

# Social Media for Lawyers or How I Built a National Law Practice using Social Media

By Ary Rosenbaum, Esq.

Five year ago, I joined a prestigious (I thought at the time) Long Island law firm with the idea that I could start a National practice devoted to ERISA and single employer retirement plans. Unfortunately the idea was to cross sell my services to our existing client base and use that to create relationships with financial advisors around their country and help them service their clients. Thanks to the firm being stocked by many former solo attorneys, the client lists were shut off. Still trying to build that practice, I started to write a few articles and attempted to work with social media. Thanks to the Firm's advertising committee, those ideas were thrashed. After starting my own practice almost 3 years ago, I turned to social media to build my National ERISA practice after languishing using a public relations firm. So this article is about my experience using social media and how social media should be an integral element of any law firm's marketing campaign, regardless of size.

## Social Media isn't advertising

When I was at that law firm, the Advertising Committee said that I couldn't partake in social media because that was advertising and the advertising rules for law service in New York are stringent. Let's face facts. There was one lawyer on that advertising committee. That firm liked to create useless titles like Chair of Corporate Finances and they had two corporate finance attorneys. This lawyer didn't draw a dime in client origination and he was clueless what social media really is. Social media is content, information targeted to a specific audience. To be effective, it can't be advertising because the audience will treat it the way people treat those Nigerian scam emails, they will tune it out. Social

media is like the icebreaker at a singles scene, it is a way to start a conversation with the audience you are trying to target. It is a cost effective way to build a reputation that will grow your business and raise your profile to the level where you're invited as a guest speaker to further spread your message and increase your network of admirers.

## Who is the audience?

The audience depends on your practice. I was always lucky that I knew that the closest way to my ideal retirement plan sponsor clients were financial advisors.

advisors and individuals while large firm corporate attorneys would target in-house legal counsel.

## Target the audience

The way you should write is based on the audience you are trying to target. Clearly, my humor writing and lack of blue book skills may not be the right fit for in-house counsel and a treatise isn't going to work for a non-lawyer. You will get the positive interaction when content fits the audience.

## Social media is a tool

Before I had kids, I took golf lessons and Kenny, my golf teacher told me that a gold club is just a tool; it's how you use it. Since I don't play anymore, the tools are collecting dust in the garage. Social media is a tool and if you don't make a dedication to create content, it's a useless tool. You need to create content whether it's an article or a blog on a very frequent basis. You can't continue a conversation with your audience after just one article; you need a steady stream of content.

## JDSupra

It is no coincidence that my law practice took off after I started using JDSupra to stream my content. While I'm not on their payroll or a shareholder, I am one of their biggest cheerleaders because the fact that you are reading this article is proof positive of their good work. Not only is JDSupra a vault for your work, it's an effective tool of distributing your content. The integration with LinkedIn and Facebook are great, the added bonus is that they syndicate your content through their Twitter feeds, as well as some of the independent websites that stream relevant JDSupra content. While they are an



My audience was financial advisors who would eventually invite me to meet their clients because my content helped these financial advisors recruit and maintain their client base. It was articles geared towards helping plan sponsors take better care of their retirement plans as well as letting financial advisors know some good tips to help them expand their business. So in developing a social media plan, you have to identify your audience, i.e., the people that can become clients or get you clients. I would assume that estate-planning attorneys would gear articles to financial

intricate part of any lawyer's social media campaign, they can't create the content for you; you still have to produce articles for distribution. In addition, you must augment their social media distribution with your own. Stream the content by positing it to relevant LinkedIn groups, your Twitter and Facebook accounts, as well as email or through Constant Contact. The attorneys at your firm can also syndicate to their clients, of course unless you work at my old law firm (they won't, except there was one).

### Who should write?

Who should write the content for your law firm? Those that can write well-written content for the targeted audience. I am an effective writer of content because of my student journalism experience. If my targeted audience were large law firms, I'd have a problem because my legal writing wasn't very good (I can do a 1,000 write-ons during law school and I'm sure 999 times I wouldn't make a journal). So find the attorney who can write clearly and succinctly for the right audience. At my old law firm, the largest producer of social media was the law firm administrator, who would write articles for law firm management and I'm sure it never made the law firm a dime (sorry, Fred). Find associates and partners who can write content that can help build your firm's brand image, as well as developing goodwill that can help generate business down the line.

### Facilitate the distribution of content

For my old law firm, I only wrote three articles in one year while I can write 4-5 a month on my own. Why? Well it could take 4-6 months for an article to be proof read, approved by the ERISA partner, the advertising committee (yes, that one guy), the law firm administrator, and the managing attorney. That's a lot of bureaucracy for a mid-size law firm. While there needs to be an oversight of any content distributed with your firm's name on it, you need to make sure that the process to review the work will expedite content and not thwart it. Distributing yesterday's news tomorrow won't help you develop a following of

your firm's content.

### Blogging

Aside from just writing articles, the other major outlet there is blogging. Blogging requires at least 2 posts a week and it should be shorter pieces of content



than one of your articles or newsletters. I compare blogging and writing articles to how my favorite band Aerosmith records music. Compare articles to songs and compare blogging to riffs that can eventually develop into songs. Many of my JD-Supra articles were developed first as blog pieces. Then distribute your blog posts through LinkedIn by positing it on profiles and relevant groups, as well as Facebook, and Twitter. Blogs can also be recycled as part of an e-mail blast. Great content is evergreen content; it can be constantly reused in different formats in reaching out to your audience.

### Interaction with old media

Like most law firms, my old law firm had a public relations firm. 5 years later, I still don't know what they did. When I went on my own, I hired a p.r. firm and it was an absolute disaster. Getting your name in the newspaper is great, but it won't develop clients for you. When I hired my own p.r. advisor, I was told that my dream in appearing in the Wall Street Journal would take time after I appeared in other publications. After firing the p.r. advisor, I did appear in The Wall Street Journal two months later, because I posted an opinion of mine regarding the use of exchange traded funds in 401(k) plans on Twitter. Getting in the Journal was great, but I never had a client call me. Appearing in what I call old media (print and

television) helps you build credibility, but social media fleshes out that credibility. My late father in law once said: "If your mouth is shut, people will think you're stupid. If you open your mouth, then they know you're stupid." On the flipside, appearing in old media, people will think you're smart. Reading your well-written social media, then they know you're smart.

### Social media is like growing a garden

My old law firm was behind in social media because the hierarchy thought it was either advertising or that it couldn't get clients even though the managing attorney told me how successful her husband was at it with his own law practice. Social media

is a conversation starter with potential business partners and clients, so it takes time to develop business. It may also lead to avenues that are more important than just a client or two, it can improve your firm's stature, I have been invited to speak at national events around the country just based on the articles and content I have developed in just the past two years. In the end, I succeeded because I did less talking and more doing and the doing was drafting content that potential business partners, sources of referrals, and clients would appreciate it. It's that simple. Sorry, Lois.

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