



# THE Connection

Official Newsletter of the Georgia Association of Professional Private Investigators, Inc.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Next  
GAPPI Atlanta  
Chapter Meeting  
December 13, 2011  
at Ryan's Restaurant  
705 Jimmy Carter Blvd.  
Norcross  
(770) 840-9096

Networking and lunch  
from  
11:30 a.m.—12:00 noon  
Meeting from  
12:00 noon—1p.m.

The cost is \$15.00 for  
GAPPI members

\$20 for non-members  
(includes lunch and  
beverage)

\$10 for meeting only -  
no lunch

Students and potential  
members are always  
welcome.

“We look forward to  
seeing you all there!”

## 10 Ways to Become an Investigative Expert

You might be an expert in your daily investigations work, but your expertise isn't quite as valuable to you if people don't know that you're the go-to person for information about a particular subject. Establishing yourself as an expert private investigator in the public eye is something you might need to work at, but once you have obtained that recognition, it has several advantages that can propel your business to new heights.

If you're ready to let the world know that you're an industry leader, keep reading to find out why and how to establish yourself as an expert.

### Benefits of being an expert

Even the word “expert” inspires confidence. It tells the media that they should interview you for a breaking story. It gives your peers the feeling that you'd be a good person to collaborate with on a case. Most importantly, perhaps, it tells potential clients that they should hire you over all others.

Think of establishing credibility and expert status as not only a way to gain respect, but as one of the better marketing methods to use for your investigation firm. People tend to flock to experts, and you can use that added attention to your competitive advantage. As mentioned before, gaining recognition can take some work. If you combine several of the following measures and stay diligent about it, you should see your reputation grow exponentially.

### 1. Choose a niche to showcase your expertise

Do you have a particular area of expertise, one where you feel like you have in-depth knowledge that places you among the best in the business? Focus on that niche and try to become well-known for it. Whether it's intellectual property investigations, background checks, missing persons investigations or one of the thousands of other areas, find your niche and make yourself visible.

### 2. Get published

Ever hear the phrase, “He wrote the book on the subject”? That's because people who get published instantly gain credibility in many people's eyes. You have several publishing options: magazines, newsletters, podcasts, videos - even authoring your own book. If you would like to

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write a book or article but lack confidence in your writing skills, you can always hire a ghost writer.

### **3. Present at industry events**

To stand out in your industry, you have to get in front of people. Look for speaking opportunities at association conferences, attorney conferences and any other relevant event you come across. This is a good chance to show what you know to peers and potential clients.

### **4. Make yourself available to the media**

Getting interviewed and quoted in local and national publications is a great way to put yourself on the map. These interviews will live online and in print for a long time and be viewed by people who are trying to find out more about your services. Once you start doing interviews, it may serve you well to keep a record of all your media appearances.

### **5. Teach or create online courses**

If you know something well enough to teach it to others, that gives people a good idea of your capability. You could teach a continuing education class for your state association, create an online course or conduct a webinar.

### **6. Become an expert consultant**

Give yourself another source of revenue by branding yourself as a consultant. The idea of bringing in an expert consultant to evaluate and repair any deficiencies appeals to many corporations and other organizations. If your specialty is security, for example, make it known that you offer security consulting for clients.

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## **7. Issue press releases**

Press releases are a proven method of alerting the media whenever you have something to announce. There are many free press release distribution websites, or you can spend a little more money on a paid site that gets your press release out to hundreds of media outlets nationwide. The next time you help to shut down a huge counterfeit operation or find a high-profile missing person, let the media know by sending out a press release.

## **8. Get involved with politics and legislation**

The investigation industry regularly has to rally against legislation that could make it harder for private investigators to do their jobs. By staying informed and leading the charge against harmful proposed legislation, you will make it clear to others that you are an important figure in the investigative world.

## **9. Stay ahead of the pack**

Paying attention to new trends and technology gives you an advantage because you can remain at the forefront of your industry, as well as offer improved services to clients.

## **10. Use your imagination**

If you have come up with innovative ways to showcase your expertise, share your experience with other professionals.

*This article was written by a PInow staff writer. For more information about PInow please visit [www.PInow.com](http://www.PInow.com).*

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## 9 Elements of a Professional Investigator Website

If making one change to your business could pay tremendous dividends for your private investigation business, wouldn't you do it? Taking your company's website from just okay to great – or creating a website if you don't have one – could be the single smartest investment you can make to have your phones ringing off the hook. In this article, we'll look at what a solid website can do for your business, then list nine elements your website requires.

### Why do you need a well-designed website?

Websites have in many cases replaced business cards, in-person visits and printed marketing collateral as people's first impression of your company. A website displays your professionalism, tells people why they should work with you, attracts new business leads and gives them a way to contact you. It's basically your company's 24/7 marketing director. You probably wouldn't hire a sloppily dressed and disorganized person to be your marketing director, so why would you want a sloppy website to represent your company?

Read on to discover 9 essential website elements that will have potential clients halting their search for a private investigator when they visit you online.

### Dressing your website for success

Just as a sharply dressed man or woman can grab the attention of an entire room, so can your website if it's visually appealing. You might think your sense of style translates to an attractive website, but most web designers will disagree if your site doesn't have the following fundamentals.

**1) Simple layout** – When it comes to the layout of your website, sometimes less is more. A jumble of flashing images, gobs of text, unnecessary background music and links scattered everywhere is distracting and can cause people to abandon your site. Stick to concise -yet-informative content, minimal-but-appealing images, and an uncluttered layout, and that should be more than enough for your site's visitors.

**2) Compelling imagery** – Question: What do photos of your dog, a tree and a Roman gladiator have in common? Answer: Nothing, and it probably doesn't make sense to feature them all on a private investigation website. Too many images, especially if they don't fit together, can take people's attention away from the vital information on the page. If you use images, choose one or two that convey your company's personality, work ethic and business philosophy. Stock photography sites have hundreds of thousands of images you can browse to find the one that belongs on your site.

**3) Color coordination** – Colors, much like images, should be used sparingly on your site. Instead of using every color in the rainbow, pick 2-5 colors that go together. People visiting your site will thank you for not assaulting their eyes with a combination of neon green and mustard yellow.

**4) Convincing content** – You have probably heard of the 5 W's (Who, What, Where, When and Why). Your website should answer those questions about your business before potential clients ask them. Who are you as a company? What can you do for clients? Where are you located and where do you provide service? When can you have the job completed? Why should people choose your company? Make this information easy to find and easy to read so people can quickly learn about your business. Make sure the content is copy edited and spell-checked because errors often scream "unprofessional" to professionals. Finally,

make sure your contact information is correct and easily located.

### **Turning your site into a high-performance marketing tool**

Most people are similar in that certain aspects turn them off when visiting websites. Make sure your website is strong in the following areas to give your site visitors a user-friendly experience.

**5) Quality URL** – The URL, or domain name, of your site should be uncomplicated and fairly easy to remember. A person might have trouble keeping [www.the-best-private-investigators-ever.com](http://www.the-best-private-investigators-ever.com) in their memory bank, but [www.nyprivateinvestigator.com](http://www.nyprivateinvestigator.com) is much easier to remember. Try to keep the URL fairly short, memorable and relevant to your business.

**6) Search engine optimization** – Now that you've chosen your domain name, it's time to make sure people can find the site. Search engine optimization (SEO) helps search engines such as Google and Yahoo! find you, which means that potential clients can find you when they search for investigators. There is a lot that goes into SEO – too much to fit into this paragraph – but essentially it's a comprehensive effort involving site structure, targeted keywords, meta tags, content strategy and more. There are hundreds of books and thousands of online articles about SEO, but in the end your best option might be to consult someone who knows how search engines operate and how to build a search engine-friendly site.

**7) Fast load time** – Have you ever typed in the URL of a website and then spent 30 seconds waiting for the site to load? You don't want people waiting that long for your site to load because they might just say "forget it" and move on to the next website that Google suggested. One way to prevent slow load times is to minimize large graphics and icons. Slow load times can also be caused by more complicated back-end issues that likely require professional attention unless you are skilled in computer coding.

**8) Simple navigation** – People should be able to jump from your home page, to the contact page, to a page that lists your services, and back to your home page without breaking a sweat. Website users get frustrated if they have to do detective work to figure out how to find the information they need on your site. Make sure the site is structured in a way that makes sense to visitors, with a clearly defined path that leads people to their desired destination.

**9) Working links** – Broken links not only frustrate site visitors, but they can lower your search engine ranking. You should test your site links regularly (some companies offer online tools that automatically test your links) to make sure nobody receives a message saying "Oops, this page could not be found" while on your site.

Building a better website might seem overwhelming, but you can turn to a professional website designer if you can't make the changes yourself. Once you have an attractive, effective website to show off, all that's left to do is satisfy the many new customers who request your services.

*This article was written by a PInow staff writer. For more information about PInow please visit [www.PInow.com](http://www.PInow.com).*

## 10 Email Mistakes Private Investigators Should Avoid

Even if you haven't heard any complaints about your emailing style, there's still a chance that you are violating an email etiquette rule or two. It might not seem like a big deal, but sometimes potential customers or other industry professionals judge a private investigator by his or her sent messages.

The best way to avoid making a bad impression is to ensure that you and your staff are on the same page about your policies for business-related emails. To help you recognize and correct any email errors you or your colleagues may be making, we have compiled this list of 10 common email etiquette violations. Don't feel bad - most people have been guilty of these at some point!

### 1. Unprofessional email address

Using `freddiewatchesyou@isp.com` as your address probably won't leave a favorable impression with your email's recipient. Your best option is to have a business email address with the same extension as your private investigator website (e.g., `fsmith@xyzinvestigations.com`). At the very least, choose a professional address such as `xyzinvestigations@isp.com`.

### 2. Cluttered signature block

Some people clutter their signature block with images, quotes, wild fonts and other unnecessary items. Make it easy for people to find your contact information in your email signature by sticking to a format similar to this:

NAME  
COMPANY NAME  
ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP  
PHONE  
FAX  
EMAIL  
WEBSITE

### 3. Hitting reply-to-all more than necessary

If someone sends you and a group of others an email, only hit "reply to all" if your response truly needs to be seen by everyone. If you want your response to be private or you are only replying with a few words, spare everyone else the hassle of checking their inbox and only reply to the sender.

### 4. Writing a novel

Your email should be fairly short and to the point. You will lose the recipient's attention if you don't clearly state your objective right away, or if you stray from your objective. If your message includes many different thoughts or involves coordinating a group of people, you might be better off using a phone call to convey your message.

## **5. Error-filled messages**

Spelling or grammar errors look unprofessional, and wording your thoughts incorrectly can lead to confusion or even bigger problems. Take a couple of minutes to self-edit your email before you hit "send."

## **6. Sharing too much**

Keep in mind that the email you send can be saved, forwarded and generally shared with people who you might not want seeing it. Think twice before sending sensitive information, angry messages, off-color jokes or anything else that might be detrimental if it fell into the wrong hands. Also, if you don't want everyone on the email chain to see each other's addresses, use the "Bcc" function to keep this information hidden.

## **7. Delayed responses**

If someone sends you an email and needs a quick response, don't leave them hanging. Even if you just send them a sentence or two saying you will respond later, at least the other person will know you received their message.

## **8. Indiscriminate forwarding**

Almost all of us have that one friend, relative or co-worker who forwards every single email to us - whether it's an important message or a video of a cat hanging from a ceiling fan. This practice eats away at people's time and elevates their stress level when they see a full inbox waiting for them. Make sure you only forward important messages.

## **9. Vague or misleading subject line**

If your subject line says something like "Hi John" as opposed to "Request for XYZ forms," chances are that your message might not be read as quickly. Your subject line should state exactly what you'll be discussing in the email.

## **10. Additional email mistakes**

Writing in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS or no capital letters

Using emoticons such as :-) and :-\*

Using internet slang such as LOL, TTYL, ROFL, OMG

Excessive punctuation!!!?!!!

Crazy colors and fonts

Animated images

If any of these mistakes sound familiar to you, you can run through this checklist with each message you send for a while. And if you know anyone who has email problems, we encourage you to email this article to them.

*This article was written by a PInow staff writer. For more information about PInow please visit [www.PInow.com](http://www.PInow.com).*



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### Annual Financial Report for GAPPI

As we close out the year we are proud to announce that GAPPI is financially sound. We have grown to over 200 members and, once again, we had very good turn-outs for the Spring Training and the SEIC Fall Conference. We are still escrowing money in order to accrue a one year's operating capital which runs about \$35,000 annually. This is one of the goals assigned to the Board of Directors in order to provide financial stability for GAPPI. As we closed out the profit and loss statement for November, GAPPI recognized a short-fall in collecting revenue to cover our legislative advocacy.

There are still legislative issues that could have adversely affected our members and your livelihood. These issues will be back to haunt us again in the 2012 State Legislative Session which starts in January. The cost of legislative advocacy is more than what the basic GAPPI budget can handle. We are dedicated to covering this expenditure by continuing to grow our membership, fund raising and asking for voluntary donations. We realize that these are still tough times. Please give what you can to help us protect our industry. If you can't donate right now please consider giving of your time to talk to our State Legislators so that they will be better educated on issues that affect Private Investigators.

If you have any questions please give me call at 404-766-1632 or you can e-mail me at [vernon@ahqi.com](mailto:vernon@ahqi.com).

Vernon Thomas  
Executive Director, GAPPI

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