

SonicSEO sells law websites to Internet Brands

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Arvind and **Becky Raichur** initially built their firm in the heady days of the late 1990s technology boom.

Arvind, president and CEO of SonicSEO.com, recalled spending in the "seven-figure" range to advertise the attorney directory they created, AttorneyLocate.com. Once the tech bust happened, burning through that kind of cash was no longer possible.

"We had to discover for ourselves how to create organic traffic, which is what search engine optimization is all about," he said.

Apparently they learned well. Their company, AllLaw.com, which is doing business as SonicSEO.com, has sold its two legal-oriented websites to [Internet Brands Inc.](#) for an undisclosed amount. Internet Brands owns more than 100 sites, including [ExpertHub.com](#), [CarsDirect.com](#) and [DoItYourself.com](#).

Internet Brands, based in California, focuses on building or growing websites that have a lot of "organic traffic" and direct advertiser relationships, said **Steve Lombardi**, president of ExpertHub.com. Organic traffic is free traffic, such as the listings that come up on the left side of the screen on a [Google](#) search, versus the right side, which are paid listings.

"We looked at the properties we have, and AllLaw and AttorneyLocate are very similar," he said. "They rank well organically, and they have lawyers who have direct relationships with them."

Arvind was an attorney with the [Modrall Spierling](#) law firm in Albuquerque in 1997 when he saw the untapped opportunity of the Internet. He and his wife, Becky, chief technology officer for SonicSEO.com, launched AttorneyLocate.com in 1998. It allowed attorney searches by city and practice areas, and offered web hosting and other services for smaller and medium-sized law firms.

It grew to include thousands of attorneys in all 50 states. The Raichurs acquired AllLaw.com in 1999 and built that into a site for consumer information on legal topics.

The work they did figuring out how to drive traffic to their site and clients' sites taught them about search engine optimization, or SEO. That was long before the concept of SEO exploded. It worked so well, they expanded the business three years ago outside the legal arena to small businesses doing everything from roofing to photography to pest control.

In the deal with Internet Brands, SonicSEO retains the search engine optimization business.

"It's not something they do, and it's something we're good at," Arvind said. "They wanted those two properties, so it was more of an asset sale. We sold the client base that goes with that, but there are crossover clients because a lot of attorneys we served, we also serve for SEO. That's our fastest-growing piece."

They are tapping a swelling demand, Arvind said, as more business owners realize they must be online in a way that they can be found by potential customers.

"It's almost like the Better Business Bureau used to be," he said. "If you're not online, on that first page of Google, [Yahoo](#), [Bing](#), it's like a credibility thing. If [the search engines] put you there, that must mean you're a good plumber or roofer. That's how people view it."

And getting on that first page of search results requires companies like SonicSEO to constantly adjust to the changing algorithms used by search engines.

"They want the best results they can deliver because that's what gets them usage," he said. "Our job is to stay on top of those changes and make sure the clients we represent come up."

[Forrester Research](#) predicted in July of 2009 that spending on search marketing would reach \$32 billion by 2014, and that most companies it surveyed are

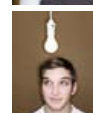
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SonicSEO co-owner Arvind Raichur learned SEO techniques through building his sites AttorneyLocate.com and AllLaw.com, which he has now sold.

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outsourcing those efforts to other firms. Part of that growth is from money shifting away from traditional advertising, according to Forrester.

SonicSEO has hired up to 23 employees and is hiring several more, Arvind said. He can't disclose the purchase price from Internet Brands for the two websites, but said the company got a "nice capital infusion."

Monthly costs for clients range from \$700 to several thousand dollars. That covers the basic SEO services all the way through managing companies' social media campaigns and their brand management on sites like [Yelp](#) and [TripAdvisor](#).

"We can track [clients' customers], see what page they entered, what page they exited," he said. "If we see customers coming in too quickly or jumping off, we can adjust the page or adjust the message."

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