Technology in Marketing

Developing a Team-Authored Blog

By Joshua Fruchter

It's well-established that blogs are a great way for lawyers to promote their expertise, develop thought leadership, and create keyword-rich content for search engines. At the same time, publishing a blog can be time-consuming for an individual attorney when done right. That commitment often scares lawyers away from launching a new blog on a solo basis.

One solution: Publish a blog in collaboration with other attorneys in the same practice area. But managing a law firm blog with multiple attorney contributors can pose challenges. To maximize the likelihood of success with a multi-author blog, consider the following tactics recommended by MarketingSherpa (tailored to apply to the legal industry):

Step One: Define a Niche

"In niches there are riches" is a truism that applies to blogs.The more targeted a blog's focus, the easier it typically is to rank higher in Google search results for chosen keywords. The reason is simple: The competition is typically lower, often significantly so. Therefore, the first step is to define the blog's niche, for example, educating readers about new developments and trends in the field of Brownfields litigation. Or, as another example, real estate trends in Chicago.

Step Two: Develop Keyword Lists

Develop a list of your key target audiences in your niche — *e.g.*, developers, contractors, brokers, etc., in the Chicago real estate market — and then identify the different keywords and phrases used by each group to describe their legal needs. Alternatively, you might develop keyword lists associated with major sectors in a particular industry such as healthcare, industrial, residential, etc., properties in the real estate market in a city like Chicago.

Step Three: Create an Editorial Calendar

With keyword lists established, create a full-year editorial calendar to ensure that the blog's content will cover all phrases on the lists. The editorial calendar should assign a different market sector or audience to each week's post(s). For example, for a local real estate blog, one week would cover healthcare, the next would cover industrial, and so forth. Next, map out specific topics to cover within those sector categories. For example, if several posts on healthcare-related real estate in Chicago is planned for during the year, break down the subject into more granular topics, such as hospital contruction, medical practice leases, etc.

However, despite a calendar, remember to maintain the flexibility to swap out a scheduled blog post if there is a piece of breaking news that needs to be covered on a priority basis.

Step Four: Enlist Lawyers As Blog Authors

Dividing up blog posting responsibilities among multiple attorneys lessens the burden on any one person to provide posts each week, and creates a natural diversity in phrasing and word use (resulting in better search-optimized content). Just don't force lawyers to publish; instead seek volunteers. Then let those lawyers who volunteer review the editorial calendar and decide which topics they want to cover.

Step Five: Provide Writing Guidelines

Remind attorneys that the blog is a firm communication that requires a certain level of professionalism, but without losing the casaul touch that often makes blogs such appealing reads. Establish a target word length for each blog post (500 words is a good number). Lawyers may also need to be reminded not to create whitepaper-length articles, but rather to craft bite-sized chunks of useful legal information that demonstrates the firm's expertise.

Step Six: Set Generous Deadlines

Because attorneys chose their own topics, they know well in advance when blog posts are due. Still, formal deadlines help accommodate the editing process.

Step Seven: Use an Editor

Assign one lawyer the role of editor to review all posts for compliance with the guidelines and effective execution of the SEO strategy (*e.g.*, composing appropriate meta title and description tags). An editor might also be tasked with the role

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Joshua Fruchter, Esq., is a former attorney and is now principal of eLawMarketing, an Internet marketing agency.

Great Recession

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One of the most valuable lessons firms can learn from this recession is that the firm's overall health depends upon attorneys who are well-educated and disciplined in the nuances of the business development process and can deliver upon those principles with new matters. Firms that resist investing in their valuable assets — their time keepers — with results-driven business development skills training and coaching, do so at their own peril and, in all probability, ensure their prized present and future rainmakers will move to a firm which will.

Semantic Differences

It is useful to define the oft mistaken words "marketing," "business development" and "client development." According to Jayne Navarre of LawGravity LLC, "Marketing is about influencing and shaping opinions and attitudes. It sets the stage by providing exposure for services and products. In short, it is advertising, publicity, promotion and branding. Business development is about influencing and encouraging action. It connects consumers to services and products. Client development is the retention, expansion and growth of revenues derived from existing clients. Marketing sets the stage, provides exposure, but it takes business development and client development to win new engagements and grow revenue."

The Place to Network

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a blog into one's business development toolkit allows lawyers who are in the early stages of a learning curve to have equal opportunity as those who have long mastered the subject. In the end, those with clear, concise, authoritative and easy-to-read prose will outshine those who have little to say. In this way, the world of blog publishing is self-regulating.

OUTSOURCING

Some firms outsource blog content to expert writers from outside the firm or from within, and the lawyer reviews the work before publication. While this can be an efficient way to generate regular content — which is by far the most challenging aspect of maintaining a blog — one critical element that is lost in such an approach is "voice." The most popular bloggers insert their own personalities into their writing, and it's as much the style as the content which attracts and retains readers. When a blog becomes a sterile conduit for corporate speak or legalease, then it may impart information but fail to attract a loyal following.

CONCLUSION

There are many marketing and business-development tactics competing for busy lawyers' time. There is a constant struggle to network to one's target market. Blogs have proven to be an effective tactic to establish subject matter expertise, and the Internet search engines which are designed to promote sites with frequently updated content can help reach a target audience on a scale that other networking tactics, and traditional publishing venues, may not. But publishing a blog requires discipline, a regular influx of new ideas, and desire. With these, plus a simple and easy-to-use blog publishing platform, any lawyer can achieve credibility and visibility with ease.

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who cover all of the categories. The following categories will be used to evaluate each firm:

Marketing/Business Development Strategy

The firm's formal plan (*i.e.*, needs assessment, overall firm plan, target industries, practice-area plans, proposal strategy for major engagements and new-business pipeline reports, cross-marketing, individual marketing plans); three examples of a success, including implementation and cost; whether or not a yearly budget is created and the criteria used in creating the plan with line-item examples; and examples of major new initiatives.

Business Development Staffing

How firms utilize the following structure for their business development planning: Practice group administration positions, business development analysts, client intelligence positions and profitability analysts.

Results

Measurable return-on-investment in specific efforts, how expenditures on specific strategies and tactics resulted in new clients, matters and/or additional profits.

Commitment

Marketing requirements for partners and associates, training programs, percentage of gross revenue as applied to marketing; participation of marketing partner on governing body of firm.

Advertising and Visual Communications

Approach, implementation and one example of a return on investment.

Technology

How technology intersects with marketing and business development including partnering with clients and prospective clients, *e.g.*, audio/video podcasts, blogs and social networking. This section also includes the revamping of Web sites to increase traffic to site.

Client Service Programs

Goal setting, client service teams, client surveys, co-branding with clients, co-producing events, etc. Metrics and ROI will also be taken into consideration.

Outreach

Community activities, pro bono and diversity programs that intertwine with client relations.programs.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS FRIDAY, SEPT. 24, 2010. Essays must be sent as a Word document via e-mail to Elizabeth Anne "Betiayn" Tursi, Editor-in-Chief, at elizabethtursi@aol.com. Any firm wishing to send accompanying collateral materials must make a request directly to me via e-mail. No entries will be accepted that are sent via mail or fax to Law Journal Newsletters. If you have any questions, please send them to me via e-mail.

The Top 50 Law Firms in the Areas of Marketing and Business Development will be announced in the November issue of *Marketing The Law Firm.*

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Elizabeth Anne "Betiayn" Tursi is Editor-in-Chief of this newsletter.

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of vetting posts before publishing to ensure they don't prejudice an existing firm client in any way. After appropriate review of any changes with post authors, the editor can approve posts for publication. Over time, the blogging team should try and document how long it takes to get a post from initial drafting to publication in order to identify any "bottlenecks" that might be slowing down the process.

STEP EIGHT: SHARE WITH CONTRIBUTING LAWYERS

Incentivize attorneys by providing them with a byline for all posts, notifying them of any comments requiring response, and providing recognition for popular posts in an internal firm e-mail newsletter.

CONCLUSION

In the end, getting a multi-attorney blog up and running, and successfully maintaining it, takes time and effort. But following the above step-by-step guidelines can help facilitate the process.

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