

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

Social Media is Here to Stay - An LMA 2012 Recap Part I

Posted on April 2, 2012 by Lindsay Griffiths

You may have guessed that I have a certain fondness for social media. I've touted its benefits here before, so it should come as no surprise that I headed straight for the social media session while I was at the [LMA Annual Conference](#) in Dallas a couple of weeks ago.

Before I get into the nitty gritty of the presentation from the panelists and my thoughts, I'll share what the CMO of Nixon Peabody said during the session – *"The most significant thing a marketing department can do in 2012 is to develop a social media strategy."*



These are bold words from an industry that was still wondering whether social media had staying power only last year. And I couldn't agree more. Although, I would go a step further than that and say that rather than creating a separate strategy, social media should instead be used to enhance and drive existing strategies and projects. If the tweets coming from the other breakout sessions were any indication, all of them were mentioning social media in conjunction with their topics – the possibilities for using it for law firms are exciting and valuable.

We kicked off the session with a few words from the panel's moderator, [Larry Bodine](#), Editor in Chief of Lawyers.com at LexisNexis, who opened with a few statistics. If people are STILL wondering whether social media is really that popular, these statistics went a long way in showing that it is. Larry said that 845 million people are using Facebook, and 75% of Americans use social media in some form to guide their purchases.

Larry also delved into the results of a recent LexisNexis survey, which found that 81% of respondents are already using social media – it's no longer cutting edge, but is now mainstream.

LexisNexis also asked how important respondents considered social media to be, and 81% said very or somewhat important. They also identified LinkedIn and blogging as their favorite tools (no surprise there!). LexisNexis looked at some of the results using the size of firms as a filter, finding that smaller firms (of 1-5 attorneys) are using social media at a greater rate (91%).

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Most law firms have a social media profile, but only 19% of them are updated. However, when looking again at the data by small firms, 58.8% have updated profiles. Again, this is not surprising as smaller firms are able to be more nimble in a changing environment, and are seeking to level the playing field with larger firms, which is helped through social media.

Following this introduction, we had [Camille Stell](#), the Director of Client Services for Lawyers Mutual Liability Insurance Co of North Carolina. Her first piece of advice to the audience was to “hire a social media intern.”

I took issue with this publicly on Twitter, because I feel that it’s the wrong advice – in the last few years, we’ve seen the misconception that because someone is young, they understand social media. This may be true, but that person doesn’t necessarily understand social media for professional use – just recall all of those stories you’ve heard about college kids’ drunken party photos preventing them from getting their dream job, or their complaining status updates resulting in a withdrawal of a job offer.

I spoke with [Jon Holden](#) of Bennett Jones LLP during the break following this session and voiced my comments, which he agreed with. He went further to say that at this juncture, it’s becoming far more important to have someone handling social media who is well educated in the culture of the firm, rather than someone who is well educated in the use of social media. The tools of social media can be taught much faster than firm culture.

Hiring an intern might be the right decision if the hiring process is done carefully to select the right candidate and make sure that that person is the one you want to be the voice of the firm (because make no mistake, that’s what they are). And since social media, by nature, is a two-way street, that person will also likely be handling client complaints, nasty anonymous messages, and even time-sensitive requests coming in from all fronts (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc). Is that intern the right person to be handling all of that? Will they be able to correctly communicate the firm’s culture?

These are important questions to ask.

Someone tweeted back to me that the intern for Lawyers Mutual had been extremely professional and worked out very well, and that Camille had been extremely careful in the hiring process, which was fortunate. But I just wanted to add those words of caution.

Next up on the panel, we had [Marcy Salo](#) of Cairncross & Hempelmann, P.S. She was speaking from an in-house perspective, and gave us a case study of how her firm was able to create a successful blog. The recipe?

- Managed by a team of attorneys,
- Uses guest posters, and
- They only post once a week

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(As an aside, posting once a week may sound infrequent, but [recent data](#) suggests that general counsel are only reading blogs weekly, so it's agreed among many marketers and attorneys that the quality of a blog post far trumps a greater quantity of them).

Marcy also suggested that firms work with both [LexBlog](#), who provide a turnkey law blog and social media solution for lawyers and attorneys looking to grow their practice through online marketing and [JD Supra](#), a repository of free legal information shared by the professionals who generate it.

What I was most interested to hear from her is how the firm measures their success – they do this by measuring growth in terms of subscriptions, specific inquiries, comments, requests for re-use of posts, and new clients.

Marcy talked about other tools as well, saying that LinkedIn is one of the easiest to sell because it's considered to be the most professional. She cautioned firms not to forget that they have a firm profile page on LinkedIn, as well as individual profile pages.

In terms of using Twitter, her firm mainly seems to use it as a tool to push out content and not to engage. I'm of two minds on this – I firmly believe that social media is (and should be) about engagement. It's a two way street, otherwise, why did we move past just publishing news items on our websites?

But in terms of a firm's account, I can see why primarily using it to push out content is useful. News organizations act similarly with their Twitter accounts, and people generally prefer to interact with individuals and not brands. If there are attorneys at the firm who tweet individually and engage and interact with their followers, then I have no problem with the firm using their account as a way to push out content and act as a news distribution source (as long as their tweets are spread out a bit and not pushed out all at once). But if a firm only has one Twitter account, and that's the brand account, then there does need to be more engagement to be useful.

In Marcy's case, they have a substantial number of journalists following their firm Twitter account, which tells me that they are putting out valuable information. They wouldn't even need a large number of followers, as long as those that they have are the right people to be connected with.

Marcy added that Twitter is also a very valuable tool for searching, which I wholeheartedly agree with – remember what James Kane said about using social media to learn more about people!

Tomorrow, we'll talk about the second part of the panel, as well as my recommendations for effective social media usage.