

*“The secret to happiness in life is setting low expectations.”* □ – My Uncle Lyman

Over the past few weeks, in the comments to my [ATL posts](#), there have been a number of questions about whether or not large law firms are bringing in real clients through their law blogs. While we have seen some instances of big wins that have come as a direct result of law blogs, these have been rare. What about the average law blogs? Have blogs lived up to the expectations of Biglaw firms?

My inquiry began by looking at all the law blogs of the [Am Law 100](#) firms. Click [here](#) to see the full list. As you can see from the chart, the majority of the law blogs come from just a few firms. In fact, 5 percent of the firms account for 49 percent of the total law blogs of the Am Law 100.

So I went directly to these firms and asked them: Have the law blogs been worth it? Have they been worth the money, the effort, and the (expensive) billable time of the attorneys?

I spoke to several law firm partners and marketing officers to find out...

Victoria Spang, Chief Marketing Officer of [Sheppard Mullin](#) — a pioneer in blogging, which leads the AmLaw 100 [with over 22 blogs](#) (two of which are bilingual, in Chinese and Spanish) — had this to say:

Yes. Given the number of blogs we have, they do consume a fair amount of attorney and staff time to maintain; that said, it’s an efficient way to let our clients and others know that we are on top of legal developments in areas of law that are of interest to them and in which we practice. We also take steps to push our blog content out to various distributors, e.g., Lexology and Mondaq, for maximum readership.

Bob Kleiber, Marketing and Communications Manager for [Dorsey & Whitney](#),

which is about to launch their seventh blog, had this to add:

We believe the increase in visibility and credibility can only help the blog authoring lawyers and the firm. That said, it takes the right kind of people to do a blog. It's like having a puppy. You can't just leave for a month and forget all about it. There has to be a commitment and a willingness to think long-term and see the bigger picture.

To be honest, in completing the interviews I truly expected to speak with a few naysayers complaining about blogs that failed to bring any business or attention. What I heard instead was just the opposite.

"The blog has absolutely been worth it," according to Susan Alter, a partner in the Los Angeles office of [Reed Smith](#), who blogs about lending issues at [The Law Lending Report](#). When I pressed Susan for some negatives, she observed that "only lawyers with unrealistic expectations have been disappointed. You need multiple contacts with potential clients to bring in business. Remember, as all the business development coaches say, 'Client development is a marathon not a sprint.' The biggest value I get from the blog is the subscribers get an email and a link every time I publish a new blog post — and they call. Some of those calls turn into business."

There were fairly clear expectations across the board, from all the law firms I spoke with with regarding client development through blogs. Law blogs were clearly having a positive impact — but it was often difficult to quantify.

According to Steve Bell, Chief Client Development Officer of [Womble Carlyle](#), which has [17 blogs and 60 regular contributors](#), "It's harder to draw a solid line between blogging and specific engagements, but I'm confident that at least some engagements have resulted directly from blogging. In law, it's hard to say that any one discrete marketing activity results in wins. Clearly though, in 2010, blogging is an important piece of the marketing mix."

One of the biggest measurable returns on investment from blogging according to the firms I spoke with were media mentions. The Womble Carlyle [Trade Secrets Blog](#) has garnered attention from the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Bloomberg News and National Public radio. What dollar figure can you put on that type of free publicity?

“Blogging is one of the ways that we are going to market in lieu of consumer advertising — a medium in which we once invested heavily,” added Steve Bell of Womble Carlyle. “These days the investment we’re making is not for dollars, but time and effort to generate blogs and other digital media posts.”

If the positive returns from law blogs are so obvious, why are so many law firms refusing to jump on board? The top 10 law firms in the Am Law 100 are home to over 17,000 attorneys worldwide — and only two law blogs, [Jackson on Consumer Class Actions & Mass Torts](#) (at Skadden) and [Product Liability Monitor](#) (at Weil).

Russell Jackson, a partner at [Skadden](#), spends 10 hours per week on his Consumer Class Actions & Mass Torts blog. When I asked him if it has been worth it — in terms of the time, money and effort put forth — this was his reply:

Yes, I think it has — but probably not in the way that most lawyers would conventionally measure its value. I haven’t had a single person cold-call me to hire me because of my blog. That’s hardly surprising, though, because I represent large corporations in mass tort and consumer class action matters, and that’s just not the way they go about hiring counsel.

Surprisingly, I do get a number of potential plaintiffs who call trying to hire me, despite the obvious defense orientation of my blog.

The primary benefit of my blog is that it has made me a better lawyer. I spend an average of ten hours a week on it, and because I know that people are counting on me to tell them about new decisions, I work on it even during times when I’d rather be doing something else. The result is that I

am much more disciplined about keeping up with recent developments in my field than I would be without the blog. And writing about new developments is very different from simply reading about them religiously. You internalize the cases by writing about them in a way that you don't simply by reading about them.

The most innovative attorneys and law firms have been using blogs for years now; will the rest of Biglaw follow suit anytime soon? I am too young to remember when email was first introduced into law firms, but I've been told there was a big uproar over whether or not email should be allowed in law firms. Was it a danger to privacy and confidentiality? Was it leaving clients exposed?

Then one day, suddenly everybody was using it. Perhaps that's how it will happen with blogs and social media at law firms. One cold February morning, when things are slow and there is nothing else going on, the rest of Biglaw will decide to log on and join the party.

Has your law blog failed to live up to your expectations? Do you know of any Am Law 100 blogs we've missed? Feel free to email me: [info@adriandayton.com](mailto:info@adriandayton.com).