

Nuts and bolts of social networking and social media for Utah Bar Association

Professional and business development in the law is all about relationships and word of mouth. Never before have lawyers been presented the opportunity to build relationships and word of mouth the way the Internet allows lawyers to do so today.

The key for lawyers is learning how to turn the digital dials by using social networks and media effectively. Learning here comes from trial and error.

Adapting to the cultures each social media present is like traveling to a foreign country. You get comfortable over time and keep the faux pas to a minimum as you start.

Here's an outline of items we covered in my presentation on the nuts and bolts of social networking and media at the Utah Bar Association Fall Forum.

Listening

Social media and social networking is a means of engaging others in a real and authentic fashion. Just as engaging others in person at a networking event requires you to listen first and talk second, listening is more important than producing content when it comes to networking online.

Listening online requires you to use listening tools that are easy to use and free. The first type of listening tool, and the most effective tool, is a news aggregator (RSS reader). A news aggregator enables you to follow relevant sources (blogs and mainstream media) as well as keywords and key phrases relevant to your work.

A news aggregator allows you to network with your target audience of clients, prospective clients, and the influencers of these two – bloggers, association leaders, reporters, and publishers.

By sharing items from your news aggregator on social networks you'll pick up a following from all three of these groups in your target audience. Engagement will ensue with prospective clients and influencers by virtue of what you share.

A news aggregator is also key for blogging in that you will be able to engage in the the existing "conversation" that is being reported and blogged upon.

Feedly is the most popular news aggregator. It's an application for various non-mobile web browsers as well as mobile devices running on iOS and Android.

[Feedly](#) compiles news feeds from a variety of online sources for you to customize and share with others. Feedly also allows you to monitor key words and key phrases from Google News.

Listening to subjects (key words and phrases), including names of organizations, terms of art in your area of law, case names, and legislation can be as, if not more, important than following sources.

[Flipboard](#) is a social network and news aggregator providing stories in an eloquent magazine-style format that users "flip through" on mobile devices, including the iPhone and iPad. Flipboard has proven popular among lawyers because of its intuitive interface that reads like a magazine with heavy imagery.

In addition to aggregating items from sources and subjects you have chosen, Flipboard pulls news and information that has been shared by those you are following on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook.

Flipboard recently added a feature where you may select topics and Flipboard will gather the best content from the most influential sources. The more you use this feature, the "smarter" Flipboard gets in delivering you the news and information you'd like to see. Think "Pandora for content."

Both Flipboard and Feedly allow you to share items from the respective applications directly to social networks, including LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Google+.

Twitter, LinkedIn's Pulse, and Facebook can also be used to listen to relevant discussion.

Blogging

Nothing equals a blog for enabling a lawyer to showcase their passion, experience, and care. Rather than publishing at third-party sites, lawyers have a home base they own forever. A law blog's content will be reached on searches from Google and can be strategically shared by a lawyer with clients and prospective clients.

Niche blogs tend to bring greater success than general topic blogs. Niche blogs become must-have content for certain people and identify the lawyer publisher as a “go to” lawyer in an area of the law and/or locale.

Niche blogs do not pigeonhole a lawyer into one type of work, though many lawyers have welcomed this development. Niche blogs open doors.

Clients seeking referrals to other lawyers will lead to networking opportunities. Other clients, because of the trusted relationship you have established, will look to you to do legal work related to your niche.

Discovering your passion, pinpointing your skills, identifying with your audience, solving a problem, and establishing your goals are the five steps to follow in defining your blog niche. Here’s a [post from my blog](#) which details these five steps.

Seven keys in building a law blog

- **Independent site and domain.** A blog should live on a separate site from a law firm website. This enables the blog and the blogging lawyer(s) to achieve a level of authority that could not be achieved through marketing, which is what you have with a blog in a website. Blogs separate from websites will generally be cited and shared much more. Such a blog also opens up the door to guest posts from and interviews with influencers who may shy from opportunities to participate in your website marketing.
- **Brand with blog title first.** Your blog is a publication published by law firm or lawyer. Think Nevada Water Lawyer on the spine of a treatise – subtly saying its published by the law firm of Smith and Jones. Claim that mantle of expertise a blog can give you.
- **Value of design.** First and last impressions matter. Like it or not, people judge lawyers by their dress and their offices. Bad design is only second to bad content in causing people not to find your blog credible.
- **Authenticating information.** Share information about you, your firm, what you do (especially as it pertains to your blog niche), and your office location on interior pages of your blog. This information separates you from those who may be blogging in their mom’s basement.

- **Comments.** Enable comments. It shows you listen. Not to worry, you will get few, if any comments. The only people more afraid of comments on a law blog than you and your firm are the people who may leave them. Those left tend to be academic and all comments should be moderated before they go live. Note that much law blog commentary today takes place on social networks – Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.
- **Viewable on social readers.** Content moves socially. Your blog must be easy to read and navigate for users on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.
- **Mobile first.** Forget non-mobile devices. Good mobile design and development, preferably responsive design, will render well on non-mobile devices. Upwards of 40% of your blog readers will soon be reading their content on mobile devices. Mobile users are also more apt to share blog content, something critical for your blog's distribution.

Four keys to blogging success

- **Write to the medium.** A blog post is not an article, alert, or email newsletter. A blog should be written in a conversational tone. Being real and authentic is key, no one else writes a lawyer's blog posts. Link liberally, blogging is a conversation where you are referencing what others are saying (writing). Make your posts scannable with bullets, block quotes, and brief paragraphs.
- **Be strategic.** Rather than just sharing information, think about who you can engage through a blog post. Referencing people and organizations in your posts will draw their attention to you and what you said. Offer the ability to do guest posts to referral sources, business leaders, and experts in the field. Email interview those same people with four questions – the answers can be turned into a post. These people will share word of you and your blog.
- **Be time relevant.** When legal, business, and consumer news relevant to your niche is breaking, the news will be reported and commented upon by bloggers and reporters. These bloggers will include other lawyers nationally and in your community. Blog then, not a week from then so you are relevant and get seen by those in the discussion.
- **Be socially relevant.** Tap into what is being discussed in your “community.” Listen to what is being written and engage those bloggers and reporters. You'll

be blogging on items people are most interested in and find more people sharing your blog posts on social media.

Elements of a post

- **Title of post.** Keep titles brief and descriptive of your post. Four to six words and sixty to seventy characters is optimal. Such a title will properly display in Google's search results, be easy to view by email and news aggregator subscribers, and be readable on mobile.
- **Image.** A clean image at the top of a post draws readers' eyes. Your post will be more attractive in news aggregators and on mobile devices. Look at popular news sites a la The New York Times or Mashable. Images are everywhere.
- **One point.** When you get to the second and third point, think of doing a second post. Blogs tend to cover a point and conclude.
- **Brevity.** There is no perfect word count for a blog, but a good blog post may be 350 to 500 words. We're not talking articles 1,200 words long. People, especially the influencers, consume a lot of blog content. They won't return to blogs with posts that are always long.
- **Keywords and SEO?** Do not blog thinking of keywords and SEO. Clear titles and valuable content that people can not get elsewhere, combined with sound technology, will get your posts at the top of Google search results.
- **Meta description.** Blog software enables you to insert a brief description of your post. Include a sound bite and it will appear below the title of your post in Google and attract readers.

LinkedIn

- **Personally crafted profile.** Take the time, maybe five or six hours to personally write your profile. Do not copy and paste from your law firm bio. Put information for each position you've held and what schools you attended. Why you worked here, what you learned, why you left etc. Get all of your contact info in – email, phone, cell phone, website, blog, Twitter, Facebook etc. Help people who are looking for you. Seek out recommendations, not endorsements, even from peers and mentors.

- **Build your network.** Connect with those people you meet in person and online. Send a personalized request to connect, it says a lot about you. Accept connections from people who work in areas relevant to what you do, don't limit connecting to those people you have met before. Dig your well before you get thirsty.
- **Share items in news update.** Feedly and Flipboard enable you to share blog posts and news on LinkedIn with an accompanying comment from you. By doing so LinkedIn will learn about your interests and suggest to others with similar interests that they connect with you.
- **Network with people you engage on LinkedIn.** People will share, comment upon, and like items you share. Take the opportunity to engage those people, as appropriate with an inMail on LinkedIn.
- **Take contacts face-to-face.** LinkedIn is a perfect stepping stone to meeting in person. Ask to meet with connections when traveling to their communities. Same for reporters, bloggers, and other influencers.

Facebook

- **Get comfortable with privacy.** The concept of a company monitoring your digital behavior for the benefit of advertisers leaves many lawyers uncomfortable. However, your web behavior has been monitored by Google and other companies for years. Your buying behavior has been monitored by grocers, drug stores, catalogues and credit card companies for decades. The benefits of relationships and word of mouth outweigh privacy concerns. Lawyers, of course, need to be discriminate in what they post.
- **Social is personal.** Relationships are built on a person to person basis. It is difficult, or impossible, to separate your personal and business life, especially on Facebook. Law firm pages do not work as well as Facebook personal accounts in building word of mouth and relationships.
- **Share personal and business items.** As you Facebook more, its algorithms will display your posts to those friends interested in the item you shared. Not every "Friend" sees everything you post. Get comfortable sharing those items you are passionate about, whether it be personal or business.

- **Add “Facebook Friends.”** Do not limit your “Friends” to just personal friends. Look also for people whose Facebook posts may add value to your life. Think of Facebook as the front page of your news brought to you by people you have come to trust. “Friends” may include people you meet in person and online. Overtime Facebook will suggest people you may wish to befriend. Consider reaching high to befriend people in business, the law, and the media when you have a fair amount of mutual friends.
- **Short-form posting.** Though a blog will always be a lawyer’s home base, Facebook is an excellent place to share a blog post or news story accompanied by a short post by you. Three to five paragraphs can work to generate “Likes” and “Comments.” Share your blog posts with an introductory comment or question.

Other resources

- [Real Lawyers Have Blogs](#) - thousands of posts archived in sections covering social media, blogging, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and more.
- [LinkedIn in an hour for lawyers](#) - ABA
- [Blogging in an hour for lawyers](#) - ABA
- [Twitter in an hour for lawyers](#) - ABA
- [Facebook in an hour for lawyers](#) - ABA
- [Social media for lawyers : The next frontier](#) - ABA