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How Lawyers Can Avoid Social Media Burnout

By D. Todd Smith on October 22, 2010

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When I started my own firm four years ago, blogging was a relatively new concept, and few had heard of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. I was among the first Texas lawyers to use these emerging tools as part of a broader marketing strategy. It is a work in progress, and the implementation could be better, but this strategy has worked well for me overall. A number of other lawyers are now following a similar plan with some success.

Over time, though, remaining actively engaged in social media has taken more effort. Maybe the shine has worn away a little, and I am just not as excited about it as I once was. Participation is more difficult when my workload cycles up. Forced to choose between posting and signing up a new client, meeting a court deadline, or preparing for a hearing, the paying work always comes first. And, as Voltaire said, "The perfect is the enemy of the good." Lawyers tending toward perfectionism sometimes have trouble letting go of a blog post or tweet that will be part of electronic history forever.

This new phase got me to thinking about what social media burnout might look like. On the web, nonlawyers who are heavy social media users (usually marketing or technology types) have reported negative changes in diet, sleep patterns, real-world social interactions, and personal relationships as some consequences of being too connected. Following a few straightforward guidelines can help lawyers participating in social media avoid these sorts of experiences.

Strategize at the outset. A lawyer should know what she wants to accomplish before jumping into the deep end of the social media pool. Just lurking around or occasionally chiming in about a favorite television show or sports team is fine, as far as it goes. But an attorney who intends to use social media as a business tool should define her purpose and come up with a plan for attaining her goals.

Be selective. A lawyer should resist the temptation to follow everyone who follows or friends him. It's best to know one's online contacts in the real world, or at least have mutual interests that could help spark a meaningful online relationship. It's also wise to evaluate whether a potential connection has any prospect for furthering one's objectives. Furthermore, a lawyer should avoid trying to read every blog or status update posted in his network. No one can keep up with that much content for long without something else suffering.

Use available tools for managing selected content. Lawyers can control their use of blogs and news-related sites through an RSS service such as Google Reader, which collects multiple feeds in a single location. **TweetDeck**, **Seismic** and similar desktop applications allow users to view status updates from Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn on one screen. These applications

also allow users to filter content by keywords and post to social media sites from one place, rather than logging in and out of multiple accounts.

Turn off notifications. Because of the sheer number of updates in almost any size network, social media can be even more distracting than e-mail when it comes to desktop notifications. Productivity experts like Timothy Ferriss, author of "The 4-Hour Workweek," recommend turning off notifications and handling e-mails in batches no more than a few times per day. A lawyer should protect her sanity and stay on task by batching social media, as well.

Don't hesitate to "de-friend" or "unfollow." A lawyer should feel free to delete a blog from his RSS feed when posts remain unread for more than a few weeks. It's best to just disengage from reading tiresome rants about someone's deadbeat ex-spouse or posts about a new dog. Life is too short to spend valuable time on things that create frustration or feelings of falling behind.

Take time away. Lawyers should unplug from the entire internet once in a while. As with any other work, it is important to put down the laptop or smartphone and simply take a break from business-focused social media periodically. Some of us find ourselves re-inspired when we return.

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