

5 Social Media Tips for Law School Grads and Solo Practitioners to Help Find a Job and Build a Practice

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(Originally published in November 2011 on [Cogent Legal's Blog](#))



When I graduated from law school in 1993, job searching via social media consisted of using the Yellow Pages to find a law firm to cold call. Wannabe associates like me attended job fairs and perhaps asked a parent's friend to write a letter of recommendation. In that pre-Internet day of dial-up modems, none of us could network virtually.

Obviously, the path to finding an associate attorney position—or going solo and building a practice—has greatly changed and widened over the years, but recent law school graduates have it really tough these days, much as my peers and I did in the early '90s when big firms had big layoffs. In light of this challenging economic climate, [my law school](#) asked that I co-present a seminar to help third-years find their first job post-graduation. I was asked to talk about “the do's and don'ts of using LinkedIn and Facebook for your job search.” Much of the information that follows about using social media also can help attorneys who are building their solo or small-firm practices.

Based on my immersion in the subject of hiring and marketing following the start of my firm, Cogent Legal, I felt qualified to try and help. I also appreciated the help of Miles Cooper ([Rouda, Feder, Tietjen & McGuinn](#)), who gave an excellent seminar on Social Media Marketing for attorneys that I heavily borrowed from. What follows are the key points, plus the slides from my PowerPoint presentation.

1. You are your brand.

In the same way that Steve Jobs built Apple into a phenomenal brand by protectively nurturing and promoting it with the utmost care, you should think of yourself as a brand that you must develop, represent and promote in the most effective and careful way possible. Your online profile in places like Facebook, LinkedIn, [Avvo](#) and [Martindale](#) create your “brand” with the outside world, and gaining control of that brand is critical.

At a minimum, you should regularly do a search of your name on Google, Yahoo and Bing to see what comes up, and try to ameliorate the situation if your name is confused with someone's less-than-flattering profile. (For example, I use my middle initial “C” to lessen the confusion with all the other Morgan Smiths out there.) Most important, don't put any photographs or information on the web that you would not want a prospective employer to see. Whenever I hire someone, I look very carefully at online information when considering a resume.

2. Use as many social media channels as possible to connect with others.

Using LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook (both individual profiles and company pages), and now Google Plus is an essential way to get your professional identity known in the marketplace and connect with potential employers, clients, and so-called “key influencers” or “thought leaders” in the field.

If you’re a newbie, then it’s worthwhile to take a “Social Media 101” type of course online from a site such as mediabistro.com, or read how-to articles available on websites devoted to legal-specific marketing such as [The Matte Pad](#) or [The Lawyerist](#). Become familiar with customs and best practices, and avoid unintentionally annoying people by acting as a “stalker” or “spammer” by posting too frequently or thoughtlessly. For example, I find it annoying the way some people link their Twitter accounts to automatically post their tweets as Facebook and LinkedIn status updates—in my view, the multiple tweets in a single day junk up the Facebook and LinkedIn streams. But, I think it’s a good idea to judiciously post a news update every day or so to LinkedIn and to Facebook, and those updates can automatically post on your Twitter feed.

3. Build a blog—with care.

While undeniably time consuming, blogging gives you marketing benefits that other media don’t. Done right, it can establish your credibility, enhance your reputation and make you a go-to person in your specialized field. But many are not done right—they’re neglected, overly self-promotional and/or bland. The key is to find a niche, develop a voice, update the blog frequently, and write genuinely useful and interesting articles (easier said than done). Many general sites such as [Blog Traffic Exchange](#) give advice on how to do it. Other attorney-specific sites and services, such as [LexBlog](#), have lots of info to help attorneys blog and use social media, and they offer paid packaged services to get you going.

If you don’t have the time or motivation to start your own blog, then try to be a guest blogger on reputable sites that serve the legal profession. You won’t get paid for it, but you will build your portfolio and reputation.

Blogging can give you a steady supply of articles to show prospective employers or clients on topics they care about. Also, it drives traffic to your website (if you have a firm website separate from your blog) and can help you rise in search engine ranking. Finally, you can expand your reach by syndicating your blog through a service such as [JD Supra](#), which distributes and promotes legal articles (including re-purposed blog posts) and makes them available in searchable archives. This service can result in much greater readership of your work than possible through your blog alone. Establishing a profile and syndicating through JD Supra costs money (I have a “Premium Plus” subscription for \$75/month), but I’ve found it’s worth it.

4. Don't just broadcast. Follow and engage.

Don't come across as someone who's on social media just to broadcast his or her own services. Too many attorneys make an echo chamber of Twitter or LinkedIn Groups with shout-outs about the great things they've done and written, and automatic retweets of links they probably haven't even looked at (retweeted because they want to develop a virtual quid pro quo of getting others to retweet their links). The better way is to subscribe to others' blogs, "like" their Facebook pages, join their Google Plus circles and follow their Twitter streams with genuine curiosity.

Try to carve out at least a half hour or so daily to actually read and think about this stuff. It can be a time suck, so watch the clock, but do devote some time to really review what others are posting. Then, engage by posting comments on blogs, posing questions you care about, and writing pithy updates that show you're an intelligent person with a genuine interest and expertise in your niche.

5. Don't overlook the power of face-to-face and other "old-fashioned" practices.

In my mind, face-to-face networking always trumps social media. Go to roundtable discussions, bar association mixers, alumni gatherings and other events where you can network in person. Even if you're unemployed, have business cards made with your name, twitter ID, LinkedIn profile URL and your blog URL if you have one. If someone makes time to meet with you, send a thank you via email—or, if it feels right, send an old-fashioned handwritten note via snail mail, which can really impress.

But don't phone someone out of the blue, the way I used to cold-call firms after graduation, to see if they're hiring or "just to chat." Phone calls these days often are considered intrusive, unless the person calling is a potential client.

The PowerPoint slides embedded [here](#) cover the points described above.

Still confused about social media etiquette? Then maybe the humorous tutorial that I found on [YouTube](#) can help.

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