

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Getting Back to Basics: Networking Through the Internet - A Webinar from Kevin O'Keefe

This afternoon, I had the good fortune to sit in on a webinar put on by [Kevin O'Keefe](#) & [LexBlog](#), focused on getting back to basics. The topic was on [networking through the internet](#) (I'll post the link to the recording when it's up on Kevin's blog) and since I've seen Kevin speak before, I knew the audience was in for some valuable information, which I'd like to pass along to you.



Since we've already talked about [why social media should matter to lawyers](#), the next step is to talk about "well, here I am, now what?" Kevin did a great job of addressing that question and more in his webinar and focusing on the concepts that mean the difference between success and failure.

He started by talking about advertising, and that's something we've gotten a lot of requests from our members about. Without fail, every six months or so, I'll get an email or see someone in person who says "shouldn't we be advertising as a Network?" As a marketer, I love advertising - I watch tv for the commercials, enjoy a really snappy, slick print ad, and even like to see how some television commercials translate to radio.

But for our group, it's not the right fit - to do it successfully would require a major campaign and lots of money, which is generally what I tell our attorneys. But now I can also tell them this - Kevin said that only 14% of people trust advertising. He reasoned that the percentage who trust lawyer advertising is even lower, and said that essentially, websites are advertising too.

He wasn't advocating not having a website, but his point was valid - if people don't trust advertising, where's the value in investing a lot of marketing dollars into it and websites? People are much more likely to trust someone they know, and this could be extended to someone they only "know" online. So developing an online presence and empowering your online friends to be your word of mouth advertising is far more valuable than putting together a slick ad campaign or spending most of your marketing dollars on a website, particularly for smaller and mid-sized firms.

Okay, so with all my previous arguments and Kevin's enthusiasm for pursuing social media, I'm sure many of you are still wondering how to be successful and efficient (since as we know, lawyers are very busy people).

Important Concepts for Internet Networking

Kevin talked about some important concepts, starting with my favorite:

- "*Engage*" - You've got your blog, you're writing posts and publishing them - think about who you're engaging with in your audience as you're writing.
- "*Networking*" - think about what you're doing to network, specifically, what are you doing to increase the number of people you're networking with.

An important caveat here, which Kevin mentioned as well, is that numbers aren't everything in social media. You'll see people contact you on Twitter offering to help you increase your followers and maybe it's an ego boost to have 50,000 people following what you say. But that group might be made up almost entirely of spammers or people who don't share your interests, either personally or professionally. Those aren't the people you want to be connecting with - focus on the quality of followers, not quantity. Read [this article](#) in the New York Times on "If you think social media marketing is worthless, you're doing it wrong" for some additional insight.

Kevin added that networking on the internet (like networking in person) isn't just about finding someone who is related to the exact area of law that you practice. It's about connecting with people who share your interests. Maybe the twitter follower who is into fly fishing like you are turns into a client at some point. You never know where business can come from.

- "*Relationships*" - That's the cornerstone of our Network, because when you build relationships with people, they trust you. And that trust leads to business.

In this case, Kevin said that the outcome of engaging, networking and building relationships is developing a word of mouth reputation.

He cautioned against getting into social media and thinking the legal work will immediately start to come in - it's similar to joining a network like ours. When you join a network or start out in social media, you need to begin engaging with people and developing relationships, and also

looking how you can help them. In social media, that may be through sharing an article you found that might be of interest to your followers, passing on a link, or answering a question.

What's Your Strategy?

This is all part of having a strategy and Kevin suggests that that strategy focus on four groups of people:

1. Clients
2. Prospects
3. Referral sources
4. Influencers

For clients and prospects, write down who you want to represent and on what types of matters. To create relationships with influencers, you've got to show them that you're listening. How can you do this? If you read an interesting article in the New York Times that you can offer some perspective on, write a blog on it and quote the author and the piece. Then send them an email and let them know you've mentioned them. You might ask, "why would they care?" Authors, conference organizers, and other influencers like their information to be shared on social media.

Once you've gotten this initial contact, offer to connect with them on LinkedIn. Maybe send them an email the next time you're in their city so you can meet up - start to build a relationship with them.

Kevin offered some important concepts to keep in mind while internet networking:

- **Social media equity:** This is about getting people to trust you. It's important because as we mentioned earlier, people trust information that comes from their friends more than they trust a Google search.
- **Trust:** If you can be a trusted, reliable authority who shares valuable information, it's only a small step to being hired as a lawyer. Trust is built not just by sharing your own blog posts, but by sharing other information your network might see as valuable. This shows you as someone who cares about helping others.
- **Listening:** It's more important to listen than to just put out content. Kevin pointed out that people compliment good listeners, but they don't compliment people who talk a lot and interrupt others. He suggested thinking of the internet as a conversation.

Kevin talked about the concerns he hears from firms whose attorneys are just beginning to blog, including both ethical issues and the issue that in the past, if someone made a mistake while out on the golf course, only a few people knew about it. But today, the internet offers a much wider audience. He agreed that these concerns are valid, but that they can be handled. His advice was "don't be an idiot."

He also talked about the idea that social networking is "just for younger people," pointing out that Generation Y is not 14 years old. So it's not insignificant that 75% and more use social media to get their information and build relationships. [Betsy Munnell](#) agreed via Twitter, saying "Stop writing Y off."

Another question he gets is "do I have to be perfect?" And the answer is no - no one knows what they're doing because it's all still new to everybody. Kevin said "you're going to need to let your hair down a little bit," which he added can be tougher to do in larger firms. As [Laura Gutierrez](#) pointed out via Twitter, it can also be hard to do in smaller firms as well.

Parting Advice to be Successful Internet Networkers

Kevin's parting advice was:

- Do the things that bring about ROI.
- Use an RSS reader.
- Use LinkedIn: Don't just sign up for it, but use it. When you meet someone and get their card, connect to them on LinkedIn.
- Use Twitter: it's valuable for engagement and professional development.

Kevin said the key to blogging is **FLEE** - **F**ind (the conversation), **L**isten, **E**ngage, and **E**mpower (your audience, by providing value). He finished up by saying that demonstrating leadership both in your firm and in the legal profession in terms of social media is so important - it shows people that lawyers care and helps to make the law more accessible to them.

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