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Social Media is Here to Stay - An LMA 2012 Re-cap Part II

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Yesterday, we covered the first part of the social media session from the Legal Marketing Association's Annual Conference. Today, let's jump into part two!

Next up, on the panel we had Melissa Croteau, the CMO of Nixon Peabody. Her role on the panel was to talk about how a large firm handles social media. Nixon Peabody started using social media in 2009, beginning with Twitter. They currently have 2,500 regular followers, with a majority of those being media.

Because I'm always trying to follow the tweet stream, as well as live tweet, when I'm at a conference, I also was keeping an eye on the tweets coming out of other sessions. From another session at the same time, Russell Lawson posted what turned out to be a timely suggestion for our group as well – he noted that journalists are using their Twitter stream to find interesting or out of the ordinary story ideas, so firms shouldn't post the same old thing all the time. If Nixon Peabody has so many media followers, they must be adhering to this idea already!

Back in our session, Melissa shared that the firm also has a Facebook page, which is still in the experimental stage.

While I found value in seeing where the panelists were at in terms of their social media usage, such as Melissa's comment about being in the experimental phase in terms of Facebook, I did feel that if we were going to have a set of panelists giving advice on how to use social media, they should be more proficient (individually and as firms) in their use of all of the platforms, which by and large, they weren't. Alternatively, it would be useful to see a panel with some firms that are very proficient, and others that are just starting out, and see what advice they would have for each other - that would cover the range of attendees and their experience and be a useful exercise.

Interestingly, Nixon Peabody does work with their attorneys to move their LinkedIn profiles from being simply a rehashing of their resume to being a discussion tool, which I strongly endorse. Melissa admitted that they had initially discounted the importance of LinkedIn until about a year ago when it went public. Then, they started to pay attention.

In addition to working with current attorneys, Melissa also advised that when a firm brings in a lateral hire, they should pay attention to how much that person promoted their former firm on LinkedIn, and give them some language for the new firm to update it with. Otherwise, the attorney can end up having just one line about their new firm, while their old firm's information is still highly visible in their profile.

Melissa commented that only 20% of law firms have a full-time social media person in the marketing department, and Nixon Peabody is now one of them. She said that when looking to hire someone in this position, they ended up going with someone who had worked in a PR firm as a social media strategist for clients. This person had also worked to measure results and return on investment.

As this point, she made the bold statement I mentioned earlier, that the "most significant thing a marketing department can do in 2012 is to develop a social media strategy." Melissa said that Nixon Peabody is totally focused on social media for this year to bring in clients, and they're working to tie it in with their other activities. This is in line with what I said in my post yesterday, that although having a social media strategy is important, it's far more significant to work to see how social media can be leveraged to boost a firm's other activities.

Melissa added that the keys to using social media successfully at a law firm in her experience are:

- an enthusiastic managing partner
- partner business development champions
- buy-in from the ethics partner
- hungry attorneys who want to blog, tweet, etc.
- dedicated marketing resources
- the coordination of social media, traditional marketing and business development

Most importantly, firms must develop a strategy.

The final panelist was Peter Vogel, of Gardere Wynne Sewell LLP. As he spoke, I thought of my own five recommendations for using social media:

1. Use an RSS reader to consume content. Google is a good one.

2. Use other sources for inspiration when blogging (but always remember to cite them!)

3. Share blog posts on LinkedIn (personally and in groups), Twitter, Facebook and Google Plus. Vary these by audience in case you have crossover.

4. ENGAGE! Share others' posts & tweets, comment on blogs, tweets, etc. Form relationships!

5. Take these relationships offline. Meet people for lunch who are in the same city that you are, and when you're traveling or at a conference.

Peter unknowingly agreed with my third point, saying during his comments that if you're blogging, you should leverage this via multiple social media platforms to raise your search relevance.

Following the panelists' comments, we moved on to audience questions, which I always find to be the most interesting indicator of where we are as an industry in terms of social media usage and challenges. The first question was how the panelists got over the ethics hump with their attorneys.

Melissa said that the medium is always changing, so it's a matter of comfort level and education. She also suggested that firms look at the most restrictive states' rules and abide by those. Sue Sassmann commented via twitter that "Social media changes the medium, not the message. Ethical rules don't change." So she suggested that firms keep current with their social media policies, and know their state rules.

In another excellent comment, Peter suggested that a good line to draw when using social media is to avoid saying anything on social media that you don't want a jury to see. He added that it amazes him how creative people can be…and how stupid they can be.

Another audience member asked about how the panelists plan to use YouTube. One of them commented that they'll be using it to show the firm's personality, they'll create their own YouTube channel, and use attorneys with specialties in the videos. We're really in the infancy stages now in terms of law firms using YouTube, so there's great opportunity there for firms to be cutting edge and develop a loyal viewership before the industry as a whole gets on board.

The final question came from an audience member who asked about how the panelists deal with the issue of time management in social media. Camille said that using their intern was a cost-efficient way to get more help. She also multitasks by using the social media apps on her cell phone to stay on top of the social media space. I am a huge advocate of multitasking (though I know that doesn't work for everyone), and I also regularly suggest to my attorneys that they carve out a limited time period to dedicate to social media. It's nice to be able to monitor it regularly (and if you're not an attorney billing by the hour, that may be more manageable), but for attorneys, recommending 20 minutes first thing in the morning, or an hour each weekend can make the concept more palatable.

Now that social media is mainstream, but we're still transitioning into how it will work best for lawyers and firms, I'll be curious to see how next year's LMA Conference will showcase this.