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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.

Legal Marketing: Social Media Strategies You Can't Ignore

Social media, at this point, is hardly a new concept in law firms. People have been debating its merits for a few years now and more and more firms are getting into the game with Twitter and LinkedIn accounts, a Facebook presence and a JD Supra page. But for the still-averse among firm leaders, what's the absolute last word? In my opinion it's this: Get in the game! While you don't have to jump in the deep end immediately, not participating in social media can only serve to hurt your firm. It keeps you connected to clients, colleagues and referral sources and allows potential clients to gain information other than simply what's on your website. That being said, there are some basics to remember when joining the online community. Here are few...

- 1. Do your homework.** There's obviously a lot of advice and opinion when it comes to social media, especially for lawyers. That's why it's imperative to do your own research. Look around different sites, speak with friends and colleagues and start to understand where and how you want your online presence to represent you and your work.
- 2. Have a plan.** Once you've done your investigation stop and think what you want to get back from these sites. Is it referrals? New clients? Visibility? You must also figure out who you're speaking to. The way you present your information and what you choose to share will differ based on whether you're speaking to other lawyers, clients in a specific industry, etc... Once you've set some goals and have a strategy in place you'll be better able to navigate the world of social media by understanding who you want to connect with, what you want to say and how you want to do that.

3. Start Small. If you're uncomfortable with social media start with something simple. Your best bet? LinkedIn.

Because it focuses more on the business side of your life, it's easy to set up and relatively non-invasive when it comes to personal information. It will allow you to reconnect with friends and colleagues and put you top-of-mind for referrals. It will also allow you to join industry-specific groups where you can share information with colleagues from around the country. Another great industry-specific site is JDSupra.com, who works closely with LinkedIn to create content related to law firms and attorneys.

4. Remember that it's always business. Social media can be dangerous because it makes the sharing of information that much simpler. But it also makes the viewing of information that much simpler. Though most attorneys are extremely careful about what they share online, it's always good to remember that once information is out there it's hard to erase it. Whether it's an article, white paper or just a simple Tweet, everything that goes on the web is a reflection on your business and your firm. It's called social media but it's really all business.

5. Keep it up. There's no point in setting up a social media account if you're not going to use it. Carve out time once a week (or even bi-monthly) to check in, update, add new contacts or join a new group. If you've written an interesting article, post it; if you read an interesting blog post, share it; and if you meet a new referral source, add them to your network. Just do something.

As social media continues to grow and expand, it becomes more and more important for marketing-savvy law firms to join the movement. As I mentioned above, you don't have to turn your business development plan upside down, just dipping your toes in the social media waters can reap powerful benefits in the form of visibility, connections, referrals and recognition.