

Distributing Content Online: Channels for Lawyers and Legal Professionals

By Adrian Lurssen

Looking to distribute your content online? Good, you should be: content is king. And in this Information Age you have the ability to participate in many meaningful ways.

“Content is king.” This rallying cry has defined the Web since its earliest days. (I heard it often in 1996 in the halls of Yahoo!, back when I worked for the “startup” helping to build its popular directory of web sites.) But today the phrase has even more resonance for anyone seeking to market their services online.

Fact is, we live in a time of information saturation. We are so bombarded daily by marketing messages that our default is to filter all of it out. The challenge: how to be noticed in this loud and extraordinarily crowded landscape? The answer: provide useful information to the people who are looking for it *when* they are looking for it (including colleagues, the media, prospective clients).

In the Information Age, truly substantive content indeed is king. It gives people what they want (answers! knowledge!), when they want it. Content helps to create connections, build trust, gain the kind of attention that allows you eventually to market your service to an otherwise preoccupied or overwhelmed audience.

What does this mean to you? A lot, actually. Lawyers and legal professionals are prolific generators of top-quality information. You create it daily, in the form of written work: court filings, briefs, articles, newsletters, legal alerts, and so on. If you’re not distributing your daily written work online already, you should start now. Read on to learn how.

First, Get Your Work Indexed by the Search Engines

In 2009, the way we find what we are looking for online is no longer defined by Yahoo!’s searchable directory of web sites. We know this already: Google owns the day. And if you consider how “search” has changed in the last decade you begin to see Google as one of the Web’s most effective distribution channels for your work, document by document.

Today the search engines (led by Google) scan and index every page you provide to them and – based on sophisticated algorithms – list those pages/documents based on their relevancy. For example, if you are a trusts and estates attorney, you’re no longer simply vying for a spot on an online list of other trusts and estates attorneys. Now, the fact that you have posted a sample trust online, or an estate-planning checklist, or alert describing implications of new legislation related to inheritance taxes – all of this makes you so much more findable. (And, again, so much more useful from the start.)

Meaning, in basic terms: the more documents you place online, the wider the net you cast. Google loves information, so post early and post often. The more you provide, the more you stand to be found. It really is that simple. (We’ve seen this first-hand at JD

Supra. Contributors who share lots of documents generate much more search engine traffic to their profiles as a result.)

Regardless of where you post your work (more on this below) any online distribution plan should start here. Make sure that what you place online is available to the search engines, and provide lots of it, as much as you can muster. Google and the other engines (including Yahoo! Search) really are some of the largest online distribution channels available to you.

Other Online Distribution Channels

What else? How to market your service today by distributing worthwhile information to targeted audiences online? Consider any or all of the following.

- **Send Email Newsletters:** Last August, a Pew Internet Project report showed that email remains a killer app. On a typical day, 60% of Internet users access email (compared to 49% of Internet users, who search on a typical day). If you are writing regular newsletters and/or alerts for clients, consider sending them out to an even wider audience by email. Either manage your own delivery mechanism (which is easier than it sounds) using a service like Campaign Monitor (www.campaignmonitor.com) or AWeber (www.aweber.com). Or, participate on a site that already distributes work to your target audience. If you pursue the former (your own email program) be sure only to send your work to those people who've opted to receive it. Nothing brings an end to effective online marketing quite like spam!
- **Start a Blog:** The legal profession truly is a daily relationship with language and writing. This puts you ahead of the game in an age when the online landscape is starved for meaningful content. If you have the time for it, start a blog. Update it regularly with content that showcases your expertise. The best blogs are driven by well-considered editorial schedules. Plan to write content that first and foremost considers the audience (your potential referrals and clients): provide tips and advice, thought pieces, news updates, legal analysis, alerts – whatever it is that turns your blog into a must-read destination for anyone interested in your field of practice. Blogging benefits from two kinds of distribution: the search engines index posts; and every post is usually also available for “streaming” elsewhere through RSS (which stands for “Real Simple Syndication” and is exactly that: an extraordinarily simple way to syndicate content throughout the Web).
- **Share Your Documents:** Do whatever it takes to get your daily legal work online. In the relationship between *show* and *tell*, those legal documents collecting dust on your hard drive go a long way toward actually *showing* an audience what you are capable of, underscoring expertise and experience in your field of practice. (We've heard from attorneys whose clients have been thrilled that they had an opportunity to see filings and other examples of their work online before engaging their services. Makes a big difference.) And the beauty of it: you've already created the work; it's written. In some cases, the search engines also index these types of documents, and so the more you share, the better your positioning.

- You can either post your documents on your own website, or share them on a site like ours, JD Supra (www.jdsupra.com), which connects the work to a professional profile and also aggregates it in a widely visited repository of free legal information – or you can do both.
- **Connect the Dots with RSS and Widgets:** Beyond the power and depth of online search, another defining characteristic of the contemporary Web landscape is the extraordinary portability of so much of its content. Put in plain English: with little more than the click of a few buttons, it is possible to bring together and publish (on a blog, web site, intranet, or what you will) streams of content from different sources throughout the Internet. For example, your firm’s website might include a “widget” listing all of the court filings and alerts that you share online elsewhere, updating the list in real time, as you post new documents. Your blog can now “push” its content to any other place online that will take an RSS feed (including Facebook and LinkedIn). As you build out your online presence – start participating on sites like LinkedIn, JD Supra, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs – look for any opportunity that allows you to stream your content from one site to another, or to include your work in a branded stream that reaches a large audience. Connect the dots using your written work and you will be strengthening the net that you’ve cast online.
 - **Build a Presence on Facebook:** Recent numbers tell us that somewhere between 120 and 150 million people actively participate on Facebook. Reason alone for you to hang your shingle there. At the end of the day, Facebook is what you make of it – and, done right, you can certainly leverage the power of the site’s viral reach and distribution to create an effective presence for you and your firm. Connect to friends and colleagues using a Facebook profile. Promote your business or firm using a Facebook “page” (a relatively new feature, which does not exist behind a screen and is easily accessible to anyone. Some attorneys tell us that they like the Facebook page because it separates the professional from the personal.) Both profiles and business pages allow you to stream in your blog posts and documents using RSS and other applications (including one by JD Supra). The search engines also index Facebook pages.
 - **Use Social Bookmarking:** Finally, I suggest considering one of the easiest forms of online distribution: sharing your links with the world. If distributing blog posts and legal documents online is the equivalent of sharing a book with a friend, then social bookmarking is akin to recommending a magazine article to someone at a cocktail party. It’s simpler than it sounds: instead of privately bookmarking what you like on your browser, share the links that matter to you on a service like delicious (www.delicious.com), Digg (www.digg.com), or StumbleUpon (www.stumbleupon.com). One of the easiest ways to influence an audience: show them what influences you. And, as you build that audience, keep in mind that whatever you post online elsewhere can be bookmarked and shared on these services, too. Share it!

| Adrian Lurssen is Communications Director at JD Supra (www.jdsupra.com), a legal content and distribution service. He is happy to answer questions via email at

adrian@jdsupra.com, by phone at 415.306.6486, or on Twitter at
<http://www.twitter.com/jdtwitt>