

**By establishing a social media policy for your law firm now, you can avoid confusion and potential negative repercussions down the road.**

Many law firms have been reluctant to start using social media, and for good reason. While it can be a powerful medium, it also comes with a lot of legitimate concerns. But if you establish a comprehensive policy up front, you too can be reaping the rewards of jumping on the social media train.

Here are a few things to think about.

**Explain the purpose of social media and your firm's position on it.** While this may seem a bit obvious, it really isn't. Social media is not a pure sales medium. The beauty of it is it helps you reach out to your various audiences for a variety of purposes. Yes, it can be used to promote your firm and services, but you should also use it to help educate your audience, interact with them and create a community of like-minded followers. Ultimately, your presence is more about creating an image and an impression than outright sales. Make sure everyone is clear about how it works, and then talk about how your firm wants to use it.

**Decide who will own your firm's social media presence and how it will be managed.** Can anyone in your firm create a Twitter account and start tweeting about your firm's business? Should the marketing person at your firm manage it? Do you want to create accounts for the individual niches you serve and assign the partner in charge of that niche to manage that account? There are many ways this can be done, but you need to establish how your presence will be managed at the onset so there is no confusion down the road. If this is done right it will take a good bit of time, but it is well worth the investment.

**Educate your staff on the things they can—and can't—say on social media.** This should be unnecessary, but it's amazing how often people forget how far-reaching, and permanent, their comments can be. First, never say anything online that you wouldn't want your mother to read. Secondly, remember that you are representing the firm, so avoid saying anything that can be interpreted as inappropriate. That includes political comments, coarse language, and even comments that can be construed as advice. This can also apply to your employee's personal pages as well. While you have no real control over what they say or do online when on their own time, it may help to remind them that they should be careful.

**Respect copyrights and always reference the source of your posts.** Again, this should go without saying, but it's important enough to mention. Copyright laws exist for a reason, and just because you are online doesn't mean you can ignore them. But outside of that, there's a code of ethics for social media too. If you see a post you like and want to share, make sure you give the person who posted it originally credit. Not doing so is a quick way for you to get a reputation that you don't want, and people will point out when you are using unapproved content. And once that wave has started, it's hard to stop it.

*Sidenote: Many bloggers don't care if you repurpose their post. You have to check the **Creative Commons License** button that is usually located on the blog web site.*

**Bring value.** If you are going to join the social media universe, make sure you are adding a valuable new voice. Remember your community and post information that you think they will find interesting. Converse with your followers, and you'll soon create a real group of interested participants. If all you do is promote your services, you'll quickly be ostracized. Just think about it as a dinner party. If you are seated next to someone who is constantly talking about their job, how good they are, how many things they do for their company and who they work with, without learning a thing about you, you'll find an excuse to move. But if they talk about their job, then moved on to ask about yours, then you discuss about the latest headline, then comment on the wonderful food, etc., you will enjoy your evening. It's the same thing. Keep your content interesting and varied, and ALWAYS keep your audience in mind.

This is just scratching the surface, but it does give you a place to start. If it feels overwhelming, think about having an outside expert come in and help you through the process. It's so much easier to start out with a plan and policy in place than try to rein in the cats once they are out of the bag. Ultimately, social media has incredible benefits, ones your firm will really grow to appreciate. But make sure you are doing it right from the start.