

Social media — as easy as a Hula-Hoop

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During the 1950s, a plastic circular tube containing a little bit of sand took the nation by storm. During the first six months after its introduction, more than 20 million Hula-Hoops were sold. The surprising thing about Hula-Hoops is not that they were so popular, but how few people could actually get those darn things to stay spinning around their hips. Twitter, LinkedIn and blogging are similarly easy to join, but can be much more challenging to master.

As I speak to lawyers all over the world about social media, I am continually greeted with the attitude that these tools are too hard for them, or that only the younger lawyers will have any luck figuring them out. This couldn't be further from the truth. Social media sites are easy to use, but to have success with them requires deliberate strategy. So for those who want a little bit more than I covered in my last post, "[Social media? Nothing to be afraid of](#)," here are five keys to jump-starting your social media strategy.

1. Craft a targeted bio on Twitter and LinkedIn. The most common mistake lawyers make is to tell people they are a good lawyer. "Experienced litigator with 20 years of experience." A much more effective way to design your bio is to show that you are a good lawyer: "Litigator to Fortune 100 companies." "Highest trial rating of practicing lawyers in the state of Kansas." "Adjunct professor at Harvard Law School." In economics, these are referred to as "signals" that identify you as being in a category separate from the average attorney. Even if you haven't been to Harvard, every lawyer has accomplishments that set him or her apart.

2. Learn the rules of the game. It goes without saying that you must proceed into the world of social media in a manner that is both ethical and professional. In fact, in a recent blog post by Jay Shepherd, [A two-word corporate blogging policy](#), he compares Harvard's legalese-burdened social media policies to a simple two-word social media policy: "Be Professional." When I talk to firms, I give them similar advice: That the purpose of the firm's social media policy is to keep attorneys from saying stupid things. Is it too much to ask that firms simply trust their lawyers to use good judgment online? (You don't need to answer that!) Make sure that whoever is using social media within the firm understands that whatever they say is out there forever. This can be a big positive, but it should encourage caution.

3. Practice. Just as it takes time to learn how to use the Hula-Hoop, it takes time to learn social media. Many lawyers never make it past signing up for Twitter or joining LinkedIn; after that, their accounts lie dormant like so many forgotten hula hoops. To

really get the hang of Twitter and LinkedIn takes time, especially during the first couple of months. One great secret to learning social media, though, is that people who use social media a lot love to give advice to those just starting out. You can easily go to the community directly to ask questions as you figure things out. One way is to ask questions directly on Twitter or in your LinkedIn groups. If you don't want to come across as if you don't know anything, you can simply send a personal message to someone who appears to be a veteran. Another approach is to simply search Google for your answer. There will likely be free YouTube videos that show you exactly how to achieve whatever it is that your looking to accomplish.

4. Be Focused. Social media may be the best tool ever invented for wasting time. (I'm warning you, don't go to <http://search.twitter.com> and put in the terms "Jimmer" or "#marchmadness" or insert your favorite basketball team if you want to get anything done at work. Especially not this week.) In all seriousness, I'm talking about focusing on your target market. Figure out who your ideal client is and find out which social networks he or she is most likely to use. If nobody you want to connect with is using social media, it might not be worth your time and energy. One caveat to remember, however, is that journalists from every major publication are using social media to find leads for stories and to find experts to interview. Even if your ideal client isn't using social media, these highly influential members of the media are online.

5. Be a collector or be a creator. Two personality types are of value in the social media community. The first are collectors, who find great content, collect it and pass it on. Generally, the content will pertain to just a few areas of interest to industries. Collectors are of value because they save everybody time — they basically are doing research that benefits all those interested in the topic. The second are creators. Creators are far more rare and more highly valued in the online community. Creators come up with original ideas and start discussions through blogging and various other platforms. Lawyers make excellent creators because they are highly educated and generally are good writers. If you don't want to collect information and share it, or create information of value, you may have a hard time making any headway online. Those who have the most success online are givers, and both collectors and creators are always giving.

Is there more to it than that? Of course there is, but I hope this helps lawyers who want to take a few steps beyond the basics. By just taking a few minutes a day for the next couple of weeks, you will already put yourself ahead of all those who created accounts and haven't touched them since. It's like learning to use a Hula-Hoop. You have to learn how to use one before you start jumping on one leg or jamming with five-at-a-time. Get going — the next hula hoop contest will be here before you know it.

Adrian Dayton is a lawyer, speaker and consultant helping lawyers and practice groups to create social media strategies and to develop the skills to build-high value

relationships online. You can grab a free chapter of his book, Social Media for Lawyers: Twitter Edition at <http://adriandayton.com>.