

Blogging Levels the Playing Field

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By Adrian Dayton



Late in September, in what can only be described as a David-vs.-Goliath battle, the New England Patriots came to Buffalo, N.Y., with all the swagger in the world. They had beaten the Buffalo Bills 15 times in row, boasted the leading offense in the NFL and showed up ready to extend the winning streak to 16.

Then the unthinkable happened. The Patriots lost the game on a last-second field goal. What happened?

In football, they have an expression: "On any given Sunday, anything can happen." Which means that the team that should win can lose. Is this true in the legal industry? Is there a chance for small firms to compete with Big Law?

Social media and blogging are helping the smaller firms to do just that. This is due in part to "information democracy," Dion Algeri of Great Jakes Marketing Co. explained recently during a conference in New York City organized by Hildebrandt Baker Robbins. Online, the content you create — whether blog posts, newsletters or alerts — speak for themselves. Good information is passed along, while poorly written and unhelpful information is ignored.

"Social media is a great equalizer for smaller firms," said Jasmine Decarie, director of marketing and business development at Foley Hoag. This is partly due to search engines like Google, which rank the most helpful and most popular content first. They could not care less whether your firm has an office in New York or Washington.

Two of the most powerful stories that came out of the session were, fittingly, from lawyers at small firms — one a litigator and the other a criminal defense lawyer. Both had experience in AmLaw 200 firms, but now are partners in their own firms. Both have generated well more than \$1 million in business from their blogs and are consistently winning business that normally would go to much larger firms.

Why have they been so successful? They each found a niche and they have aggressively blogged about the issues relative to that niche.

One of them shared a story about an e-mail he received from a Russian company that wanted to engage his firm for U.S. litigation. He initially discounted the e-mail as spam,

but sent a short reply requesting a retainer, and it turned into a major piece of business. The Russian company found his blog through a Google search.

Other attorneys shared stories about the success they have enjoyed by using LinkedIn in a strategic way. One example was Chris Colvin, a partner at Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel in New York who started a LinkedIn group called "Ivylife," allowing graduates of Ivy League colleges to network online. This grew organically, and now has more than 50,000 registered members and holds monthly networking events in New York and in dozens of cities worldwide. Members now have a [password-protected community](#), and the group continues to grow. Colvin's online exercise has turned into profitable connections offline and a thriving networking organization.

The other success story was that of Ram Sunkara, an associate at Sutherland Asbill & Brennan, who works his LinkedIn connections like an old-school salesman used to work his Rolodex. He exports his LinkedIn contacts to an Excel spreadsheet, prints it out and spends a few hours in the evenings working on building those relationships. As a result, Sunkara has brought in well more than six-figures in business from his LinkedIn connections alone. (Note: Sunkara couldn't attend the conference, but his story was shared there by Amy Knapp of [Knapp Marketing](#)).

Your firm may never have a New York City address and you may never be a part of Big Law, but by creating great content and using social media to connect the dots, any firm can win business that it might never have aspired to in the past. The world is changing, and now even the big boys are vulnerable. Just ask the New England Patriots.

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Adrian Dayton is a speaker, facilitator and author of the book, *Social Media for Lawyers: Twitter Edition*. His latest book, co-authored by Amy Knapp, is *Social Media for Lawyers: LinkedIn & Blog Edition*, tentatively scheduled for release in September. To be the first to hear about the official release date, sign up at <http://adriandayton.com>.