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Lawyers: Make social media work for you

Social media is the latest and greatest thing.

Lately, it seems like everyone is talking about it — in fact some people rave about its potential as a business tool. But does it really make sense for lawyers, who provide professional services, as opposed to companies that sell products or consumer-oriented services, such as auto repair?

The short answer is, “Yes.” Social media can work for lawyers, too. It’s more than just a marketing tool. In fact, it can be used to benefit lawyers and their practices in a number of useful ways.

However, as I’ve oft-repeated, social media is useless without goals. In fact, in the just released book, “Social Media for Lawyers: The Next Frontier,” my co-author, Carolyn Elefant and I devote an entire section of the book to the various goals and the ways in which they can be achieved.

As we emphasize throughout the book, different lawyers have different types of practices and different goals, and thus should have different social media strategies. It’s not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Instead, you must carefully tailor your social media strategy so that it forwards your chosen goals and makes the most efficient use of the time you spend online.

In future columns, I’ll examine each goal in turn in addition to offering suggestions as to how to go about achieving the various goals. I’ve focused today’s column on an overview of the different goals.

First, you can use social media to network and build relationships with colleagues and clients. The key to doing so is to interact on the social media platforms that are used by the people with whom you want to network. Then, after connecting online, convert the online relationship to an offline one by picking up the phone or meeting for coffee or lunch.

Another great way to use social media is to locate information to support your areas of practice. Using social media tools, such as RSS feed readers and Twitter feeds, you can easily sort

through the constant barrage of information and bring information relevant to your practice directly to you.

Social media can also be used to gain competitive intelligence and customer feedback. Using certain search techniques, you can gather data about potential customers and your competitors.

And, web analytics tools can provide you with detailed information about visitors to your website or blog. By evaluating key word searches that lead people to your site, you can determine what your potential clients are looking for and tailor your online presence accordingly.

You can also showcase your expertise and create a personal or law firm brand via your blogs and your social media interactions. Your online persona will vary from one platform to another, depending on your goals and the nature of the platform. However, consistency across the platforms and a professional, yet personable presence will greatly assist in establishing yourself as an approachable expert in a particular area of law.

Finally, an effective social media presence can greatly improve your online presence, thereby increasing search engine optimization, and thus improve the quality of leads. The more you tailor your online presence to reach a certain target market, the more likely you’ll be contacted by clients seeking those types of services from your law firm.

As you can see, social media is far more than a marketing tool; instead, it’s a virtual toolbox that can benefit your law practice in more ways that you thought possible.

It’s just a matter of creating an effective social media strategy that forwards your chosen goals.

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