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The New Age of Rainmaking

Use social networking and multimedia to win clients

By Julianne M. Weinmann

The notable challenge of consistently winning clients who will bring life-time value to your firm is not new and it is still complex. The technology and the new media available for lawyers to reach a vast audience, or conversely, to target a narrowly defined niche audience, is evolving and becoming more sophisticated minute-by-minute. For those who can master the technology, the possibilities are endless. But the real answer to the question of “How do I use this new media to win new clients?” is more about merging traditional strategies and skills with these new and improved channels of communication.

How Do New Clients Find You Now?

Those seeking a qualified attorney for any serious matter still rely on referrals from friends and relatives or acquaintances with similar legal issues. Potential clients will also search the Web for lawyers in the practice area that deals with

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their legal issues and possibly check out bar association and other online directories that provide practice area-specific information along with lawyer credentials and ratings. If your law firm’s Web site ranks high in a Google search or appears as a link in the most prominent directories, those interested will venture there and learn more about you. On your Web site they should find your profile, including education, certifications, awards and published cases. On most law firm Web sites, visitors also view lawyer photos, read case summaries, success stories and testimonials, can search helpful FAQs and read articles on hot legal topics. On a content-rich Web site, visitors get a good idea of your specialties, level of experience, and point of view. But will they get to know you enough to trust you with their legal matter?

Here’s where the new media and multimedia win as lawyer marketing tools. If your Web site is mostly text, you are failing to address a huge part of the decision-making process — emotion. If your Web site is static, in terms of technology, you may as well be using a flip book to watch your favorite Oscar-winning film. I guarantee you: something will be missing. A

successful Web presence today is dynamic and interactive. To make your firm and your expertise come alive, you’ll need to get a grip on video. The popular Web site YouTube has over 100 million visitors searching for video to learn about products, services and people. Search engines also love video. To convey emotion, to educate and connect with your Web site visitors, and ultimately, to convert those visitors to clients, you need to be seen and heard online.

Blogging and Social Media, the Next Generation

So you have a dynamic, visitor-friendly Web site with loads of relevant content, and you engage your visitors with compelling video and offer them helpful educational tools. The next frontier for you and your firm can be blogging and using social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Although without careful planning, a blog can be a risky undertaking for lawyers, it is the best way to develop your online presence and to take the lead on the most important legal topics of the day. Blogs allow you to reach a vast audience and allow you to communicate with those interested in your particular practice specialty.

The best thing about a blog is the potential for an interactive conversation between the author and site visitors — achieving the “connection” you want with

your visitors in order to build the all-important trust relationship.

Social media Web sites are getting the most press as the next new marketing mavens. But actually, this media was created to facilitate online friendships, encourage group memberships and to foster online social relationships. So before venturing into this domain, it is best to check your own sociability "quotient."

Just how professionally sociable are you? Do you use traditional networking methods like Chamber of Commerce membership, and are you active in your local and state bar associations? Are you known as a good business "connector," frequently referring business clients to associates who can use their products or services? And more importantly, are you effective in any of the traditional methods of rainmaking — networking, publishing, speaking, group leadership, teaching and public relations?

If you have been using all of these traditional methods, then using the new media won't be a stretch, and for the brave and articulate, it offers unlimited opportunity.

Buzzmarketing Daily gives us a glimpse of what's happening in the world of social media and lists the "Top 10 Most Important Tweets of 2009." The number one tweet was: "We just made history. All of this happened because you gave your time, talent and passion. All of this happened because of you. Thanks" From: President Barack Obama, when he announced his winning election to the world.

For a little primer on all of this, let's dissect several of the most popular social networking Web sites, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, and take a look at some of the features they offer.

1. **Twitter:** is a service for communicating with friends, family and co-workers. You stay connected with them by broadcasting quick, frequent messages

about what you are doing, what you think, and generally what's happening in your personal or professional life. "Tweets" are brief updates posted to your Twitter profile or if you have a blog or Web site, you can post them there using Twitter badges and widgets. Twitter sends your messages to all of your "followers," and your messages are also searchable on Twitter search. If you "follow" someone, you will receive all of their "tweets" or updates on your Twitter homepage or your mobile phone. There are many more features you can read about on Twitter's homepage.

2. **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn advertises that it is "the world's largest professional network with over 55 million members and growing rapidly." It connects you to your most valuable contacts, and provides tools to help you exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a network of professionals. The advantage of this site is that you can build a network of contacts that will help you with every professional business need. For example, as an attorney, you may need to refer a business client to an accountant, so add a trusted CPA to your network. A personal injury lawyer may need to refer clients for rehabilitation or medical help. Add local physicians and counselors to your network. LinkedIn makes it easy to connect, search, recommend, refer and communicate, making business decisions and solutions happen quicker, easier and with more reliable results. It's the next generation "rolodex."

3. **Facebook:** Facebook is fast becoming the standard for social media. It ranks number 2 in popularity according to Alexa (the Web information company), surpassed only by the search engine Google. Those overwhelmed by the multitude of social networking sites on the Web are beginning to use just one consistently, and for some, Facebook offers the richest array of

services, features and advanced technology for both personal and business networking. Although once you get the hang of it, "tweeting" and adding contacts to your LinkedIn network becomes quick and easy, updating multiple social media sites can become quite time-consuming, especially if you are also maintaining your own Web site and blog. Facebook appears to be the most interactive social media site, with enhanced privacy controls so that you can direct certain information to certain contacts. With Facebook "Groups" you can join like-minded individuals and discuss common topics of interest. You can also post photos and videos, send updates to mobile phones and place Facebook ads.

Whichever social media service you choose, it will be more effective than any contact management system you use now because it makes the connection with people simple and visual, with no need to input contact data, and no phone tag or voice mail to encounter. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, you can easily find out what your contacts are working on and you can collaborate with colleagues, communicate your wins, your accomplishments, and your news to all your most important contacts, instantly.

If you want to win new clients via the Internet, if you want to get noticed, reach a broader audience, and develop meaningful dialogue with all of your important contacts, there is the potential for a tremendous return on your investment in blogging and social media. But you will only find out by experimenting with it. As with all media, the Internet is not a "closer" for the professional, but it is a powerful marketing tool. If you develop a plan and give it some time to work for you, you will surely reap the rewards. ■