

# How Australian Law Firms See Social Media

How do Australians compare to Americans when it comes to social media use? I was asking myself this question as I rode the ferry into Sydney Harbour for the first time a couple weeks ago. As I gazed at the bridge and opera house in front of me, I asked Nick- who I had met on the walk down to the ferry, “when does the last ferry come back this evening?”

“Don’t you have the iPhone app?” He asked.

Commute into Sydney

Of course I didn’t have the app, I had just arrived in country and my iPhone was barely 72 hours old. Within a few moments I was able to download the app, “Next SYD Ferry” which I have used every day since then to make sure I never miss a ferry ride home. Apparently there is an app for that, and Australians are quite keen to this new technology.

I have noticed something else about Australians as I walk through the city or ride on the train. So many of them have iPhones, Blackberry’s or smartphones of some kind. Australians love their technology so much that, according to a recent study, they lead the globe in use of social media. You can read more details here, in Ross Dawson’s article, [“Australian’s are #1 Globally in Social Media Use.”](#) So if the Australian people are using social media, how about the lawyers? It may come as no surprise to you that Australian lawyers are not as linked in to social media as their non-solicitor counterparts. From interviews with many of the largest firms in Australia I have learned that outside of the marketing department, most attorneys aren’t using social media at all- except for purely personal reasons. This creates a great opportunity for those lawyers willing to jump in.

Lawyers that use social media for business development won’t be competing with many others for attention. Have you seen the percentage of the Yellow Pages that are taken up by lawyer advertisements? It is huge, even here in Australia. As a business with a finite advertising budget you can choose to advertise where all of your competitors are advertising- or do what Stephen Fairley calls contrarian marketing. “Find out what the crowd is doing and do the opposite.” There is a giant market out there, and the first movers will position themselves like the unusual company that started using the internet to sell books online.

So what is holding Australian law firms back? Well there are a few issues. Quite similar to the US market, directors of the major law firms in Australia want to control the message. In addition, Australia is fairly conservative from a legal marketing standpoint. They are early adopters of technology, but social media seems like a different creature all together. Is it marketing? Is it business development? Is it worth their time? Perhaps most importantly, whose job is it to handle social media within the firm? Major firms in Australia are putting a toe in the water by starting a firm Twitter page. Norton Rose (formerly Deacons in Australia), Blake Dawson, and even Baker & McKenzie are all trying Twitter out as an experiment- as a firm- but not yet as individual attorneys. A good start, but not quite on target until they involve the actual attorneys and practice groups.



View from Baker & McKenzie Office in AMP Building

The message I have been sharing with firms here in Australia this month is the same message I have been [sharing for the last year in the US](#). Social media is all about building relationships and creating conversations. Marketing folks can't build relationships for your lawyers. The lawyers themselves, or "solicitors" as they call them here, need to participate. They call it *social* media for a reason. I have had the pleasure of meeting so many outstanding lawyers and marketing and business development individuals while here in Australia. Such a friendly group of people. For Australians in the legal world, using social media effectively won't be a challenge- the challenge as always is to decide social media is worth your time, and dedicate the time to make it pay off. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there is not yet an iPhone app for that.

*Adrian Dayton is a New York attorney and author of the book [Social Media for Lawyers: Twitter Edition](#). He is spending the month of March 2010 in [Australia speaking about social media for lawyers](#). To come hear him speak you can see his full schedule of events at <http://adriandayton.com/speaking-events> or follow his experiences in real time on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/adriandayton>*