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Paula Black has advised law firms around the globe on everything from powerful and innovative design to marketing strategy and business growth. She is an award-winning Amazon-bestselling author and the force behind **In Black & White** (inblackandwhiteblog.com), a blog dedicated to clear, straightforward advice and open discussion of legal marketing issues. For more information on Paula Black, her books and her company please visit paulablacklegalmarketing.com.

Blogging: The First Step Is Creating A Strategy

In the past year I've seen an incredible interest from my clients in the area of blogging. Even my most internet-skeptical attorneys are venturing into this new arena (well, new to them!) and exploring the possibilities that come from expanding their brand online through a blog. It can increase your credibility and visibility. So what makes a great blog? One word: strategy.

As I often tell clients, everything you put out into the world should have your distinct stamp... your brand. From design to content, that includes your blog. Prior to jumping in head first, I always advise clients to stop and understand the strategy behind the journey they are about to embark on. If you don't have a plan, your blog becomes lost and you lose focus. Do your research. Look at what's out in the blogosphere, what's NOT out in the blogosphere and where you fit in with your expertise, your background and your target market. What do potential clients and referrals want to read about? How will you be able to engage them in conversation, so to speak. What should it be called? How often will you post and will your posts have a set format? Will you write them or hire a ghostwriter? These are the questions (and more!) you need to answer before you get started. Here are a few major points to consider when it comes to your blog...

1. **The Topic.** Finding your niche when it comes to blogging is an important part of the process. Randomly commenting on events or ideas won't cut it in this day and age...you have to have something that sets you apart and distinguishes your blog from the other million or so out there. So how do you know what to blog about? Use

your expertise, your personal brand and your target market to begin with. You want readers to get an instant sense of who you are, what you do and what makes you stand out. Once you have that straight, move on to your target audience. A copywriter that I work with says she often pictures writing to a specific person... do the same with your blog. Who are you writing to? Other lawyers? Potential clients? A specialized industry? It will help you become clear on what your blog needs to cover and how you can position your voice and your advice in the best light.

Finally, think about theme. Find a way to differentiate your blog from others out there that are similar. Mine places it's focus on simple, straightforward legal marketing and business development advice that can be applied to everyday life and is formatted in a very specific pattern (question, poll, answer and discussion). Are you passionate about a certain topic within the law? Have special insight into city-specific rulings or legislation? Does your legal knowledge translate well into a long-term newsworthy topic (local real estate? Celebrity divorces? Travel issues?)? Turn it into a blog. Just be sure to choose something that interests both you and your target audience and do it in a voice that stays true to your personal brand.

2. The Time Commitment. The first question out of most of my client's mouths when I suggest a blog is the following: How much time will it take? The answer is simple. As much as you want it to. There are many ways to think about time when it comes to blogging but the most important thing to recognize is how much of it you want to devote. It may sound harsh, but if you're not willing to dedicate your time and your focus you may as well not embark on the journey. While once or twice a month is respectable, to truly reap results from the blog you should plan on posting at least once a week. It will help you build a following and get readers on board to follow you and keep up with your posts.

3. The Design. Though most blogging platforms offer up templates of how a blog should look, it's up to you to impress your personal brand on the page. The true test: Can someone easily identify the blog as YOURS upon first glance? That doesn't mean intricate design or bells and whistles graphics, it simply means bringing a sense of organization to the visuals and reflecting your brand in the color, fonts and logos used. My biggest pet peeve in blog design is the lack of originality. It takes only a few extra minutes to incorporate your logo or signature colors into the banners and headlines (same with your Twitter page—if you have one) to set yourself apart from the competition. A

few other suggestions? Make sure your logo or tagline plays a prominent role as soon as the page appears; Stick with the same colors and fonts as your website, brochure or business cards; Be organized in the way you think out placement of buttons like “search” or “archives” and make sure they are easily spotted; Use photo and video to enhance your posts; and make sure headlines look like headlines and not simply blocks of copy.

4. **The Content.** While the direction and voice of the blog should come from you (and your personal brand!) there’s no harm in bringing in help. A few of my clients have recently begun working with ghostwriters. Though you must still dedicate your time to overseeing the content, these professionals can help shape your words and post on a regular basis. My advice if you’re planning to go this route? Stick with someone in the legal arena, whether it be a lawyer, former lawyer, paralegal or law student; find someone you connect with—even though it’s someone else writing it should still reflect your tone and your opinion, and all content should be directed by you; and be clear on the arrangement from the beginning by setting a schedule for how many posts you expect per week or per month.

You might consider guest bloggers. They add variety and can help increase your frequency as well as contribute their own unique point of view and credibility.

Once you’ve established a plan for all of the aspects above, it’s simply a matter of time, focus and dedication. Think of the blog as a true extension of your business development and give it the thought and respect you would anything else. Think through your posts (make sure they stay on target!), keep your personal branding front and center, and most importantly...have fun with it. Engage, enlighten and encourage connections and you’ll reap the results. **And the bottom line? YES... you can develop business with a strong blog.**

