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Promote conferences with social media

Attendance has been down this year for many legal conferences, in large part due to budget cuts at law firms due to the economic recession.

Legal conference planners need not despair: Individual lawyers can be convinced to cough up their own money to attend upcoming conferences. That can be accomplished by thinking outside of the box, and delivering highly-targeted, effective promotions directly to lawyers through non-traditional media.

Specifically, conference organizers must utilize social media to reach lawyers. Many have started to do so by using their organization's social media presence. The strategy is not particularly effective, however, since attorneys who are following an organization likely are already planning to attend the conference. You are preaching to the choir when you disseminate information about the conference to those attorneys.

A more forward-thinking approach that will pay off in the long-run — both for this year's conference and for future years' events — is to set aside a small portion of your advertising budget to engage the promotional services of a handful of legal professionals with a strong online presence and following.

Just offering such an influential group a free pass to the conference isn't enough to convince them to attend. A few legal organizations have taken that approach over the last year, and met with minimal success.

The vast majority of legal influencers online already have free access to many conferences, either because they're speaking or are eligible for press passes as a result of their online, and offline, reporting. To ensure this group's attendance at, and promotion of, your conference, you need to offer to pay for, at the very least, their transportation and hotel expenses.

In return, you can expect them to promote the conference in the weeks preceding it, cover the conference via their blogs and Twitter, and publish articles and blog posts about the conference after it ends.

The benefit of engaging the promotional services of this group of online leaders is priceless: They already have large followings in the legal community because people find them to be interesting and thought-provoking. Many are influencers in the legal field and people read their tweets, blogs, articles and books for the latest, cutting edge assessment of legal issues and trends. Their followers listen to them, respect them, like them and, most

importantly, are receptive to them.

When lawyers with a strong online presence promote and attend a conference, their followers are more likely to attend the same conference and also will help to spread the word about the conference. You should request that the handful of lawyers you've retained for this purpose promote the conference in tandem, months ahead of the conference, thereby reaching an even larger audience of potential attendees.

The online buzz that can be created by online legal influencers is unparalleled, especially if you ensure that a few of the people whom you retain have a strong Twitter following in the legal community. (A list of can be found at <http://legalbirds.justia.com/birds/all/all/cc/list>). Their tweets about the conference will be re-tweeted multiple times, increasing the likelihood that the conference hashtag will become a trending topic on Twitter.

As any good conference organizer also knows, legal conferences are about more than just learning. Attendees also expect to network with their peers, and have fun. Lawyers with strong online followings facilitate the social aspect of conferences in ways never possible before social media became popular.

They can create buzz by organizing after-hours events via social media. Such gatherings allow people who have followed the online influencers the opportunity to get to know them better, and to interact with other attendees with similar interests. Such events tend to have large turnouts and continue on well into the evening. Social barriers are overcome quickly due to people's familiarity with one another through social media, and a good time, always, is had by all.

The bottom line? If you're able to secure the attendance of a handful of online legal influencers at your conference, you will reap the benefits many times over.

Make your conference the place to be. Be creative, mix things up a little and use social media to your advantage. If you do it correctly, your conference will be the one no one will want to miss.

Nicole Black is of counsel to Fiandach and Fiandach and is the founder of lawtechTalk.com, which offers legal technology consulting services, and publishes four legal blogs, one of which is Practicing Law in the 21st Century (<http://21stcenturylaw.wordpress.com>). She may be reached at nblack@nicole-blackesq.com.



By NICOLE BLACK

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Columnist