



THE MATTE PAD

MARKETING KNOW-HOW FOR
THE LEGAL PROFESSION

30 Years in Prison for a False Tweet?



The speed and ease of sharing information via social media does not excuse us from checking the facts of what we are saying, especially for legal marketers!)

We spend so much time on social media, and encourage our clients to do the same, that it's easy to forget that this is still a relatively new method of communication. While there are clear rules and case law that apply to most other communication methods, the world of social media is still trying to figure out what is and is not allowed.

What brought this to mind was a recent article on Mashable entitled, "[Twitter Terrorists](#)" Could Get **30 Years in Prison**. Basically, in a story that recalls Orson Welles' *War of the World's* famous radio broadcast, two people in Mexico tweeted false information about gunmen attacking schools and kidnapping children. Not surprisingly, panic ensued as parents rushed to bring their children to safety causing dozens of car accidents and jamming emergency phone lines. Both of the accused claim they were just forwarding information they had seen on Twitter.

So, is sharing false information on Twitter the same as yelling "fire" in a crowded building? Should users be held responsible if the information they share leads to problems and injury? Ultimately, we are all responsible for what we share, but the speed of social media and the ease of forwarding information, and dare I say the desire to be the first to tell a story, does tend to make us a bit less tenacious about checking facts. Most of the time it's something harmless like Facebook changing their privacy settings or some celebrity announcing an engagement. But the point still stands that some information can be harmful, and it's very hard to get the cat back in the bag once it's out.

If punishment is to be meted out, what is appropriate? Thirty years in prison seems a bit harsh to me, but if someone had died because of the panic caused by their Tweets, maybe not. I know I'm not answering any questions here, but posing quite a few, but it's a new area, and one that needs to be considered some point soon. If nothing else, this story behooves each of us to do a wee bit of fact checking before we just automatically re-tweet or re-post some juicy information that may or may not be true. As law firms, this would go doubly true, since we hold our legal professionals to a high standard as far as information sharing goes, fair or not.

What do you think? I'd love to hear your thoughts on this issue!





Welcome to The Matte Pad! Here you'll find tips, trends and tools to help the busy legal marketing professional. I hope you'll find this content valuable and practical. Information on the latest social media trends, creative ideas and marketing strategies that you can use at your law firm or in your legal marketing department.

