

Law Blog Success Down Under

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Mallesons Stephen Jaques's

Natalie Hickey

I'm spending the next few weeks in Australia and New Zealand speaking to lawyers about social media, so I thought I would share an interview I had with Natalie Hickey, law blogger and partner at Mallesons Stephen Jaques — one of the "Big 6" firms in Australia and one of the 100 largest firms in the world, with almost 1,000 attorneys globally. Australia law firms are very conservative, especially the large ones, so I thought it would be interesting to find out how Ms. Hickey has been so successful in getting the firm's blog, the [IP Whiteboard](#), up and running.

AD: Why did you choose to start the IP Whiteboard?

NH: In the IP group, we realized that nobody was writing for journals anymore, and writing had gotten quite stale. In a 2-3 hour workshop we talked about client behavior, how time poor we are, and that nobody read journal articles. The pace of life is far too fast for journal articles to connect with clients.

This turned naturally to starting up a blog — so we decided to take 12 months to strategize and decide what we wanted to do with our blog. We were effectively in a start-up phase.

First question we asked: How do we be authentic and be part of this social network and true to Mallesons and respectful of our client base? We took the approach of giving it a go — but started it in house, deciding if this was worthwhile endeavor.

AD: What were the biggest challenges in getting the blog going?

NH: Our firm is very conservative, so at first [all new posts] had to go through layers of approval. Now I just have to approve it all, but it doesn't take much. Author always gets credit, headlines are always punchy. Management was skeptical, especially that the blog might offend clients — but after 18 months, we haven't had a single complaint.

AD: Has the blog paid off?

NH: Development of relationships has been the most important takeaway — with clients in particular. We try to make sure that some of it is amusing, some of it is thought-provoking. We are open to comments on our blog, but we don't receive many — but that doesn't mean people aren't interacting. We get a lot of feedback through e-mail, and phone calls. On a Friday afternoon we will get a call from a client saying "we love to read your blog."

We've also seen mainstream media inquiries as a result of the blog; we have a number of journalists that follow it.

AD: Has the blog been worth the time and effort?

NH: It's only just beginning. Here is a short story to show why I think it is worth it. We have seasonal clerks that come through the office, law grads that might join in the future (comparable to summer associates in the United States). I have found it so rewarding to have them come up to me and say, "I hear you are the editor of IP Whiteboard" — this makes me feel great because these guys are reading the blog on law school campus.

In addition, as an international firm, many of our lawyers are spread over many offices; the blog helps us work together interoffice.

AD: This first blog seems to be somewhat of a pilot at Mallesons and certainly stands out as a rare example of a large Australian law firm that blogs. Do you expect more blogs to follow at your firm?

NH: I don't know. I think what is interesting to see is how different people are trying different things [in marketing their practices]. Some are using Twitter, others with different ways of sending out client alerts. The language is becoming less formal. The social network is allowing people to be more individual.

IP lends itself to law blogs because reasonable minds differ all the time. There is always room to debate matters of impression. Not like regulatory work, where things are much more black and white. There is much more to chew over in the IP world.

CONCLUSION

Law blogs have primarily been a U.S. phenomenon over the past few years. Many of the largest global firms don't have a single blog yet. Pioneers in big law blogging, like Mallesons, are taking a chance by getting out there and blogging — but they also have the most to gain. In the next couple of years, when many more IP blogs emerge, Mallesons will already have established itself as a leader in this area. I've spoken in multiple articles about the hesitance of big law firms to engage clients and prospects through blogging and social media — and the case study being put together by

Mallesons shows that the Internet is not as cold and scary as many running the big firms believe.

Adrian Dayton is an attorney and consultant who helps attorneys and practice groups tap into the power of social media to build high-value relationships. You can see what his client alerts are like and get a free chapter of his book, Social Media for Lawyers: Twitter Edition, at <http://adriandayton.com>.