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Make time for social media

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One year in college my brother and I decided to unplug the cable and go without television programs for an entire year. It was so liberating, we were able to spend our evenings watching either the movies we chose (as opposed to *Law & Order* re-runs or *Mannequin 2*) and we were able to make better use of our time. I'm not saying that TV is all bad, but it is often used to fill the extra time in our lives that could be better used elsewhere. Perhaps the sinister element of TV is that it is a socially acceptable way for Americans to waste their lives. Nobody is going to judge you for being a *Glee* junkie. Well maybe, but you get the point.

Americans watch an estimated 200 billion hours of TV each year, according to [Clay Shirky](#), co-author of the bestselling book *Cognitive Surplus*. The people who make TV shows are facing a growing threat, according to Shirky — Americans who would prefer engaging in conversation online with Facebook, Twitter and blogs rather than watching TV. TV is starting to get some competition for the spare time of Americans. Shirky refers to this 200 billion hours of time as "cognitive surplus," and it is now being channeled towards global endeavors like Wikipedia, where individuals submit articles and edits to a shared database with no hope of financial remuneration. An estimated 100 million hours have been plugged into Wikipedia articles — and while this may seem like a lot of time, it is still roughly 0.1% of the time Americans spend each year watching television. Who had time to write all those articles? Turns out, everybody.

Lawyers don't have the same amount of free time as the average American, so where do they find time for social media? "I force social media and blogging into my schedule," said David Donaghue, author of the [Chicago IP Litigation Blog](#), recently named one of the top 40 under 40 attorneys in Chicago. With all of the demands on the lives of attorneys, you won't find time for social media unless you make a place for it. It has paid off for Donahue, though, helping him gain significant exposure and close new business.

The most successful bloggers online have created a routine for their participation in the online world. Roy Ginsburg, author of the blog [Quirky Employment Questions](#), spends time every Sunday night creating his blog posts for the coming week; others find early mornings work best. For attorneys who have found success through social media — they make it a priority.

So what does success look like for law bloggers? Success can look very different for different bloggers. According to David Brown, a partner at Alston and Bird and co-leader of the [Financial Markets Crisis Blog](#), "Regulators read our blog from the IMF, World Bank and FSA — we didn't expect that." In addition to the increased exposure, Brown described how the blog has helped he and his colleagues become better lawyers. "[Attorneys] need peripheral vision

— you can't get that by being a faithful reader of the *Wall Street Journal*. The blog is helping make our lawyers more credible and more expert." When asked why they started the blog, Brown explained, "We needed a real-time tool, we couldn't keep pace with six-to-eight page alerts."

For Alston & Bird, the blog has been deemed a success, but success means different things to different firms.

For some firms social media is a success only if it brings in new business. This is problematic, because social media and business development don't exactly go hand in hand. A huge amount of traffic to a blog can often translate to zero new matters if the attorneys don't have a strategy to convert traffic into contacts and convert the contacts into clients. If attorneys make the time to blog — great. If they can invest the additional time to engage in conversations — even better.

If you think about the sales cycle like a funnel, at the very top of the funnel you have visibility gained by media and possibly your online persona — at the very bottom, you have retained clients who are writing the checks. To get from the top of the funnel to the bottom, there needs to be real engagement and quality touches in between. I often ask my clients, "How many appointments have you set up as a result of your social media efforts?" Phone calls, breakfasts, lunches — these offline appointments are the valuable communications that lead to new matters and referrals.

Is it worth the time and effort? Why not spend the time doing traditional marketing or making phone calls? Why not spend the time relaxing and watching TV? Engaging in social media in your free time is not yet as socially acceptable as watching TV — it requires you to leave your comfort zone and learn new habits and new ways of communication. Social media can open your eyes to untapped sources of information and relationships that would have been impossible to build otherwise — and those are things you will never gain from watching the nightly news.

Adrian Dayton is an attorney and social media consultant to large law firms. He is also author of the book, Social Media for Lawyers: Twitter Edition (Ark Group 2009) and the blog [Marketing Strategy and the Law: Social Media Edition](#).