

THE DAILY RECORD

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

Waking the sleeping giant

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"A year ago [a law firm] commissioned a song celebrating [their nomination as one of the best companies to work for] ...

The law blog 'Above the Law' put the song on youtube.

Merriment ensued.

Then [the firm] found out that people were laughing at them.

So, they laughed and said 'Yeah, it is a silly song.'

No, of course not.

So they started to act like a bunch lawyers.

They sent YouTube a DMCA takedown notice. Youtube took it down.

That got [the firm] some attention. ...

Heck, nobody was even sure it was real. Until they lawyered up."

— YouTube video commentary (54,959 views as of June 5)

When I first started my New York law blog, "Sui Generis," in November 2006, very few lawyers knew what a "blog" was.

Quite frankly, not many lawyers actually cared.

Time has a way of changing things. The increasing popularity of social media, including the indisputable and viral effect of blogs, has finally caused those at the top of the legal profession to sit up and take notice.

The major impetus behind this change has been a number of notable public relations disasters occurring over the last year involving large law firms, that were, at the time, unfamiliar with the social media landscape.

The most notable incident, described above, involved a large firm's rather lawyerly response to the leak of a celebratory song commissioned by the firm. In another case, a disgruntled associate's parting e-mail to her former employer, Paul Hastings, was leaked on the internet, causing untold amounts of negative publicity for the firm.

These and other online public relations gaffes by large law firms over the past year have forced the legal profession to reluctantly acknowledge the existence and importance of blogs and other online social media, as evidenced by a recent New York Lawyer article: "Gossip Girls (and Boys): Blogs Bedeviling BigLaw."

As explained in the article, "The immediacy — and, at times, the brutality — of the media form is presenting a challenge for firms that are wary of their private matters entering the public domain."

For that very reason, that article notes that many large law firms, now painfully cognizant of the viral effects of online media, are trying to track blogs and other social media in an attempt to engage in damage control.

In response to the growing need to monitor social media, software companies have emerged which provide businesses with tools to track and measure what's being said about their company online in real time, such as Techrigr, a locally-based technology start up.

Techrigr provides SM2, a software solution, which allows businesses to search and analyze what is being said about their company and their competitors on blogs, message boards and forums, social networking sites, and video sharing sites such as YouTube.

It's inevitable. Companies such as Techrigr will be in increasing demand as the importance of monitoring online discourse becomes more apparent to businesses with reputations to maintain.

Technology is changing rapidly. Information is being exchanged online in ways not previously encountered or envisioned.

The legal profession has always been somewhat slow to embrace change. But, much like a slumbering giant, once awakened, it can be a force to be reckoned with. So, let the reckoning begin.

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