

MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2010

Social Fresh - What Did I Learn About Social Media?

Today, I attended one of the [Social Fresh](#) conferences, which took place here in Portland, Oregon - for those of you wondering what Social Fresh is, it's a conference about social media, focused around case studies, and it takes place in some "underserved cities," as the conference website describes them. Although it's not a conference focused around the legal field, I felt that broadening my social media education to find out what other companies are doing and what works for them would be useful in my own professional social media efforts, as well as for the law firms we work with.

Like LMA 2010, I'll be posting re-caps of the valuable sessions that I attended today over the next few days, but I wanted to get a quick post up about my thoughts and the key takeaways from today's conference.

The theme that I took away from today's panels and presentations was two-fold - 1) know your social media objectives and 2) know your audience. In terms of the former - it's not just enough to jump into social media, to create a Twitter profile or a Facebook fan page (in terms of your company or firm's brand - I still think there's utility in experimenting for yourself to learn about the tools). You have to ask yourself why you're on there, what you want to get out of it, and what you're prepared to do with it - have a strategy. There were a lot of comments that although marketers may be handling a company or firm's social media efforts, customer service is still a large part of the job. So even if you enter into social media for the purpose of getting content out there, you must be prepared to answer questions and deal with customer service-type issues. This is true even in the legal industry - for law firms getting involved in social media, you have to be prepared to deal with questions coming up that border on a client-attorney privileged relationship, possible issues

with complaints against the firm, etc. The overwhelming answer on how to deal with these issues today was "have a plan." Before entering into social media, decide who will be behind the efforts, what happens if a person or group starts flaming your Facebook page, what steps are taken if a crisis arises - think about the possible issues that may arise *before* they happen. Everyone agrees that social media is just another channel for the same types of marketing that companies and firms have always been doing, so some of this will just be an extension of an existing crisis communications plan your firms have, but it's essential to discuss strategy and possible roadblocks before releasing a corporate social media strategy.

In terms of audience, this was another topic that was mentioned again and again today. Speakers emphasized finding out about your audience to determine what social media channels make the most sense for your firm to participate in. The way to find this out is by **asking them**. One speaker used the example of an animal rescue organization that he had donated to - following his donation, they sent him a lovely coffee table book. Unfortunately, he had no use for this, since he doesn't own a coffee table. He commented to them that it would be useful for them to follow up with their donors and ask how they would prefer to receive future communications. They initially said that they already knew their audience, and because of their age and make-up, they knew that they preferred to receive things like the coffee table book. But they took his advice and started to follow up with donors - an overwhelming number said they preferred email communications, and the organization ended up saving \$500,000 in printing costs. The message was clear - no matter how well you think you know your audience, talk to them anyway and find out what works best for them. If they're overwhelmingly on Facebook, create a fanpage. If they prefer LinkedIn, develop a group. Connect to them. If they're on multiple channels, connect with them on all of them.

Some firms might be concerned about getting "out there" on social media because they don't want to deal with the conversation that's happening about their firm or their competitors - but the point was made today that the audience is talking about



them whether they're involved in the conversation or not. So finding out where your audience is and getting involved in the conversation by listening and engaging (make sure you have the right people in these roles) is key.

There may be those out there who see social media tools as only a flash in the pan and everyone's interest in them akin to "shiny new toy syndrome." But social media is **not going away**, and will only become more and more ingrained in our everyday lives. It can work for law firms as easily as it does for other companies, with the right planning and execution that takes the legal field's special characteristics into account. Social media is the fourth most popular online form of communication - AHEAD of email. There was a time when many people believed that email wouldn't catch on, and now we can't imagine our lives without it - social media is the same. It's evolving, but it's where conversations are happening and great opportunities still exist.