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Marketing Your Law Firm Using Social Media



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There are many ways to market your practice, but online marketing presents an excellent opportunity to expand your reach and get a lot of marketing ‘bang’ for your buck, especially when starting a new firm. In addition to your law firm website, developing a blog and a robust social media presence can reap many rewards.

1. What Can Lawyers Hope to Achieve Using Social Media?

There are many benefits and advantages to using social media as a networking tool for your practice. Social media takes word of mouth marketing and networking to the next level by allowing you to reach many people at once and expand your network beyond your usual geographic limitations. Used properly, social media can allow you to meet and get to know new people, engage them in conversation and develop relationships which can then extend offline into the “real world.”

Similarly, social media can be used as a tool to help extend your existing “real world” relationships. By connecting online with people you meet in person, you create more opportunities for interaction and follow-up.

Online social media tools can also help you to showcase your expertise by providing opportunities for you to demonstrate your knowledge in discussions, post articles, presentations, videos and other content online and reach your target audience with that content – all for free or very little cost.

The media loves to use social media as a resource. If you post regularly and if your posts generate engagement with others who like, re-post or comment on your content, you may attract media attention which can result in being used as a resource for a news story, quoted in an article, or interviewed for a local or even national audience. Your activity on social media and your status as a “go to” expert can also lead to speaking engagements, writing requests and other opportunities.

Introduction to the Major Social Media Platforms

Many social media platforms share basic ideas, but each has its own culture, language and norms. In general, social media platforms allow users to create profiles which provide information about them. Users then post information, photographs, videos or links onto their profile or platform to share with their audience. They can interact publicly or privately with others through these sites, or restrict posts so they can only be viewed by specified groups of people.

LinkedIn



Founded in 2003, [LinkedIn](#) is the “professional network” and the one many lawyers are most likely to be familiar with. Conversations typically revolve around business – rather than personal – issues. LinkedIn is a great tool for research and identifying companies or individuals within companies to connect with, finding news and information to share with your network and for establishing your expertise. LinkedIn users participate by sharing information through Updates, joining Groups and actively engaging in discussions or sending individual messages through the platform. They can invite others to connect or accept others’ invitations to connect. Connections are reciprocal – you cannot be connected to someone on LinkedIn unless they agree to be connected to you.

LinkedIn’s publisher platform allows users to create longer posts, establish their expertise and gain even more attention. These posts are shared directly with your Connections who receive notifications when you publish a new post, but they can also be seen by a wider audience on LinkedIn and beyond, giving you even more exposure.

Companies and law firms can create LinkedIn Company pages to be the face of the law firm (as opposed to the individual lawyers) on LinkedIn, with sub-pages, called Showcase Pages, for each practice area. LinkedIn users can follow these pages, even if they’re not individually connected to anyone at that firm. LinkedIn Company Pages can also target updates to specific groups of followers.

For more information on LinkedIn, see [LinkedIn in One Hour for Lawyers, Second Edition](#).

Facebook



Founded in 2004, [Facebook](#) is arguably the most popular social networking site, and is more like a social gathering than a professional networking destination. Facebook is all about connecting with people you know. It can be used effectively for business networking, especially if you create a Facebook Business Page for your practice, but generally lawyers are most comfortable using it for personal connections with family, friends, classmates and colleagues, with only occasional posts about their work, the clients they represent and the cases they handle.

Although Facebook users must also accept “Friend” requests, many users are more open about who they accept, and Facebook has a “follow” mechanism in which users can allow others to follow them on Facebook even if they aren’t Friends, so it is not a completely reciprocal platform.

If your practice targets consumers rather than businesses, Facebook can be especially useful. One lawyer who uses Facebook effectively for his practice is Jacob Sapochnick, whose [business page](#) has over 100,000 likes. As you can see, his Page isn't just about business or law; he knows how to engage his audience.

For more information on Facebook, see [Facebook in One Hour for Lawyers](#).

Twitter



[Twitter](#) is a real-time information sharing network which many use as a news feed or a place to quickly obtain information. Information in Twitter can be grouped into lists, or followed by conversation using hashtags (#). Tweets can 'go viral' very quickly on Twitter through the use of these hashtags and the culture of sharing or "re-tweeting." Posts on Twitter are limited to 140 characters in length. Tweets by and for business people often include links to articles or other information or links back to the firm's website or blog.

Other Platforms

There are many other social media platforms available for lawyers to participate in, including visual and photo-sharing sites like Pinterest and Instagram, but for most lawyers – at least at the beginning – it is recommended that you focus on the "big three" – LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, with the possible addition of Google Local/Google Plus/Google My Business (see below).

Google Plus/Google Local/Google My Business

[Google](#) has its own social media platform, Google+ (or Google Plus), which functions in many ways like other social networks do with contacts organized into "circles" rather than lists of friends or connections. Businesses that set up a profile with Google My Business also automatically create a Google+ business page, and your business information will appear in Google Search and on Google maps. Your firm's Google+ page can be another way to connect with your clients and potential clients.

According to recent news stories, the future of Google Plus may be in question and there may be some changes on the horizon with regard to its social platform, but it is still worth investigating Google+ and Google My Business for search purposes.

Blogging

A blog (short for web log) is a website that is comprised of 'posts,' usually organized chronologically or by category. Each 'post' is like a short article or commentary on a specific subject. While blogs are not generally considered "social media" *per se*, most blogs accept comments from readers, so they can be interactive. Many law firms set up blogs either within their law firm websites or as a stand-alone site using platforms such as WordPress as a way to provide information and commentary to clients, potential clients, referral sources and strategic alliances. Blogs can be an effective means to demonstrate your knowledge in your practice area, engage others and build trust. Blogs are also a good hub for the different spokes in your social media presence.

Getting Started with Social Media

Define Your Goals

The first step in getting started with social media marketing is to define your goals. Every marketing endeavor should begin with an exploration of purpose and goals. Why are you using social media? Do you want to gain exposure? Build your reputation? Interact with potential clients? Build your network of referral sources? Promote your services? Become known as an expert in your niche?

Defining your purpose can help you approach social media more strategically and participate in a way that advances your goals. It will help you focus when faced with a multitude of social media messages and platforms so you can not only decide what to do, but also what not to do.

Keep your purpose in mind when creating and sharing content and measure the success of your online endeavors on that basis.

Identify your Audience

Next, identify who you want to reach – who do you want to connect with? Who is your message for? For example, is your intended audience professionals, parents, hospital patients, entrepreneurs or construction workers? Do you want to connect with other lawyers or gain the attention of the media?

Once you know who you want to build relationships with, think about what their goals are, what is important to them, and how you would like them to respond to you. What step would you like them to take after reading a post on your social media platform? Perhaps you want them to download a whitepaper from your website, attend a presentation or call you for a consultation. The answers to these questions will help you to develop the next step – your content.

Develop Your Message and Content

One way to build relationships is to provide your audience with quality information about topics that engage and interest them. Identify the topics and keywords that will resonate with your audience and incorporate them into the content you post on your blog or on social media platforms.

Share information that demonstrates that you understand the challenges your intended audience faces daily. Post articles or tips to help them accomplish their goals. This information can be created by you or created by others and simply collected and shared by you on your social media pages.

At its most effective, social media is a networking tool, not a direct marketing channel, so don't be too promotional. Use the 80/20 rule; 80 percent of your posts should focus on providing value to your audience on topics of interest to them, and only 20 percent should be about you.

Keep in mind that each social network has its own culture and customs, the same way different groups in real life have different norms and conventions. What is perfectly appropriate on Facebook might not be quite as accepted on LinkedIn.

Participate Consistently

Although participation may be slightly different depending upon the platform you choose, when you participate on social media sites, essentially what you're doing is starting or joining a discussion. Consistency is key to engage with others and build relationships. Ideally, you'll post on social media platforms between 2 and 5 times per day. Your posts can be a mix of images, video, text only posts, such as posing questions to your audience, and links to articles or information of interest.

Interact with others: join their discussions, like and comment on their posts, share and promote their content; it's not only good social media etiquette, but it builds better relationships. It can also improve your visibility with limited effort on your part.

Monitor Your Activity

Use analytics to monitor your progress on social media. Google Analytics can help you determine whether your efforts on social media are helping to drive traffic to your blog or website; in-app analytics such as those provided by LinkedIn and Facebook can help you determine which posts are the most effective at driving engagement and what times your audience is likely to be online. Keep track of inquiries, consultations and calls and be sure to ask new clients or referral sources how they heard about your firm; while this information will never be 100% accurate, tracking it will give you a good idea about whether your efforts are paying off and where to direct your resources in the future.

4.

Ethics Issues in Social Media Use

There are some cautions to keep in mind when using social media to market your practice, including rules of professional practice/ethics as they relate to advertising, solicitation, and communication about the lawyer or law firm's services. These rules vary depending on your jurisdiction. That being said, here are some of the "hot button" ethics issues related to lawyers' use of social media.

• False or misleading information

Lawyers are prohibited from disseminating false or misleading information about themselves or their practices. This is the "golden rule" of lawyer advertising ethics. Make sure that the information you provide about yourself and your firm is complete enough not to mislead others. Beware of embellishment. Monitor what others are saying and doing on your behalf on social media.

• Disclaimers

Social media profiles that contain information about you as a lawyer and the legal services you provide, especially if used primarily for the purpose of obtaining business, may be considered advertising. If your advertising rules require disclaimers, you'll likely need to include them on your social media accounts and posts as well. The rules regarding blogs may be a bit murkier since some blogs, in some jurisdictions, may fall outside of the advertising rules, but you may wish to err on the side of caution.

- **Specialization/Expertise**

Many jurisdictions only allow the use of these terms, even when used as section headings that cannot be changed on a social media platform, under very limited circumstances – usually when you are certified as a specialist in a particular area of practice by an approved body. Read your rules very carefully.

- **Reviews/Recommendations/Endorsements**

Some social media sites allow others to post on your profile or timeline, or permit recommendations or endorsements by clients, colleagues and others. In most jurisdictions, if you have control over what others can see on your profile or timeline, even posts written by others must comply with the advertising and ethics rules. In other words, if you can't say something, you can't allow a third party to post it on your site either. Make sure you are monitoring all of your social media sites to ensure that you are in compliance.

- **Solicitation/Direct contact**

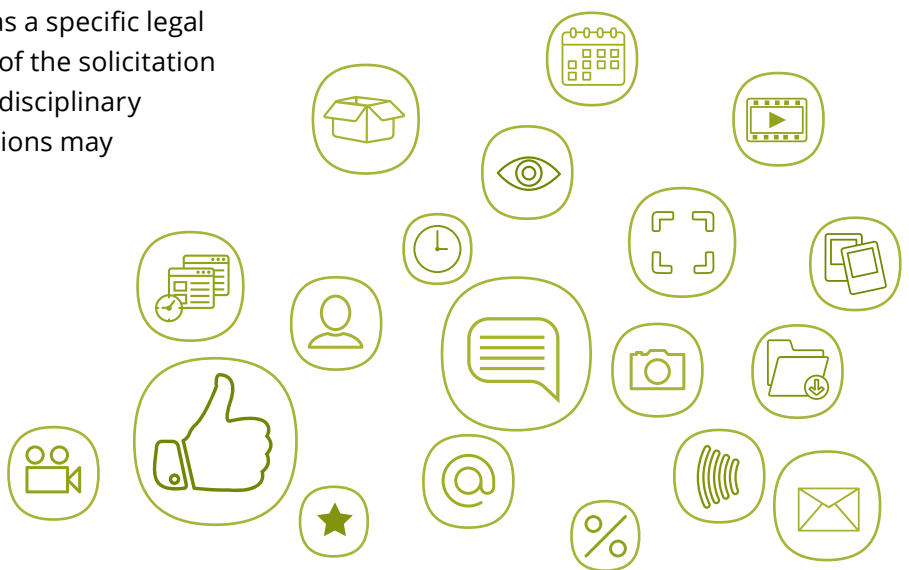
Most jurisdictions have special rules lawyers must follow when speaking with an individual or targeted group of individuals (rather than posting to the public), especially if you are aware that the person you are conversing with has a specific legal need. You may need to file a copy of the solicitation or message with your local bar or disciplinary committee, and additional restrictions may come into play.

- Confidentiality

Beware of revealing client confidences in online discussions. When asking questions in forums or posting on social media, be sure you're not inadvertently revealing a client's identity. Don't talk about specific cases without obtaining client's permission first and ensuring that your jurisdiction permits such discussions. Remember that your clients, adversaries and others may be lurking online and may see what you post.

- **Unauthorized practice of law and inadvertent attorney-client relationships**

When you participate on social media, be mindful that you may be speaking with others who are outside of your jurisdiction; be clear about where you are licensed to practice, be sure to advise that anyone who needs legal help should contact an attorney in their jurisdiction, and don't give specific legal advice online. Make sure you advise that online discussions do not constitute retention of you or your firm and that no attorney-client relationship is established by communicating with you through those platforms.



5. Tips for Successful Online Marketing

Now that you know why social media and blogging can be effective, what you may hope to achieve as a result of your participation and what to watch out for, here are some tips on how to use social media effectively.

• Follow and Listen

You must follow and connect with others online to listen to what they have to say and learn what is important to them. Make connections, join Groups, read the discussions, and invite others to contribute. Follow industry leaders, people with similar interests, and people who might be good clients or referral sources. See what they are talking about and what is important to them. Check your News Feeds regularly.

• Initiate conversation

If you want people to engage with you, you need to engage with them. They need to know you exist. Ensure that your online blogs, profiles and accounts are easy to find. Add links to your email signature and your website and cross-reference your social media profiles with one another. Name your profiles and accounts consistently. Send personal messages directly to individuals, like or share others' content, or mention them in your Updates (where appropriate) to get noticed. Say thank you when people follow you or accept an invitation to connect, and personalize your own invitations wherever possible. Write posts that include questions or calls to action to engage your audience. Look for opportunities to continue the conversation

• Target messages and updates

Don't send every update or post to everyone, or automatically cross-post everything to every network you join. Use Facebook Friend Lists, Google+ Circles, Twitter lists, LinkedIn Groups,

tagging capabilities and other tools to target your messages to the people or groups who will get the most value from (or who are likely to be the most interested in) what you have to say in a given post.

• Use visuals

Photos, cartoons, infographics and video are 'hot' on social media. Posts and updates that include some kind of visual content get more engagement than text-only messages. If you're posting a link to a website article or blog post, include an image in the article or post so that image will appear on in your social media post along with the link.

• Show a little personality

Each network is different, but there's always room for a little personality, whether it's a glimpse into your firm's culture, a feature on a specific employee or department, or even some more personal (but still publicly appropriate) postings about hobbies, interests, travel, or even family, depending on the platform, its culture and your connections on that site. People do business with people they know, like and trust. Let your online connections get to know you a little better by showing your human side while still maintaining your professionalism.

• Make your content shareable

Think about your own use of social media: what kinds of posts and updates do you like to re-share? What is it about those posts that make them attractive to you or that encourage you to share them? Take that information and use it to inform what you post. Think not just about law or business, but also about what interests and engages the people in your networks. The more shareable your content, the more widely distributed it will be and the more exposure and interaction you'll enjoy.

- **Consider hashtags**

[Hashtags](#) (#) are now supported on many of the social networks, including Google+, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram, in addition to Twitter. Not only will hashtags help people discover your posts and updates in searches, but they can add another dimension to the discussion. They can also help you to find people to follow or discover people discussing a particular issue.

6.

Bring Your Online Activities Offline

One final word of caution: while blogging and social media can be fun and effective tools to help you to market your practice, don't make the mistake of thinking that you can build your business solely by using online tools. Your online presence should be an extension of your "real world" marketing efforts and vice-versa. Neither stands alone. Bring your online contacts out of the virtual world by meeting them in person or speaking to them by telephone. Extend your relationships with colleagues and strategic alliances that you meet in court, at events, or through the bar association by connecting with them online as well.



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