

The art of blawging

Blogs have proved to be hugely successful in the consumer world and are rapidly gaining gravitas in the corporate sector. When planned and implemented with careful consideration, a blog can be a powerful addition to your marketing toolkit. **BY LARRY BODINE**

IN APRIL 2004, Chicago-based lawyer Dennis Crouch decided to start a professional weblog – more commonly referred to as a ‘blog’ or, in its legal guise, a ‘blawg’. This niche destination, which he called the ‘Patently-O’ patent-law blog (<http://patentlaw.typepad.com>), featured patent cases, claim-drafting tips and book reviews. It was initially aimed at an extremely narrow audience of lawyers.

Fast forward to 2006 and the same blog now receives around 30,000 visits each week, and has attracted a significant amount of new clients and business.

By definition, a blog is a website. A firm can have both and they will complement and send traffic to each other. The difference is that a blog has a concentrated scope – it covers a single aspect of law and new content is ordered chronologically, with the most recent item at the top of the list. Blogs also have a ‘personal voice’ and typically reflect the analysis, insight and opinion of the writer, although professional blogs discuss a substantive topic and do not include personal material.

Reasons to start blawging

Law-firm marketing departments can benefit greatly from the introduction of a blog, which, alongside their other campaigns and business-development processes, can be a cost-effective and valuable marketing tool. They are also easy to set up and use and you do not need to know HTML code.

Cost effectiveness

The cost of starting and maintaining a blog is usually much cheaper than hiring a developer to create a website for you.

High visibility

Blogs tend to attract visitors quickly because they are predominantly text-orientated and are updated on a regular basis, so search engines tend to place them towards the top of search results rankings.

Multiple contributor capability

Blogging software programs allow multiple authors to update content, meaning, for example, that a law firm can launch a practice-group blog and enlist numerous authors to share the writing duties, ensuring that the content is always up to date, accurate and engaging.

Content flexibility

A blog can be about anything – there are no set rules. A law-firm blog can be used to convey viewpoints and news, as well as for marketing announcements, client newsletters, legal updates and answers to common client questions.

A good blog can instantly give the author credibility. Journalists often read and subscribe to blogs in their everyday research, so a well-informed and maintained blog could result in more press coverage for the law firm.

The blawging megatrend

The ‘blogosphere’ – all blogs combined – started in March 2003 and has doubled in size every three months. According to Technorati.com, there are over one-million postings every day, which equates to around 33,000 per hour.

With at least 1,240 law-related websites across 205 legal categories, the effect of a well-planned and effectively maintained blog on a law firm’s marketing programme can be immense.

Tips for effective blogging

There are countless abandoned blogs, which have ended up redundant because the author bungled the job. I recommend the following to law firms that are looking to invest time and resources in starting one for marketing purposes:

- Use your firm’s existing branding so that the blog has the same look and feel of your website. This may require hiring a professional blog developer;
- Make it interesting and readable. Post about relevant daily news, a new opinion or regulation, an emerging trend or a contrary viewpoint – as well as making marketing announcements. Make it fun to read and convey practical information;
- Come up with a catchy title and make sure it includes your firm’s name;
- Promote the blog as much as you can. Send a print or e-mail campaign to all your clients announcing the blog and place a link on your website home page;
- Turn on the ‘commenting’ feature. This allows clients to offer feedback on your posts, creating an interactive and engaging environment;
- Post at least twice a week. A blog is supposed to be actively involved in its topic and as up to date as possible;
- Keep it concise. The ideal blog post is three paragraphs long – it makes the point, states an opinion and offers a link for more information;
- Keep the web address you start with. When you move a blog, you can lose readers who’ve bookmarked or subscribed using the original URL. Accordingly, think through carefully what you want the blog address to be.