

Must-Sue TV

How One Firm Created a High-Profile Blog That Works

By Lynne Donaghy and John Hellerman

Not to be left behind, the legal community is actively engaged in the ever-expanding blogosphere. With more than 1000 active legal blogs on the Web, firms and attorneys recognize the value of blogs as unique marketing and business development tools. However, for a blog to be beneficial, it must distinguish itself from the diluted market through creativity, consistency, and a strategic media plan.

ONE FIRM'S STORY

Ford & Harrison LLP, a national labor and employment law firm, was interested in a creative way to communicate with current and prospective clients about the difficult and complex legal issues facing employers in today's workplace. The firm has always been aggressive when it comes to marketing, and is

constantly looking for ways to stand out. Launching a blog seemed to be one way, but without a clever idea to break through the clutter, blogging seemed to present too many significant challenges.

Overcoming the Obstacles

The chief concern was the clutter. The HR market is flooded with blogs, as there are already hundreds on the Web. Another significant concern was how to generate a sizeable audience for a blog that, at the end of the day, would be about HR issues — especially given that most law firms' Web sites are trafficked pretty lightly. Lastly, there was concern over content: Was there enough to say? How often would there need to be a new post in order to keep the blog relevant and interesting? Did the firm's designated author have the time to post regularly?

The firm considered these challenges and decided it would move forward with a blog only if they were overcome. The first, and most important, step was to develop a focus unique to the HR sector, one that hopefully would enable the blog to generate a following. With this and Ford & Harrison's other concerns in mind, the idea to use NBC's hit comedy *The Office* as a backdrop seemed like the perfect fit. As most know, the show takes place at a branch office of fictional

paper company Dunder Mifflin, a company that could easily represent any in America. The show focuses primarily on the politically incorrect behavior of the office's general manager, Michael Scott, and his employees, all of whom are involved in storylines that reflect everyday HR issues (e.g., inter-office relationships, inappropriate comments, personnel conflicts, etc.).

Essentially, as far as Ford & Harrison was concerned, the show was a weekly visual demonstration of what *not* to do for HR managers and executives.

Gaining Attention

To mitigate the firm's concern that the blog might languish in obscurity, a viable site host was recruited and a deal was made, which meant that the blog would begin with a relevant, built-in audience and instant credibility.

Julie Elgar, a senior associate in Ford & Harrison's Atlanta office, loves *The Office*, and willingly agreed to write the blog on behalf of the firm. Julie, a true fan of the show, named the blog "*That's What She Said*," based on Michael Scott's trademark punch line. Julie's commitment is to create one new post every Friday commenting on the previous night's episode. (Because the show airs only once a week, Julie doesn't have pressure to post more frequently.)

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Keeping the Attention

With the right marketing plan, any blog can launch successfully. It's maintaining readership and encouraging repeat visits that's the difficult task. The best way to entice return visits is by using a consistent format. In the case of *That's What She Said*, Julie assigns a litigation value to each episode of *The Office*. The number is a dollar estimate of how much the outlandish behavior of Michael Scott and the other Dunder Mifflin employees would cost real-life companies to defend in employment lawsuits. The litigation value is consistent throughout Julie's posts and attracts people to come back each Friday to see how much financial damage Michel caused on the previous night's show.

The Launch

When it came time to launch the blog, publicity efforts were focused on three unique sectors: law and HR for the legal advice, and entertainment given the pop culture status of show. Outreach went beyond traditional media in each sector, and to generate real grassroots buzz, considerable attention was paid to other blogs (the blogging community is close-knit and relies heavily on networking and cross-promotion).

As a result of the launch strategy, *That's What She Said* received coverage in all three areas of focus — from *The Wall Street Journal* to the Life section of *USA Today*. As expected, other blogs were the first to pick-up on the story, either posting Ford & Harrison's news release or writing their own reviews. Having *That's What She Said* mentioned in the Life section of *USA Today* or on a popular entertainment blog might not seem to make immediate sense in terms of business development for the firm. However, every placement raised the blog's profile and generated

buzz, which piqued the interest of publications that were primarily important to the firm: *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *BusinessWeek*, *Inside Counsel*, and popular HR Web sites and trade magazines. As news about the blog spread and traffic increased to 12,000 hits a day, unexpected coverage of the blog followed, as was the case when *New York Magazine* called the blog "brilliant" in their popular "Approval Matrix."

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FUTURE OF THE BLOG

While the blog is currently only authored by Julie, the entire firm takes ownership of it and is proud to promote it. For instance, the firm sent an announcement about the blog to many of its clients and contacts. A number of attorneys sent clients a copy of a large, front-page business feature story that appeared in several major Gannet newspapers. The feedback was overwhelming positive — clients appreciated the firm's creativity and uniqueness, which reinforced why they had chosen Ford & Harrison in the first place. One client shared the blog with her CEO, who subsequently e-mailed it to all of the company's managers, encouraging them to visit

the site every Friday. Several clients have asked about using the blog as a training tool for their HR executives. Additionally, as a result of their exposure through the blog, Julie and other Ford & Harrison attorneys now receive frequent calls from top-tier media seeking comment on general HR issues unrelated to *The Office* or the blog. Lastly, Ford & Harrison is considering additional ways to leverage the blog's success (e.g., hosting casual Thursday night "Office parties" and promoting it to larger audiences through event sponsorships with groups such as the Society for Human Resource Management).

CONCLUSION

This is our firm's positive experience. Because they present a unique communications tool for attorneys, legal blogs will continue to grow in number and popularity. Like Ford & Harrison's *That's What She Said*, the best of the bunch will be distinctive, consistent, and well-marketed.

That's What She Said can be read online at www.hrheroblogs.com.

