

# High-touch Legal Services® for Startup and Early-stage Companies

## Lawyers and Social Media: Ten Tips for Online Success

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I wrote this originally for a panel discussion on Effective Electronic Marketing for Lawyers sponsored by the Congressman Don Edwards Inn of Court, and since have updated it for a State Bar panel discussion on Social Media for Lawyers.

During the past year, I have devoted almost half of my business development efforts to social media. The purpose of this article is to share what I consider the most important factors responsible for my success in the hope that these tips will help you become successful, too.

### 1 Decide who your prospective clients are

My clients are small businesses, especially startup and early-stage companies. This means the prospects of greatest value to me are entrepreneurs who recently started, or are about to start, new businesses.

Focusing on the right market segment is crucial. Few lawyers really offer our services to anyone (who will pay). So, even if you do have a broad client market, choose a well-defined segment on which to concentrate your online activities.

### 2 Figure out what you can give prospects that they will value

For years I had been sending out a monthly one-to-two-page e-mail, each on a business-related legal topic. This helped me stay in front of people I already knew, but did little to generate new prospects.

Nevertheless, experience suggested that what made the e-mails valuable – their immediacy and real-life genesis – could be adapted to social media. So I decided to write short (several-paragraph) communications about legal and business issues I encounter frequently, orienting those pieces toward entrepreneurs.

Practical, usable insights provide the value. The abbreviated length makes it likely a reader will at least scan, if not actually read, the entire communication.

### 3 Determine where and how you can deliver that value

When I decided to dive into social media, blogs were (and still are) the rage. I was concerned,

however, whether I could switch from writing longer pieces once per month to writing shorter pieces several times per week.

It turned out that the dozens of monthly e-mails I had already written helped me make the transition, because they could be adapted easily as blog posts. Over time, I established a blogging rhythm with which I now am comfortable, posting three times per week pretty consistently.

### 4 Make it easy for prospects to find you

When I started, my blog was, of course, unknown. Over time, a handful of posts grew to hundreds; I exchanged blogroll listings with colleagues; and I looked into what I could do to improve my search engine (primarily Google) rankings.

Meanwhile, to gain visibility, I had started answering law-related questions on Avvo and LinkedIn. Then I had *my cleverest idea for the entire endeavor*:

I started including, with almost every Avvo and LinkedIn answer, at least one link to a post on my blog. I anticipated two likely benefits: Prospects will be drawn to my blog, where they will see, in numerous posts, what I offer; and hundreds of links from Avvo and LinkedIn to my blog will improve the blog's search-engine rankings.

### 5 Be authentic

Social media are, by their definition and nature, social. As a result, prospective clients seek service providers who are human beings. This means that the individual lawyer is the story. His / her voice, passion and insights are what make him / her attractive.

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A lawyer's firm is of, at most, secondary importance. I cannot imagine an entire firm – as contrasted to its individual lawyers – having a compelling blog, because a firm has a common-denominator, rather than authentic, voice. Indeed, in my opinion, one of the most positive attributes of social media is that they put solo and small-firm lawyers on an equal footing with their large-firm colleagues.

Focusing on another aspect of authenticity, I find it difficult to imagine a top-notch blog that is largely or entirely ghost-written. While it is reasonable to seek help with idea-generation and editing, the further a post is from the lawyer's brain and hands, the less it will reflect what makes that lawyer special, and the less distinctive it will be.

## **6 Make a good photo part of your online marketing presence**

Prospects want to engage with a human being, not a bunch of words. A photo that portrays you as approachable and interested will be of greater value than one that makes you look like George (or Martha) Washington.

A professional photographer's "head shot" can be time-consuming and expensive. There is an alternative that works well for me, though it may not appeal to everyone.

It has been more than a decade since I (or my family) last hired a professional photographer. The reason: We take a cruise or two every year, and there are countless opportunities to have photos taken on the ship by professional photographers. While the prints are somewhat pricey, the great news is that there is no commitment and no risk – you buy only the photos that you like once they are printed! Plus, back home you can scan them to produce additional prints or for online use.

I have solo photos taken in jacket and tie, in addition to many casual and dressy family photos. I've been pleased with the results – in no small measure because I look better when I'm relaxed and having fun rather than stressed out running to a photo shoot between other appointments.

## **7 Be prepared to invest a significant amount of time**

Here's the catch: You can't be a social-media success averaging just a few minutes per day.

My target is to blog three times per week. Between blogging and answering questions on LinkedIn and Avvo, I spend about eight hours per week on social media – and that does not include the amount of time I spend converting prospects to clients, or on my other business development activities.

## **8 Set targets for, and track time devoted to, marketing (and other) activities**

Lawyers in private practice routinely set targets for and track billable time. Few, however, do the same for marketing and other non-billable activities.

If you consistently have more business than you can handle, congratulations – you probably can ignore this tip. But if business development is important, then setting goals and tracking performance relative to those goals is essential for establishing self-accountability.

## **9 Follow up individuals who have shown interest**

This is one area where I have not yet been sufficiently active. I've been responding only to prospects who actively reach out to me. Meanwhile, dozens of visitors have registered at my blog, but I have not initiated contact with any of them. I hope that I soon will find the time to acknowledge their interest, find out what they need, ask them to participate in surveys, investigate how they would like me to improve the blog, etc.

## **10 Be prepared to make new friends (in addition to new clients)**

One of the most pleasant surprises is the online friendships that I have developed – sometimes with lawyer-bloggers, but with other individuals, as well. As in the real world, bonds form between fellow participants, especially when they are exploring an exciting new activity.

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