

A Brief Assessment of Social Media Networks for Effective Law Firm Marketing

As avid monitors and participants in the new media landscape, we often are asked for overviews and observations on the use and effectiveness of Web-based networking tools in marketing a legal practice. A law firm's Web site often is described as its virtual front office – a place where prospective clients go first before picking up the telephone – and social media networks are an extension of that concept, working hand-in-hand with a firm's Web site as part of a cumulative online experience.

Currently, there are six online communication tools that law firms need to have some familiarity with from a marketing standpoint. These include:

- LinkedIn
- Blogs
- Twitter
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Wikipedia

The following provides a brief overview of the public relations and marketing benefits of each of these services, but please know that we can provide more in-depth guidance for any of these tools.

LinkedIn has emerged as a consistent and powerful tool for promoting the capabilities of law firms and individual attorneys, both business-to-business and business-to-consumer. LinkedIn may not have the media buzz of Facebook or Twitter, but its pages often score very high on organic search engine queries, including Google, Yahoo! and Bing. Additionally, the LinkedIn format provides practically unlimited space to fully describe a firm's resources and expertise. There are specific strategies for building a presence on LinkedIn, and we believe there is value in spending time to create a comprehensive firm profile, as well as profiles for individual attorneys. Once complete, it pays off to regularly monitor and update these profiles.

Blogging is a proven way to make a firm's Web site more dynamic and broaden the reputations of law firms and attorneys. A successful blog requires enthusiasm for the subject matter and a consistent commitment to provide updated blog content (a reasonable goal is to create one or two new posts a week). Coupled with promoting blog updates via Twitter (see below), blogging is an excellent way to direct traffic to your Web site and demonstrate your expertise. We have many tips for establishing blogs, generating content and building communities.

Twitter is the current media darling, although a noticeable backlash has developed to its rigid 140-character format, low retention rate, and the aggravations of sifting through piles of messages throughout the day. As a complement to a firm or individual attorney's blog, however, Twitter offers a useful way to promote individual blog posts and direct traffic to a blog. At Androvett Legal Media & Marketing, we've developed a Twitter following of more than 600 journalists, bloggers and members of the legal industry, and we routinely use Twitter to augment our standard distribution of law firm news.

Facebook is a phenomenon in a category of its own. With more than 250 million accounts and growing, an astounding 23 percent of U.S. Internet users visit this site on a regular basis. Facebook can be problematic because it is, in general, a much more personal and individualized network than other more business-oriented services. Nevertheless, law firms can create Facebook profiles that balance the line between formal and informal.

YouTube's value also lies in its strong showing with search engines and a visual component that offers an opportunity for firms to more fully differentiate themselves in staking out subject matter on the Internet. Broadcast media placements can easily be posted on this site and can include keyword-rich descriptions to influence search-engine results. Besides news, content can include appropriate video depositions, testimonials, interviews, and interesting demonstrative evidence to show off a firm's expertise and resources, as well as information that is appealing for intern and associate recruiting. Firm advertising on YouTube is a medium that is still evolving and represents an entirely different animal compared to the broadcast advertising typically associated with the legal industry.

Wikipedia also scores well in organic search engine results. This site has a format that offers plenty of space to describe any and all facets of a firm and its attorneys, including links back to firm Web sites and supporting material. Because Wikipedia's open-source format allows anyone to edit and contribute to the content, these pages require some vigilance to ensure that content has not been augmented in a negative or inaccurate way. Nevertheless, Wikipedia is a great way to boost the profiles of law firms and attorneys' professional reputations.

Properly executed, a social media presence demands a consistent and disciplined commitment. In return, it's likely that law firms and attorneys will achieve a noticeably expanded online reputation and increased Web site traffic. Like many areas of marketing, the payoff is not immediate. It takes time to build relationships and a strong presence on these networks, but the value down the road can be significant.

Call us for more information on our enhanced digital package at 800-559-4534 or email us at socialmedia@androvett.com.