

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

Creating an effective online presence, Part 2

Last week I spoke at an Incisive Media conference in New York City, "Social Media Risks and Rewards."

It was an extremely interesting conference, attended primarily by general counsel of large corporations. The topics discussed varied, but focused on the use of social media to promote brand names and products, and the legal issues encountered when doing so.

As I listened to the speakers discuss large-scale social media campaigns, it occurred to me that using social media to promote a law practice is fundamentally different from promoting goods, online products or Web sites.

Lawyers seek to promote their professional services and increase the strength of their online presence whereas the underlying goal for most product promotions is to gain a large scale following of evangelists who will spread the word organically about your product. Lawyers, accordingly, need to approach social media with specific goals in mind.

The first step to creating an effective presence online is to set up profiles at online directories and social media platforms, as I explained in last week's column. The next step is to determine your goals, so that you may participate in social media in a targeted, efficient manner.

Blogs are one of the best ways to target your efforts, as long as you enjoy the process of writing. Blogs can showcase an attorney's expertise and increase his or her rankings in search engine results. Search engines seek out and rank higher Web pages that provide relevant content and are linked frequently to by other Web sites, and updated regularly. Blogs satisfy all of those requirements.

Naturally the writer would use relevant key words when focusing on subjects relevant to his or her areas of practice, recent events, news items and posts from other blogs or cases. When the blog is linked to other bloggers' content, those bloggers likely will return the favor.

A blog can be set up rather easily through the use of services such as Typepad.com or Wordpress.com, but assistance from a company that sets up and designs legal blogs, such as G2webmedia.com or Lexblog.com, also can be sought. Blog posts can be publicized on the attorney's other social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Those who aren't comfortable with the idea of blogging can still participate in social media by using online legal forums to expand

a professional network and/or obtain information relevant to specific areas of practice. A large variety of practice area groups are active on both Facebook and LinkedIn.

Another option is to join online networking sites devoted to the legal field, such as Lawlink (lawlink.com), Martindale-Hubbell's "Connected" (martindale.com/connected) and the American Bar Association's legal network, "Legally Minded" (legally-minded.com).

An online presence can be expanded by distributing content and showcasing work product by uploading documents to JDSupra.com. Filings, decisions, articles, newsletters, blog entries, presentations and media coverage all can be uploaded. After that, JDSupra makes it easy to distribute the content to any profiles you've already set up on LinkedIn, Facebook and, if applicable, Twitter.

Twitter can be a useful social media platform for some attorneys, depending on their goals. For those with a national client base, Twitter is ideal. If your potential client base is local and you live in a large metropolitan area, Twitter also may work for you.

Twitter is a great place to increase a professional network and obtain cutting-edge information relevant to a law practice or other areas of interest. Attorneys on Twitter can interact with other attorneys worldwide, CEOs of major companies, innovators and thought leaders in all professions, as well as editors and journalists for major publications.

The key to Twitter success — or success with any other social media platform — is to set aside a small block of time each day to participate. When you do interact, be genuine, honest, kind and generous. Don't be afraid to share your personal interests, such as sports, food and wine or any other hobbies. Doing so makes you more personable and approachable.

It's not difficult to create an effective online presence for a law practice. Although an attorney's strategies may differ from those used to promote national brands or products, targeted social media interaction can be a very effective way to network and promote a practice.

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Daily Record
Columnist