

# Legal Marketing's Next Frontier

BY MARK BEESE



About five years ago, I was at a Denver Press Club dinner honoring Bob Costas with the Damon Runyon Award.

Sitting next to me was an undergraduate student from the University of Colorado, who also received an award for student journalism. We talked about the use of technology in college.

"We didn't have e-mail in college," I said, dating myself. "I can't imagine how easy it is to communicate with friends, now that everyone has e-mail."

The student shocked me with her reply. "Oh, I hardly ever use e-mail," she said. "Sometimes I need to e-mail a teacher or my parents, but I LIVE on Facebook." Live? Really? "Yes—I know where all my friends are, what they are doing, and I can chat with them anytime I want. I have more than 700 friends on Facebook."

Interesting. E-mail is now an old folks' technology. Social media has replaced it, and at that point in time if you weren't in college you couldn't even join Facebook. A few months later, Facebook opened its doors to non-students and the CU student journalist was my first "friend." Today, Facebook has more than 500 million active users and I have more than 900 "friends," a few of whom I actually know personally. The average age of today's Facebook user is 38 years old and more than 70 percent of users live outside the United States. The hottest topic in professional services marketing today is how to use social media for business development.

Many people view Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media sites as frivolous, perhaps best used as a tool to trade recipes on the

Internet. However, some attorneys and other professionals have found ways to leverage social media effectively to market their practices.

## Marketing Fundamentals

Before we get to some strategies and tips, let's review some legal marketing fundamentals:

- Clients want help solving legal and business problems they don't have the expertise or resources to solve on their own.
- Clients seek attorneys who are experts in their area of law, give outstanding client service, and provide value for their services.
- Clients tend to hire attorneys, not firms.
- Clients rely on referrals and references in their selection of attorneys and they check their credentials to make sure they are the "real deal."
- Clients hire attorneys who they trust to solve their problems.

Many things have changed since AOL opened the Internet to consumers

for recommendations for outside counsel.

- GCs check the Association of Corporate Counsel's online database of law firm performance before considering a firm.
- GCs Google first, call later. When considering a law firm or attorney, in-house counsel Google the firm and the attorney's name to see what comes up, read articles written by the attorney, visit the firm website, check out the attorney bios, and search social networks like LinkedIn, Martindale-Hubbell Connected, JD Supra, and Legal OnRamp for information. If you or your firm doesn't show up—especially on Google—you may never get the call.
- GCs increasingly are looking for attorneys with high levels of knowledge and experience in very narrow specialties. If it's clear that an attorney's expertise is a close match with a client's specific need, they have a much better chance of getting short-listed.

## Substantive Content Marketing

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in 1983, but the basics of legal buying behavior are not among them.

How clients get their information to make legal service purchases has changed dramatically, and chief among these changes is their use of social media.

## GCs Use Google

Last year, I facilitated a discussion among more than 100 chief legal officers and general counsel on their use of social media. Here's what I heard:

- GCs use social media to query peers

Although law firm branding has become a trend over the past decade, lawyers have used techniques such as public speaking and writing articles to develop their reputation as an expert and trusted adviser for much longer. Even Abraham Lincoln gave speeches for business development purposes. A notice that appeared in a Springfield, Ill., paper, read, "Hon. A. Lincoln will lecture before the Springfield Library Association, at Concert Hall, Monday night, Feb. 21st, at 7 ½ o'clock. Admission twenty-five

cents.”

By providing practical and insightful information that helps clients understand a legal issue or navigate a business challenge, attorneys position themselves as experts and trusted advisers. It worked for Lincoln and it can work for you! I call it substantive content marketing. As it turns out, social media is a much more effective tool than giving speeches at the local library.

### Google Loves Blogs

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 88 percent of adult American Internet users rely on search engines for finding information and 81 percent use search engines to find information about a service they may buy. Legal blogger Jayne Navarre writes in her book “Social Lawyers: Transforming Business Development” that 80 percent of in-house counsel prefer Google to any other search engine and that 60 percent of GCs are making more use of sites such as Wikipedia and YouTube.

So, what’s the best way to get your substantive content in front of Google-searching clients? Google loves blogs. Blogs are content-rich websites, have lots of links to and from the site, are often linked to a firm website, and are punctuated with juicy keywords. Plus, blogs are inexpensive and simple to set up.

Blogs are SEO (search engine optimization) machines. Many companies spend thousands of dollars and oodles of time trying to gain a coveted first-page placement on a Google search. Many of the legal bloggers I know have gained that position simply by maintaining a well written blog.

According to LexBlog President and blogger Kevin O’Keefe, as of November 2010, 62 percent of the Am Law 200 use blogs—a 420 percent increase from 2007. There is no accurate number of law blogs today, but LexBlog has created

more than 3,000 in the past decade.

Here are some tips on creating a successful blog:

- Choose a blog name and URL (Web address) that best matches the purpose of your blog to increase your ranking in search results. Think [rockymountainrealestatelaw.com](http://rockymountainrealestatelaw.com), not [bobthelawyerguy.com](http://bobthelawyerguy.com).
- Hire a professional designer to reflect your brand and image. If you want to be seen as an expert and a trusted professional, your blog (and website) needs to be professionally designed.
- Make sure you include a disclaimer that essentially says, “Reading this blog doesn’t make you a client and I’m not giving legal advice.”
- Link the blog to your firm’s website, your bio, related blogs, and Web resources.
- Have a healthy mix of original content and commentary content. Original content is information that you thought up and is helpful to your audience. It may include your insights, opinions, and recommendations. Commentary content is a post that refers to a news article, someone else’s blog post, or other content that you comment on, applying an idea or insight that is helpful to your audience. Original content takes more time to write, but is often most valuable. Commentary content can be typed in a few minutes, but too much of it is boring to readers and doesn’t fully highlight your brilliance.
- Post updates regularly. Set a goal of posting at least once a week.
- Consider a group blog with multiple authors from your firm, legal network, or other colleagues. You share the burden of writing while benefitting from having a blog. Some of the best legal blogs, or blawgs, are jointly written, such as [slaw.ca](http://slaw.ca).
- Liberally use keywords that relate

### Connect with the DBA Online

You can follow the DBA on our website, [denbar.org](http://denbar.org), and Facebook at [Facebook.com/DenverBarAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/DenverBarAssociation).

You also can find the Denver Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, the Community Action Network of the Denver Bar Association, and Metro Volunteer Lawyers on Facebook. If you’re still looking to “like” more bar-related pages, you can connect with the Colorado Bar Association and CBA-CLE at [Facebook.com/ColoradoBarAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/ColoradoBarAssociation).

Find us on Twitter at [Twitter.com/DenverBarAssoc](https://twitter.com/DenverBarAssoc). Connect on LinkedIn at [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com/company/denver-bar-association). Select Groups Directory under the Groups tab and enter Denver Bar Association in the Search keyword field.

### Still looking to connect?

Follow the CBA-CLE blog, *The Learned Lawyer*, at [TheLearnedLawyer.com](http://TheLearnedLawyer.com). It highlights people in the Colorado legal community and upcoming events. You also can read articles from *The Docket* there. Look for the tag, *Docket eFile*.

Get the latest on Colorado Law at CBA-CLE Legal Connection at [CBACLELegalConnection.com](http://CBACLELegalConnection.com). The site offers updates, resources, and information on case law, legislation, rules, the courts, and more.

### Want updates delivered to you?

You can subscribe via e-mail or to the RSS feeds of *The Learned Lawyer* and CBA-CLE Legal Connection. Legal Connection also offers RSS for practice-specific updates.

to your practice, industry, and clients in your posts to increase traffic from search engines.

- Consider your blog as a conversation with an unseen audience. The best blogs encourage dialogue through comments and reciprocal postings. Set your blog settings to accept comments after you review them (to avoid comment spam). Respond to comments, even if they disagree with you. The idea is to explore ideas, not to always be right. Read other blogs and news sources with related content and comment on their posts, encouraging dialogue.
- Use images, illustrations, and graphics without violating copyright laws. Images with [Creativecommons.org](http://Creativecommons.org) rights are a great resource.
- Be yourself, but spell check. Develop your blog voice. Be interesting. It's OK to have an opinion, as long as it doesn't

often would show up in the first page of results. Clients who wanted more information would contact him, often resulting in a new engagement. Reporters and conference planners found Piche through the same process, resulting in increased media coverage and speaking requests.

### Twitter: Following Micro-Blogging

Effective marketers use social media tools like Twitter to drive traffic to their blogs and to create communities of like-minded people, including potential clients. Twitter sometimes is called micro-blogging because posts are limited to 140 characters. You will find that the more frequently you tweet practical and relevant information, more people will start to follow your tweets.

Here are a few Twitter tips:

- Sign up at [twitter.com](http://twitter.com), but download a free application like TweetDeck to

beyond work—just not too much. We really don't care what type of sandwich you had for lunch.

- Use Twitter to communicate and promote your published articles and speaking gigs.
- Use hashtags (i.e., #employmentlaw or #whistleblower) to tag your tweets so that those who are searching for a term can easily find your posts. This way, your tweets can be effectively broadcast to an audience much wider than your followers.

### Facebook: Share and Be Creative

The Twitter tips apply to one's Facebook status updates, as well. In fact, you can set up your Facebook account so that your tweets show up as your Facebook status update.

Commercial use of Facebook is in its infancy, but it seems as though new applications are launched every day that

“The social media world is fraught with ethical dangers for attorneys, which is a topic for a different article. My advice to clients who want a social media policy is this: Don't do stupid things.”

present an ethics problem. Don't just report; show why an issue is important to you and your audience. Just don't forget to proofread.

Does it work? Ask Greg Piche, who started the Healthcare Law Blog in 2003 while working for Holland & Hart (Piche now practices under Singularity Health Law, PLLC and you can follow his blog at [singularitylaw.net](http://singularitylaw.net)), Piche stuck to a regime of four original posts a month, sometimes more. Within a few years, more than half of his new clients found him through his blog. Where most of his work prior to blogging came from Colorado, new clients originated from Pennsylvania to Hawaii. Clients searched for a specific legal topic and Piche's blog

use the service efficiently. Choose a Twitter name that reflects you or your practice.

- Search for people you know (and respect) in your legal or business market, scroll through their followers and add those you would like to follow (and have them follow you).
- Tweet regularly, but not too much. A couple of times a day is not too much.
- Tweet about and link to your blog posts, relevant news items, legal trends, court decisions (unless they involve your clients), legislation, and other bloggers' posts. Use your tweets to reflect your insight and knowledge.
- Be real. Reveal some things about yourself to show that you have a life

could be helpful in marketing your practice.

Tips for using Facebook:

- Make sure that anything you post on Facebook—from your profile to pictures—reflects the image you want to portray to the world. Don't reveal anything that might be offensive or compromise your client relationships.
- Manage your privacy settings carefully. Facebook reports that only about 20 percent of users customize their privacy settings. Don't assume that anything you post via social media is or ever will be private.
- Take ownership of your firm's Facebook page. Edit the page appropriately, including its privacy settings, and

monitor the “wall” to assure that the visitor posts are appropriate.

- Consider starting an interest group and invite clients, potential clients, and thought leaders to participate in online discussions.
- Use your or your firm’s updates to communicate with your audiences about changes in the law, speaking events, firm events, and related industry or business organization events. Use your status updates for announcements, such as new attorney and partner promotions. Communicate your firm’s *pro bono* and community involvement, as appropriate.
- Leverage and promote blog posts through status updates. Link your blog to your firm’s Facebook page.
- Find innovative ways to use Facebook to provide original content and insights. For example, consider starting a monthly 10-minute YouTube broadcast (a video blog, or vlog), and post a link to the video on Facebook.

In Colorado, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck has done an outstanding job using these and other techniques to promote the firm on Facebook. Jim Thomas from Minor & Brown is a rock star with Facebook – friend him.

### **LinkedIn: Connect with Pros**

LinkedIn has more than 85 million users. It is considered the premier business online networking site that allows users to connect with and seek introductions from people they know. LinkedIn provides the savvy social networker with a slew of business development opportunities:

- Spend time to create an accurate profile. A descriptive profile not only will help people find you but is also a strong personal branding tool. Write a compelling summary that reflects your practice, the type of clients you serve, the industries and markets you know, and what

makes you different. LinkedIn profiles are indexed by Google and other search engines—it’s like putting your résumé online.

- Connect with people you know. With 85 million users, you’re bound to know a few. Search for people that you know, scroll through their contacts, and add those who know you. LinkedIn is a numbers game—the more connections you have, the wider the network available to you for introductions. For example, today I have 1,500 first-level connections, giving me access to 9.4 million people for introductions and searches.
- Write recommendations for others, and ask for recommendations from those you serve.
- Join or create groups that correlate to your client’s industry and interests.
- LinkedIn is constantly creating new ways to integrate other content into one’s profile, including streaming your blog feed, connecting to your Martindale-Hubbell listing, linking to your documents on JD Supra, and previewing PowerPoint presentations on slide-share.com. Explore how you can leverage your original content on LinkedIn.

### **Legal Networks: Social Networking for Attorneys**

There are a number of legal social networking sites, each offering a unique twist or benefit. Martindale-Hubbell Connected is a “gated community” for lawyers and in-house counsel. Many private practice lawyers have found a connection to in-house GCs through MHC’s interest groups. JD Supra and Legal OnRamp provide attorneys a channel to post articles, newsletters, form documents, and other content to a searchable repository. Check them out to

see if they work for you.

### **Caution and Challenge**

The social media world is fraught with ethical dangers for attorneys, which is a topic for a different article. My advice to clients who want a social media policy is this: Don’t do stupid things.

The list of stupid things an attorney can do online is long, and can include violating ethics rules by posting information about clients, expressing an opinion contrary to a client’s interest, posting embarrassing photos or statements, revealing private information, and saying false or negative things about your firm.

The challenge of social media and law firm marketing is to find new ways to communicate with your audience, provide value to your clients, and strengthen your reputation and brand. The tools are constantly changing, creating exciting opportunities and creative channels for marketing.<sup>D</sup>

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### **Mark Beese’s Resources to Learn More about Social Media**

- Introduction to Social Media (Video): [commoncraft.com/video-social-networking](http://commoncraft.com/video-social-networking)
- Social Media Revolution 2 (Video): [vimeo.com/11551721](http://vimeo.com/11551721)
- ABA Journal Blawg 100: [abajournal.com/magazine/article/aba\\_journal\\_blawg\\_100](http://abajournal.com/magazine/article/aba_journal_blawg_100)
- Real Lawyers Have Blogs: [kevin.lexblog.com](http://kevin.lexblog.com)