

Peter Shankman's 4 Rules for Law Firms

By Amy Knapp



If you don't know who Peter Shankman is, I can still guarantee you that you want to see him make a presentation. He's the Robin Williams of business on the web – maintaining a frenetic, highly articulate verbal pace fueled by can after can of Diet Coke. The founder of [Help A Reporter Out \(HARO\)](#), Shankman is a renowned thought leader and entrepreneur in the web and social media space.

At [Hildebrandt's Social Media Conference](#) last month, Shankman entertained and educated 90 lawyers and legal marketers with his four rules of social engagement. I doubt he developed this presentation just for the legal profession, but he could have – it hit on many of the areas the legal profession is struggling to learn.

1. Transparency. Screwing up is a given on the world wide web. The question isn't 'if' – it's how big. And the answer is pretty simple: acknowledge and apologize. (Event Co-chair Jasmine Decarie mentioned the Nixon Peabody video of YouTube fame which perfectly illustrates this principle.) Social media can make unintended problems huge; transparency wins the day every single time (as in: that was a mistake – we'll do it better next time).

2. Relevance. Fifty years ago the average age of the nightly news viewer was 26; today the average age of the nightly news viewer is...dead. And no one venue has replaced the evening news. There is no one way to get your news now – everybody has their own favorite way of getting information. In order to deliver your message properly, you have to know how your audience likes to get theirs and there is only one way to do that: You have to ask them! Engage with your audience, ask them what they want and

how they want it, or they will go somewhere else. How often do law firms do that rather than firing of yet another verbose email alert? Which brings us to...

3. Brevity. The average attention span of an audience today is 2.7 seconds. We are asked for our attention 18,000 times a day. 140 characters is a text message or a tweet, and 98% of the world has received a text message. If you have only 140 characters to reach your audience, then you had better learn to write. Bad writing is killing America and bad writing will kill your firm. Bad writing is the root of bad marketing. All we have in a 2.7 second world is good writing. [Note that Shankman began by defining good writing as brevity.]

4. Be Top-of-Mind. On average, we only talk to 5% of the people in our network. Shankman recommends that we all go onto our networks (Facebook or LinkedIn, or whatever) and look for the people we haven't spoken to in six months. Either write on their wall or unfriend them. Because being top-of-mind is not about numbers. It's about engagement. Social media has given us the great power of self-promotion under the guise of helping. Put it to work!

Peter Shankman can be found on Twitter @petershankman, on his blog at Shankman.com and through his social media consultancy The Geek Factory.

About the Author

Amy is a legal marketing consultant and business development coach with an avid interest in social media and it's uses for professional services firms. Amy is a frequent speaker, trainer and retreat leader on business development and social media topics for law firms and related professional organizations. Contact her at amy@knappmarketing.net, visit her website at www.knappmarketing.com or her blog www.notknapping.com.

