

Back to Basics: Twitter Tunnel Syndrome and Blogging Your Way Out of Business

Sweating the fact that you don't yet have a blog? Or the fact that you do, but your readership is, ah, not quite what you envisioned? Take a deep breath. That blog of your dreams – or, perhaps, more accurately, your nightmares – is not likely going to change your life. And certainly, its ability to give your career a significant boost remains limited.

For better and worse, lawyers and their marketing teams are adjusting to the new digital age by incorporating social media platforms, blogs and online networking tools to help them stay in touch with colleagues and develop and maintain relationships with peers and potential clients. Two recent articles in this column made good points about how lawyers can take advantage of these "new" resources, but it's important to realize that while law firms and news outlets are certainly evolving, media relations, business development and client retention are rooted in one common, unchanged denominator: traditional relationship building. The times have changed, but the fundamentals of business development have not. At the end of the day, it's all about bringing in new clients and keeping the ones already under your wing happy.

Think about it this way: One ambitious tech-savvy attorney is sitting at his desk trying to show how on top of his game he is in 140 characters or less, while simultaneously repurposing an article he read during his commute for his new blog. Another – his competition for that next big piece of business – is next door at Peet's Coffee sipping a latte across from the GC she gave her card to at a networking event the previous week. The fact may be that he has something interesting – even impressive – to say. But when it comes down to it, he's typing and she's selling.

For anyone charged with bringing in and maintaining their own book of business (read: all attorneys post-Great Recession), no amount of online spouting or social networking will secure or maintain your business if it's not supported with a foundation of old-fashioned, face-to-face interaction with the right people at the right time with the right messages. So don't be a victim of Twitter Tunnel Syndrome. And certainly don't start – or continue – blogging your way out of business.

A 2009 [Harvard Business Review study](#) found that despite the rise of technologies designed to make communication easier and more efficient, executives surveyed indicated that face-to-face interactions remain a crucial element of building successful long-term relationships. Ninety-five percent said face-to-face meetings are key to success in building relationships; 87% said they help "seal a deal"; and 79% said they are highly effective to meeting new clients. So get out there.

This holds especially true in my world – law firm media relations – though every day it seems as if we move farther away from the tried-and-true traditions of old, i.e. *meeting* people. The very technologies that are allegedly bringing us closer to each other seem to have, in fact, driven a wedge between lawyers, clients, the media and the PR teams that connect the three parties. Though a lawyer's virtual self is indeed important in our new age of digital marketing, there is no substitute for building a relationship with a reporter or potential new client through a handshake and meeting on a more personal, digital-free level.

A couple things to keep in mind:

- Finding a good lawyer is not like finding a new sushi restaurant or the perfect weekend getaway – people don't often get trusted referrals and product info from

Facebook and Twitter. That said, LinkedIn can be a valuable source of testimonials from happy clients that your entire network can see.

- Host events – take advantage of your firm’s marketing resources. Your ideas are much more valuable when presented by you in person rather than posted on a blog or Twitter feed.
- Send personal notes to clients, prospective clients and reporters along with targeted, useful bits of info, and don’t hesitate to ask for a meeting. Everybody likes to get out of the office no matter how busy they are.
- Show them you care enough to Google; demonstrate knowledge of a prospect’s industry, newspaper style or journalist’s beat and find ways to show that knowledge off.
- Follow them on Facebook or Twitter but don’t expect that to be the best platform for communicating with any degree of seriousness. Remember that businesses are not social; *people* are social and *people* hire lawyers.
- Set a goal of giving out a certain number of your business cards every week, get off your phone and stop eating lunch alone. (Scientists have determined that salads taste 74% better when eaten with another person. Okay, I made that stat up.)

No matter what, don’t:

- Think tweeting beats meeting.
- Overwhelm potential clients with *every* bit of writing you produce – moderation is key.
- Just use social media for the sake of having a presence – misplaced, uninteresting Tweets or blogs lacking frequent new posts (at least once a week) can do more harm to your reputation than good.

This last point is a particularly salient one.

BlawgSearch, the preeminent directory of legal blogs, run by Justia, lists more than 5,000+ “blawgs” (that is, law-focused blogs). While no one, as far as I can tell, has culled statistics showing how many are regularly updated, a quick look at one popular category, IP Law, gives a good snapshot of the problem. Only about half of the 314 blogs listed have been updated in the last month. In the last week? A far smaller number. Now, how likely is a visitor to regularly return to a blog, no matter how good the insight being offered may be, if she’s continually confronted by the same old post? And how impressive is an attorney who starts a project she can’t keep up with? Dependability and consistency are key traits clients seek in their lawyers, and one that should be reflected in their use of social media as well.

Then there’s the matter of the actual content itself. I’ve had numerous top-flight clients launch blogs, all with the same good intentions, and the one who appears to reap the most reward from his blog dedicates about an hour a day to crafting valuable commentary regarding a timely topic. The firm markets the blog, and readers can subscribe to it via daily emails. Simply aggregating industry-specific content without value-added insight seems to only take attorneys and law firms so far. It’s the sharing of personal knowledge and experience that seems to hit home with readers—and reporters.

After months of faithfully slogging and blogging away, this particular attorney now receives calls directly from reporters who have come across his blog. (In fact, perhaps it’s a good thing more attorneys don’t make this kind of effort – I might soon be out of a job.) But the bottom line is that, unless you can devote the time it takes day in and day out to blog effectively, your best bet is to stay away from the blogosphere. Or, another alternative is to have a practice-wide blog to which different attorneys contribute throughout the week. Just

remember: consistency is key. Once you set up a blogging schedule, whether it's every day, every other day, or every Friday, you must stick to it or risk alienating your audience.

Taking advantage of new media, just as with traditional ways of expanding your network, requires patience, preparation, dedication, sincerity and time. It is by no means a shortcut to landing new business or a brighter reputation. And, just like some lawyers prefer some types of "real world" networking to others – golf games rather than bar association luncheons, say – some types of social media are not for everyone.

If you are thinking of dipping your toe in the social media waters – or are being pressured to do so by your firm – here's my advice: ring up a few local bloggers/Tweeters you respect and ask them to meet you in person to share some advice on getting off on the right foot. They'll feel flattered and validated, and you'll walk away with some useful information – and a good new contact. Now *that's* something worth Tweeting about.