

MONDAY, APRIL 12, 2010

## Recap of Social Fresh Portland: Branding within Social Media



I finished my Twitter coverage of [Social Fresh Portland](#) (because I was locked out by too many tweets!) with the Branding within Social Media Panel, with [Kim Brater](#) of [Ant Hill Marketing](#), [Steve Parker](#) of [Levelwing Media](#), [Matt Singley](#) of [M80im](#), [Kristy Bolsinger](#) of [RealNetworks](#), and [Andrew Sinkov](#) of [Evernote](#). Fortunately, although Singley threatened to liven up the panel by making it "pants optional," the whole panel stay fully clothed as they gave the audience some great advice.

The first question was about how branding is defined in each of the panelists' organizations and translated to social media. Sinkov said at Evernote, they ask themselves, "what is the impression we want to give people?" Their answer is that they want to be a company that people trust and believe in. In Brater's mind, your brand is your business. Bolsinger said that she considers social media channels to be a way to strengthen their brand and make it something "living." She encourages using the same brand and message across all channels in marketing, including social media. Social media can also help to define your brand, because through engagement, you can learn

what your customers think your brand is. Singley said that while he promised not to use these buzzwords for the remainder of the panel, it's true that branding is about consistency and engagement. To make sure everyone was listening, he suggesting using liquor to transition the Old Guard to this new media. More seriously, he said that one of the main questions he gets about using social media is how you can effectively measure it. He said that he responds by asking how you can measure the effectiveness of a conversation or a relationship - you can't. Social media requires a leap of faith. For bigger brands, this can be a little bit easier because they're used to being sued for being transparent. For smaller brands, this might be more difficult. But Singley pointed out that it's more about opportunities lost because of not being a part of a conversation, and those brands that ignore social media will lose. He did agree that at some point, it's necessary to show the value of social media and Bolsinger said that ROI can be more about what you save the company than what you bring in. Singley added that persistence and education is how you get people on board. An audience member asked if there was value in trying to measure the effectiveness of social media. Singley said yes, but he has yet to figure out how. "Metrics are a necessary evil of agency life," he commented. Bolsinger commented that if there isn't a lot of differentiation between your company and your competitors, social media can be a way to differentiate. Depending on your brand/product, you can show how social media has a better return on investment than traditional channels. For showing how pervasive social media channels are, the panel recommended [Do You Know 4.0](#). Brater also recommended looking at Olivier Blanchard's [presentation on ROI](#) in social media.

The panelists agreed that they're jobs are becoming more like customer service because of social media. While some people are voicing concern over this, Bolsinger said if your marketing isn't looking at customer service as a benefit of social media, they're missing out. If you promote great customer service through social media, sales will follow. Inversely, this isn't as true. It used to be that great customer service was the key product differentiator, but now it's customer service through social media.

Someone in the audience asked about translating a company's online voice throughout

the whole company. Sinkov said that for them, they can do it as they grow, but for larger companies, it's a big re-education. The larger the company, the more disjointed it is. Parker said that it takes time to move everyone forward in social media, but that's why everyone was there attending the panel. Bolsinger said that although it helps to have outside evangelists, you need to do that inside as well.

The panelists then briefly discussed the downside of participating in social media. Brater said the only downside is not participating, because people are talking about you online whether you're participating or not.

An audience member asked how to not talk about yourself all the time when building your brand and Bolsinger counseled "be creative." She said "You live in an entire industry and you can talk about all of that stuff on social media," adding that promoting other people is just as important as promoting yourself. Parker said that you can also engage the customer in a way that's related to the brand. The panelists also cautioned that companies shouldn't just get a Twitter account or a Facebook page, but first understand why they want one. Bolsinger added that someone needs to be held accountable in social media also - who's measuring, keeping you focused? You need to be monitoring your brand all the time. This led to a discussion of crisis situations in social media - Bolsinger said that her best practices include having alerts set for their brand on Twitter and having a formal plan in place in case of a crisis. Singley commented that it matters if its an internal or external crisis as to how it will be handled. He cited an internal example of [a bad tweet going out accidentally on Vodaphone's Twitter account](#) (if you're easily offended, you may want to skip checking out what the tweet was, though Singley writes a great post about it). The company deleted it, but didn't pretend that it never went out. Singley suggested deleting offensive content, and then acknowledging it. There are also external crises and Singley mentioned [the recent Nestle debacle](#) as an example of this, saying that Greenpeace used to have boats - now they have computers. Brater commented that crises have always been around and they're not going to go away. Just the channel is new, so companies need to take it into consideration in their crisis plans. She added that companies need to be ready to

respond to social media crises immediately and without overreacting.

How does this translate for law firms?

- **You've got to think about branding:** I know that branding has become a four-letter word in the last few years, but it's really not that terrible - it's just thinking about "what impression do we want to give our audience?" If you're an attorney and going to be blogging on your own, first talk to your marketing department, if you have one. While your firm's brand might be different than the practice-specific or industry-specific message you want to send, they can still be a helpful resource for identifying the tone you want to achieve in your blog. If you're responsible for your firm's blog (as an attorney or a marketer), make sure that the message is the same on your blog as it is in your traditional marketing channels.

- **You can be branding without talking about yourself all the time:** As Bolsinger mentioned, you live in an entire industry that you can talk about - read what other people are writing, use client alerts in your area of expertise as an opportunity to add your thoughts in a more substantive blog post, talk about other people and what they're saying or doing, write about examples of what other people are doing right. People will begin to see you as a thought leader, which has a positive impact on your reputation as well as your firm's, and they'll begin to talk about you in their own social media channels. Peter Shankman gave a great example of how this works [during his keynote speech](#) at Social Fresh - he said if he walks into a bar and two women are sitting there, if he walks up to one of them and says, "Hi, I'm Peter Shankman and I'm awesome," she would probably throw a drink in his face. But if he walks in and her friend says to her, "That's Peter Shankman over there. He's a great guy, and I think you would have a lot in common," the woman would be want to get to know him better. It's the same in business - let other people talk about how great you are instead of doing it yourself.

- **Social Media is about customer service, whether you want it to be or not:** Anyone involved in social media for their companies is involved in customer service. Even if you

plan for your blog or Twitter stream to be dedicated to providing content, there is always the possibility that someone will ask you a question about your firm or about how to handle a case. Having a plan is key here - decide before they come up how you will handle these situations and who, if anyone, you will refer the person to.

- **If you're having trouble getting internal buy-in at your company, realize that social media is not for everyone. But it might be for you:** Not everyone at your firm has to "get" social media or use it, but if you want to use it to represent your firm, you have to get their buy-in. The above video, Do You Know 4.0, is a good starting point for helping them to understand how pervasive it is, but you also have to know why you want to start a blog, join Twitter, create a Facebook fan page and be able to articulate that. Find evangelists in-house who can support your push for social media. Identify what you'll be tracking to show value at a later date, but also be prepared to point out that nobody tries to measure the value of a conversation or a relationship. Let them know that the phone and email can also be dangerous time-sinks in the wrong hands, but you plan to use social media strategically and professionally.

How has using social media enhanced your firm's brand? What do you see as the unique challenges for law firms in using social media for branding?