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## MANAGEMENT

### Using Social Media and Other Cool Tools to Rock Your PR

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**M**y attorney clients often share that they “want to get in the papers” as a result of something they consider “news worthy,” but frequently they don’t understand the overarching goals and objectives to a well-defined public relations program. This is key to undertaking efforts to increase awareness and creating a certain perception in front of your “public.” Examples of this may be the “aggressive litigators who fight for a company’s rights” or “the innovative problem solvers who stay a step ahead to prevent business issues.”

Before embarking upon a variety of possible public relations tactics, ensure your firm is clear on its stated objectives and how it will measure the success of its public relations efforts.

Outlined below are a few ways firms can build awareness among key target audiences, generate ongoing PR buzz and build a strong reputation as experts in a firm’s chosen service areas.

#### The Essential Press Release

Creating a press release and distributing it through many media channels (print and online) can be a very simple way to develop a higher sense of aware-

ness for a firm’s services and lawyers. Ways to leverage a well-crafted press release include:

- Add it to the firm website under “News”;
- Post it on the firm’s blog and under relevant practice area news;
- Post it on other relevant blog sites;
- Link to it on your social media profiles (LinkedIn and Facebook) and share it with others;
- Push it out to the firm’s social media channels;
- Send it to trade associations and other business and legal publications (print and online);
- Share it with free press-release listing sites; and
- Post it to YouTube identifying it with strategic keywords.

#### Media Pitches

Similar to the press release, pitching the media (print and online) on firm news or breaking stories can be a very effective way to garner press coverage. Pitches should be concise, developed from the reader’s perspective of “why should this matter to me” and be directed to the appropriate media contacts. If handled any other way, the firm will look amateurish and sloppy. Often, if

you clearly outline your case for covering a story and provide only the pertinent information, it is more likely to be covered.

#### Proactive Media Relations

Different from the media pitch is the submission of op-ed and byline columns. Op-ed and byline articles can contribute significantly to increasing a firm’s visibility, name recognition and credibility. They are a cost-effective and underutilized way to reach newspaper and website readership. As with the media pitch, submitting an op-ed or byline article can sometimes be tricky. By following such simple steps as focusing on one topic which has a local flavor and outlining how your topic is relevant to a publication’s readers will increase the chances of having your op-ed piece published.

#### Media Sourcing

Selecting key lawyers to be an on-call media resource can be an effective means to heighten a firm’s public relations program. Print, online and broadcast media are always seeking sharp, media-savvy lawyers who can aptly discuss issues occurring in the 24/7 media.

Send news producers, editors (print and online) and blog moderators an email with your bio to inform them that you are interested to discuss topics within your specific practice areas. Provide them with your office and cell phone numbers and email address, and follow up with a phone call. By leaving a detailed, concise message outlining the key points of your “pitch,” you will likely receive a return call if the media contacts have a need for your informa-

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tion and like what they hear. Brevity is key here.

#### **Podcasts and Webinars**

It has never been easier and more affordable to connect with and inform your clients and prospects than by leveraging technology. Instead of hosting a practice seminar at a local facility with a reception following, plan and schedule a podcast or webinar right on your target audience's desktop. You can reach and engage a wider audience, reduce out-of-pocket costs, and deliver an impressive presentation (with creatively-produced handouts) all without leaving your office. The message this can send is powerful and speaks to your regard for your audience's time. Even invite the media and cross-post the podcast or webinar file to your website and LinkedIn profile.

#### **Social Media Tools**

If your lawyers do not already have a properly populated LinkedIn profile, participate in practice-specific listservs and LinkedIn groups, blog with some frequency and contribute to your firm's Facebook community page, your firm is missing the proverbial Web 2.0 public relations boat. Yes, it matters if your objective is to stay "top of mind" in front of clients, prospects, referral sources and the key influencers in your broad network.

Engaging in these types of activities is a new reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Jump on board and develop a coordinated plan to launch and maintain a strong online firm presence. Often, social media initiatives can be managed in house but if not, there are outside resources that will deftly handle these important tasks for the firm.

One of the most unexplored opportunities for effective PR is blogger relations. Pitching bloggers can be a slippery slope, so keep in mind the following considerations:

- **Be relevant:** Mass emailed press releases do not work with bloggers. Review the blog's categories and previous posts and only offer related news.
- **Personalize:** Blogging is a much more personal expression than writing articles in mainstream publications, and bloggers respond to personal messages. Generic and poorly written pitches will generally be ignored.
- **Make it easy:** Write a summary of your news with links to full versions and related resources. Many bloggers will copy and paste your summary, add a few of their own comments and link to the news release.
- **Be persistent:** Do not be discouraged if your news does not get picked up right away or if you do not receive a response to your pitch. Be persistent and resubmit it.

Fundamental press release optimization includes keyword research, placing keywords in the correct positions and frequency in the release and adding links. A social media release deconstructs the content offered in a regular press release into sections that can be more easily scanned and used by journalists to glean story ideas.

The social media press release has come into its own in the last few years. Below are some of the elements you will want to include for best coverage:

- **Headline;**
- **Abstract or summary;**
- **Key points as bullet points;**
- **Quotes;**

- **About the firm;**
- **Logo graphic and headshots as appropriate;**
- **Media contact information;**
- **Links that enable the reader to bookmark the release;**
- **RSS subscription links; and**
- **A link to the release in a traditional format.**

After the release has been distributed and pitched, here are several postrelease distribution actions:

- **Post news release on firm website;**
- **Bookmark the release with social bookmark services; and**
- **Create an MS Word doc and PDF version of the release optimized with keywords and links and embed images/media.**

Success can be measured through:

- **Wire service reporting: impressions, reads, prints, pickups;**
- **Clipping services: online and offline pickups; and**
- **Web analytics: referring traffic and conversions as appropriate.**

By optimizing your press releases and adding social media, you can increase the distribution channels and take advantage of increased visibility to demand driven traffic.

#### **Bottom Line**

Given the emerging technologies of the new millennium, solo, small and midsize firms have leveled the public relations playing field with larger firms to promote themselves in today's increasingly competitive market. Commit to leveraging these simple public relations techniques to enhance your firm's visibility and boost awareness of your business development strategies and results. ■