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Still more social media for lawyers: Participate!

My thoughts continue to be focused on social media because of two upcoming speaking engagements on lawyers and social media.

The first is sponsored by Gotham Media Ventures, to be held Thursday in New York City. I'll also be speaking Oct. 16 in Los Angeles at the American Bar Association's Solo and Small Firm conference.

One important concept I intend to stress to attendees at both conferences is that engaging in focused online participation and interaction is the best way to amplify and reap the benefits from an online presence.

It's not difficult to do, as long as you've followed the advice from my two previous columns in this series: Establish a basic online presence and identify the online platforms with which you are most comfortable participating. The final step is to dive in and interact. Learn and interact, exchange information and network and share your content, including blog posts, recent achievements and media mentions.

Of course, an individual's level of participation and interaction vary from one platform to next. The key to effective participation is to be genuine, transparent, and to provide useful, relevant information no matter what the context.

Interact and converse, rather than merely broadcast and boast. Don't be afraid to share personal interests occasionally alongside professional ones. Doing so humanizes you and makes you appear more approachable to potential clients and other attorneys.

Attorneys with a law blog should respond to people who comment on posts. Post comments to other law blogs, leave links to your blog when inputting your name and contact information. Link to other law bloggers' posts, discuss the points raised and offer your take on the issue.

Engage in a conversation with other bloggers. You'll make new connections, increase the number of incoming links to your blog — important for search engine optimization — and, perhaps, you might even learn something new.

If online forums are your platform of choice — groups on Facebook, LinkedIn, or online legal communities Lawlink (lawlink.com), Martindale-Hubbell's "Connected" (martindale.com/connected) and the ABA's legal network, "Legally Minded" (legallyminded.com) — be sure to check in a few times each week.

When visiting a forum, reply to posts from other attorneys if you're able to offer useful commentary or information. Start new discussions relating to your areas of practice by asking for input regarding a change in the law, soliciting advice as to the proce-

dures in a particular court or jurisdiction or asking participants for opinions on how to handle a particularly thorny procedural issue.

By participating in online legal forums, you'll gain useful information, increase your reach online and network with new colleagues.

Users also can engage in conversations with colleagues using the status update feature on Facebook and LinkedIn. Post your firm's most recent blog posts to your accounts on those sites, post occasional updates about your professional activities and accomplishments, link to interesting news stories relevant to your areas of practice and comment on your colleagues' recent activities. By doing so, you'll provide colleagues and friends with useful and relevant information, engage with them, maintain professional and personal relationships and promote your practice and accomplishments.

Finally, if Twitter is your online platform of choice, follow the 50-30-10-10 rule.

- 50 percent of "tweets" should provide followers with links to articles, blog posts and other online content you think might be of interest; the percentage includes "re-tweets," or re-posts of tweets from other users, of relevant content;
- 30 percent should be replies to other users' tweets — in other words, engage in conversations with others 20 percent of the time;
- 10 percent of tweets should consist of self-promotion, including your firm's blog posts and information about professional activities and accomplishments;
- Tweet about your personal interests and hobbies about 10 percent of the time. Doing so, again, will do much to humanize you, make you more interesting to your followers and allow you to connect with non-legal users who share similar interests. That segment of your audience should not be ignored — they are your potential clients or referrers, with whom we all know it's always a good idea to connect.

In summary, an effective online presence revolves around visibility, relevancy, personality and engagement. Find the forums with which you are most comfortable and put these principles to work. You'll find it well worth your time and effort.

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