future in a big way."⁸

In February 2015, Google paid a then record-setting \$25,001,000 to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)⁹ for the registry rights to the .app TLD.¹⁰ The company launched .app at Google I/O 2018.¹¹

Domain Name Wire posted on May 7, 2018 that "GoDaddy VP Paul Nicks confirmed to DNW that .App is its biggest new top level domain launch to date in terms of pre-orders at the registrar. Every day of early access has beaten the same day of other new TLD early access periods, and it has more pre-orders than any other domain."¹² More than 250,000 .app domains were registered in the first month of availability.¹³

Domain names are not purchased. Rather, they are registered from registrars who either own the rights to a specific TLD or acquire those rights from the owner. Think of registrars like retailers. These retailers get their TLDs from wholesalers called registries. The registries acquire their rights directly from ICANN.

As with other TLD extensions like .com or .lawyer, your desired .app domain name may already be registered. Do not wait. Even if you have no intention of building a progressive web app anytime soon, it's a good idea to secure your .app domains now. New domain names can be registered at Google,¹⁴ GoDaddy,¹⁵ Donuts,¹⁶ Hexonet,¹⁷ and most other domain registrars. Domain name registration fees vary by registrar, so it pays to shop around.

Mobile Applications

Mobile apps are designed and optimized to run on mobile devices, including smartphones, tablets, and watches. The web and our mobile devices have changed dramatically since Apple launched the iPhone nearly a dozen years ago. Today, more people access and search the web through mobile devices than through desktop computers.¹⁸

Google is by far the dominant force in mobile technology today. The company's mobile operating system, Android, powers 60% to 65% of mobile devices in the United States and at least 85% of the world market.¹⁹ All of these mobile devices have Google accounts. By comparison, Apple's share of the smartphone market is approximately 13% in the United States and 11.9% worldwide.²⁰

There are many attorney-related mobile apps in Apple's App Store²¹ and on Google Play.²² Most law firms, however, have not yet embraced native apps for mobile marketing or for enhanced, secure attorney-client communication and engagement.

Firms that have created mobile apps almost always have firm websites as well. This mobile marketing strategy is inefficient, expensive to develop, and difficult to maintain. Mobile apps require separate builds for each platform: Android, iOS, and the web. Updating content, finding and fixing bugs, releasing new features and updates, and managing servers can

| Platform Features and Capabilities | Progressive Web Apps | Mobile Apps | Responsive Websites |
|---|----------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Progressive—works with every browser | ✓ | x | x |
| Responsive—fits any device | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| App like—looks and acts like a mobile app | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| Fresh—always up-to-date | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Safe—forces HTTPS encryption | ✓ | x | x |
| Discoverable—search engines can find it | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Re-engageable—send push notifications | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| Brandable—add icon to user's home screen | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| Linkable—share applications via URL | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Independent of Apple App Store | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Independent of Google Play | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Download onto device is not required | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Installation on device is not required | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Works offline—network not always required | ✓ | x | x |
| Cost-effective development process | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Fast development time—quick to market | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Can be paired with a .app domain name | ✓ | ✓ | x |

sometimes overwhelm even the most talented technical teams.

Progressive Web Apps

Many law firms have opted instead for building and maintaining mobile responsive websites, a web design concept first introduced by Audi.com in 2001.²³ Websites like these offer limited

user-engagement capabilities and are often constructed using content management systems like WordPress, which was released in May 2003. There's a better way—and that's progressive web apps (PWAs).

PWAs leverage the benefits of open web standards and modern web browsers to provide users with a rich mobile experience. According to


Google Maps, Instagram, Pinterest, Starbucks, Uber, Forbes, and *The Washington Post* are just a few popular brands that have embraced PWAs. Each of these PWA deployments has experienced dramatic, positive results.

Google, “PWAs are experiences that combine the best of the web and the best of apps. They are useful to users from the very first visit in a browser tab, no install required. As the user progressively builds a relationship with the app over time, it becomes more and more powerful. It loads quickly, even on flaky networks, sends relevant push notifications, has an icon on the home screen, and loads as a top-level, full-screen experience.”²⁴

Google Maps,²⁵ Instagram,²⁶ Pinterest,²⁷ Starbucks,²⁸ Uber,²⁹ Forbes³⁰ and *The Washington Post*³¹ are just a few of the brands that have embraced PWAs. Each of these PWA deployments has experienced dramatic, positive results. Likewise, firms that use PWAs as part of their mobile-first marketing strategy can enjoy a significant competitive advantage.

Conclusion

A well-built progressive web app, combined with a premium .app domain, is a winning web-marketing strategy for law firms and attorneys. PWAs provide a unique opportunity for attorneys to connect and engage with their clients and the public, while .app TLDs offer more secure attorney-client communications, enhanced browser speed, and better user experience

opportunities. Traditional websites and native mobile apps simply can’t compete. 

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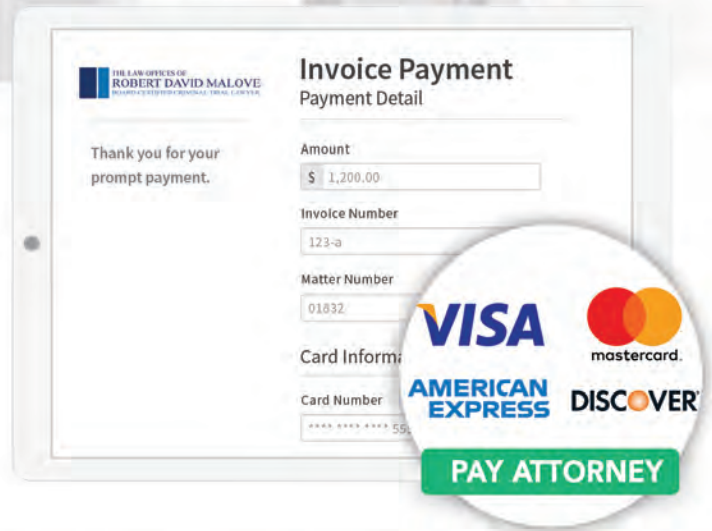
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