

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Social Media - What Are Mid-Sized Firms Doing?

[Last week's post](#) covered the questions of what the panelists discussing social media are doing at their firms, and the challenges they've faced. This week's looks at their social media policies and the effect of the approval process in blogging.

Social Media Policies

We next covered the question of social media policies, and whether firms are looking only at what their attorneys and staff are doing professionally, or also at their personal social networking habits.

David: David said that the initial cut of their policy was without regard to whether they were posting on a firm site or feed. He said that they've eased up a little when it comes to disclaimers, but otherwise, this isn't going to change. He said that any attorney at the firm is a representative of the firm when they're out there. Period. They've made that very clear to their associates.

However, they haven't told people that they can't have a personal Facebook page, or the like, but they've said that if an attorney is talking about legal-related issues, or business-related issues, they're representing the firm.

Bill: Bill agreed that it's the same for them, and said that to a large extent, they're relying on the judgement of the lawyers. He said there would be pushback if they tried to regulate what the attorneys do in their personal time, but they've been lucky so far in that associates and partners have demonstrated an understanding that they're out there on behalf of Clark Wilson.

Bill went back to an earlier point, and said that they're similar in terms of content, in that anything issued on behalf of the firm goes through an approval process. The attorney has to get approval from the practice group chair before posting. On a slightly different topic, he added that content is only as good as what the attorneys come up with. In larger firms, there's a tendency to rely on the marketing department to produce content. Although the marketers do a fantastic job, producing legal content is not their responsibility - the best stuff is content that's meaningful to the lawyer, that he puts up there, and that other lawyers can connect to.

Charles: Charles commented that he was picking up a lot of good ideas from the panel and writing his social media policy right there. He said that what he thought was interesting is the idea of keeping an eye on what people say in their capacity other than as a lawyer in their firm. With what Facebook recently did in terms of photo tagging, he's very concerned that connections can be made even more easily between a person's private social networking and their work at the firm. He said it doesn't take too much time to identify someone in a compromising position at a drunken stag party as a lawyer at a particular firm, and he doesn't see a way to stop this.

I suggested that the only way to combat this type of thing is through training, to offer some perspective on what's professional and acceptable. I also recommended that the attorneys Google themselves periodically to identify what's out there about the.

Interestingly, Charles said that he'll often search on Facebook for someone that they're considering recruiting, and often, you'll see photos from university days that they'd be embarrassed about.

Approval Process - Too Time Consuming?

The next question for the panelists delved into the issue of the approval process - they had all mentioned having blog posts reviewed before publication, and I wondered if they had any concerns about timing and getting out in front of their competitors.

Bill: Bill said that the turnaround process is almost instantaneous for them, but commented that he would actually like to see more time taken on occasion. He said that it's not as important to be the first firm out on an issue, as long as the blog is thoroughly prepared, and an example of good quality in terms of the work.

David: David agreed with Bill, and reminded the audience that they're not tweeting from the streets of Tehran. He commented that these sites are about building relationships with people, and your followers are often comprised of thought leaders, clients and potential clients. Just because you're not first doesn't necessarily mean they've read it somewhere else first - they're not out there searching all day for this stuff. So quality beats speed. David said if you need speed, Twitter is the place to go, and you can refer people elsewhere - use your 140-characters to link people to that interesting piece that showed up in the NY Times if that's appropriate.

Charles: Charles said that mid-sized firms, even with reasonable resources, don't have the same resources as the magic circle firms, and he doesn't think their clients expect them to. A lot of this information is already in the paper or on the internet, so smaller firms can't compete and it's not

even worth considering. What's important to him is the conversation - it's about connecting with clients, making sure they do what their clients need them to do in a timely fashion.

For example, Charles said that they have a new piece of legislation in the UK that comes into force on July 1st, called The Bribery Act. This has been in the works for well over a decade, and there is some guidance coming out from the UK government in the last few months, which was a requisite of the Act. The Act couldn't come into force until the guidance was in place. Every law firm in the country has been working on this. Fladgate thought that the best way to make a connection with their clients on this was to get them in the office and talk to them. They had a great turnout for their conference on this a few weeks ago.

At the end of the day, everyone is doing these types of things, so there isn't going to be an advantage to getting people to work on articles and post them to the website, Twitter or Facebook - they need to connect with their clients. Charles said that there's a point at which all of this stuff on the internet can break down and not serve the purpose that we want, so it's essential not to forget the importance of eyeballing people and talking to them about their concerns.

Wrap-Up

We were at the end of our time, so I asked the attorneys to make some closing comments.

David: David said that one of the things that was interesting about the latest developments at his firm was that one of their microsites was put through a bid process, and the design was done by a web designer in Indonesia for \$400. He said that the legal time isn't coming any cheaper, but doing this is getting democratized, and is getting a lot cheaper to accomplish.

Charles: Charles invited everyone to start a conversation with him on Twitter - [@fladgatellp](https://twitter.com/fladgatellp).

Questions this Discussion Raises

- How does your firm handle the professional versus personal use of social media in your social media policy? Do you have a social media policy?
- What type of social media training do you do at your firm?
- How is the approval process handled at your firm? Do you have an approval process?
- How do you take your online relationships offline?

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