



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

BY: LINDSAY GRIFFITHS OF THE ILN

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON

*Relationship Building
within the International
Lawyers Network*

POSTED IN [LEGAL MARKETING](#), [TWO FOR TUESDAYS](#)

Two Ways to Translate Content Marketing into Relationship Marketing

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON MARCH 8, 2016



Remember the good old days when we just did a bunch of things and didn't have specialized terms for them? Yep, these aren't them.

“**Social media marketing**” came about when social media platforms were introduced and we learned

how to use online technology to build relationships that we'd previously been building offline (that's tremendously simplified, but you get the idea). Then "**content marketing**" came along to describe what many law firms had been doing for years – writing about the law and its impact on their clients, and then sharing it with them. As a term, content marketing is broader than that, but in terms of the legal industry, that's pretty much the short version.

As we worked through the introduction of the terms, we separated people into two camps: the "broadcasters" and the "engagers." The "broadcasters" treated social media and content marketing as a means to spread their message around, but without the end goal of developing community with anyone. This isn't a bad thing, it's just a different valuation – some of the goals that firms/lawyers who embrace this philosophy might be pursuing are reputation enhancement, being considered a thought leader on a particular subject, etc. Many firms/lawyers have been successful, and even built a large following this way, and spend little or no time engaging with their audience.

"Engagers" are those who are more interested in developing relationships with their audience, and as such, use social media to hold conversations with peers, colleagues, potential clients, influencers and amplifiers, and even use their content in a similar fashion. Their end goals are to build community, develop business, and engage in other relationships that will ultimately strengthen their knowledge and practice.

This latter type of marketing is now being referred to as "**relationship marketing**" – aren't you happy you now know what to call it?

Regardless of the further segmentation of marketing types and more terms for us to remember to use, there are two ways you can use content specifically to build relationships. Earlier today, I was reading an article, "[It's not all about content, try relationship marketing](#)," and the author, Karen Repoli, makes some excellent points. Although she primarily references entrepreneurs in her post, the lessons are applicable for all of us, particularly lawyers, for whom relationship marketing is the best use of your marketing time (essentially, it's what you've always done, building your practice by word of mouth, just using social media and content to amplify your in-person efforts).

Repoli says:

“

Content marketing is talking with your audience but relationship marketing takes it to a deeper, more meaningful level. In fact, the trend today is not the newest social media network, it's relationship-building and community-building. Your direct success is dependent on the relationships you make with others. You could have a killer blog, high quality content, and lots of traffic but the rapport you have with your target

audience is all about engaging in a conversation with them. People that have chosen you as a source of information should be held in the highest regard. Once they have a great experience with you, they will be more likely to share you with others, bringing more traffic to your site and more potential customers.”

Lawyers, the great news is that despite your reputations for not wanting to pioneer new trends, you are ahead of the game on this. You have already been focused on the relationship-building side of content marketing for years, and it’s everyone else that’s playing catch up. This idea is something that [Kevin O’Keefe](#) has espoused since the early days of LexBlog, and we’ll see how some of his suggestions, and Repoli’s, along with my own make a difference with relationship marketing.

Tactic One: Inbound Marketing

“Inbound marketing” is another buzz-term that you’ll hear a lot this year. Rather than getting caught up in all of the fancy words, let’s just look at what it really means. Repoli says:

“

So what do you do to build relationships? Concentrate on actively pulling in your community, not passively waiting for them to engage. This is called inbound marketing. It involves attracting people to your product or service based on a common interest or desire to learn more. Inbound marketing is a form of two-way communication. The customer interacts with the business in a dialog. They post on the company’s Facebook wall, comment on business blogs, or take part in contests. When they participate, they become invested and engaged. People want to be in control of the information they get and this makes them more receptive to your message.”

For lawyers and law firms, this sounds great, right? You want an audience that is invested and engaged in your services as a lawyer. It can be a little bit difficult in our industry, because in-house counsel are admittedly more lurkers than participators when it comes to engaging online – they’re reading the information that you put out there, but they’re not very likely to comment on your blog post, or respond to your last LinkedIn share.

However, there are others that do, including influencers in the community and your peers and colleagues. While it may seem less valuable to you that your peers and colleagues would be engaging on your posts,

consider this – you may make a point in a blog post, for example, and a colleague adds additional commentary at the bottom that spurs a vigorous and robust discussion in the comments. Although in-house counsel aren't participating, they *are* seeing that conversation, and it becomes a secondary opportunity for you to showcase your talents as an advocate.

So, how do you build community?

- ***Get the conversation started:*** Repoli advocates asking a question of your audience at the end of your blog posts, but let's be honest, most of us are skimming posts these days and may not even get to the end of something that we're reading, even if we're interested in it. So although I still advocate what Repoli suggests, I would further recommend pulling that question OUT of the post, and using it in your social sharing – when you post to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc., don't use the title of the post, followed by the link. Instead, take the question you've posed and include the link with it. That way, you're not only encouraging your readers to engage with you in the comments section, but you're also inviting further conversation on each of those social media platforms. Keep an eye on these platforms to ensure that you're responding in a timely manner, and consider the conversations as fodder for future posts and content as well.
- ***Use content proactively:*** This has always been a favorite suggestion of mine from Kevin O'Keefe. He recommends that if you want to meet someone, be it a client or a journalist or another thought leader, quote them in your next blog post and craft your piece around something that they've said or written. Once the piece is finished, connect with them on LinkedIn (if you haven't already), and share the link with them, saying that you enjoyed their work enough to respond to it in your own post. Then continue that relationship offline – the next time you're in their city, ask to meet up for coffee, or try to schedule a call if you're not going to be traveling any time soon. The idea is that you're using your content as a starting point for your relationship with a person that you'd like to know better.
- ***Share, share, share:*** If you're a longtime reader of Zen, you know that I always advocate sharing other people's work within your own specialty, to give credence to the idea that you're a thought leader in that space. Not only is this good in general because it shows that you have your finger on the pulse of the industry, and you recognize that no one wants to hear only from you, but it's also an opportunity to engage. How? For those whose work you're sharing, tag them in each social share. When you retweet or directly share, this happens automatically, but if you're doing so directly from their site, include them in the posting so that they know you find their work valuable. Further engage the other members of your community by not just sharing the article – add your thoughts to it as well. Even better if you can come up with a question or provocative comment that will drive further conversation around the piece – that way, you're giving people a reason to further engage with you, as we described in the first point.

- **Engage back:** While the ultimate goal is to bring the engagement and community to you, you can also engage in other people's communities. When you're reading blog posts that you find valuable, and you have something to contribute, add to the conversation by posting a comment. Engage directly in LinkedIn groups and with status updates, not just to promote yourself and your own work, but to really have genuine conversations about areas of the law that you have a mutual interest in. Jump into Twitter chats that you're not hosting to ask questions and engage with presenters/hosts. All of those things will get people interested in YOU, and in addition to building relationships, it will also engender as sense of reciprocity in those people, who will then be more willing to engage in your communities with you.

Tactic Two: User Generated Content

This one is a little bit more difficult, because although both types of relationship marketing are, obviously and necessarily, dependent on others to be successful, this one in particular is harder to encourage.

About user generated content, Repoli says:

“

User-generated content (UGC) is defined as 'any form of content such as blogs, wikis, discussion forums, posts, chats, tweets, podcasts, digital images, video, audio files, advertisements and other forms of media that was created by users of an online system or service, often made available via social media websites.'
[Wikipedia] **When your audience creates comments or shares it is a powerful reference to others."**

As we all know, we can say good things about ourselves, but when someone else says them, they become exponentially more meaningful (that's why word-of-mouth has been so important for business development in the legal industry). UGC is basically getting that word-of-mouth piece to extend online.

Repoli suggests a few things that, for other industries, may work well, such as contests, requesting reviews, or asking for social shares. For various reasons, these aren't great in the legal industry (some ethical, some because they don't fit the persona of the profession well). But there are still ways that lawyers and law firms can work to encourage UGC.

- **Write for your audience:** This is something I always advocate, no matter what your goal is for your content – if you want your audience to read what you write, you have to make it something that they care about. But you can get even more tailored when you're doing this to develop relationships. For example, examine the problems that your audience needs solved. A lot

of lawyer blogs get started because the lawyers were already writing client alerts that were going out to their own clients, and they felt it made sense to translate these to a wider audience. Why not make that more clear in your writing? Ask for people to submit issues that you can consider for blog posts. This can get into the sticky area of people asking for specific help, but as lawyers, you know where the line is, and can point out to any submitters where they would need to speak with you on a client/attorney basis versus a blog discussion basis.

Use [Adrian Lurssen's suggestion](#) of basing blog posts on completing the sentence "Often, I am asked..." If it's a question that some people are asking you, there's a good chance that many others will want to know the answer as well. And your writing will then be supporting the idea that you answer client problems or legal questions that are submitted, encouraging others to submit their own.

- **Seed the content:** If you're a firm looking to get more user generated content, get your lawyers to help you out. I'm not suggesting that you do this in a disingenuous way, but transparently use their participation to gain traction around a particular effort. For example, if you'd like people to share photos of themselves in the community that your firm is in, get the lawyers in your office to participate by sharing their own such photos to your Facebook page. If you want to leverage a hashtag on Twitter for a conference, get the word out in advance, and then get your own lawyers who are attending the conference to kick off the tweeting. Maybe even show the tweet stream on a big screen in the main hall so that attendees see a diversity of tweets about the event coming through, and feel encouraged to participate. Ask all of the lawyers in your firm to like or comment on the substantive news shared by the firm and their colleagues on LinkedIn – the more that something is liked and shared, the more attention it will get among everyone's audiences, and the more engagement it will drive. Have the lawyers post interesting and thought-provoking content to any groups that the firm runs, to ensure that they appear (and are) robust, and encourage them to engage in and respond to all conversations in the group as well. When you give the appearance that others are truly engaged in the conversation, and able to share their own content freely, you give tacit permission to others to do the same.

While social media, and now content marketing, have leveled the playing field for law firms when it comes to showcasing talent, the real benefit for lawyers, in my book, has always been the ability to leverage the relationship development of these tools. Regardless of what you call it.

How are you and your firm taking advantage of relationship marketing to develop business?

