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Five Myths About Social Media for Attorneys

By Amy DeLouise

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With email, iPhones and Blackberrys, information is coming at us faster than we can say digital download. And now we're expected to keep up with Facebook and Twitter, too? There's simply no time. Perhaps. But what if social media helps us efficiently reach clients and referral sources? What if it allows us to promote and protect our professional reputations? What if it keeps us abreast of industry developments and client needs? Social media can do all of these things. What's stopping us from leveraging it are these five myths.

1. Social Media Has No Place in the Workplace. Today, more people are using social media than email (The Nielsen Company, March 9, 2009). And corporations are taking notice. Forrester Research projects that companies will spend \$3.1 billion on social media by 2014. Why? Because smart companies are using this cost-effective tool to build better relationships with clients, vendors and policymakers.

OK, fine, but we're a law firm not a multi-national corporation. How can social media help us?

Social media can help a small firm compete with bigger players. It allows attorneys to offer added client value (content) in an information marketplace. And it can help you promote your personal brand and that of your firm. How? If you're just getting started with SM, set up a Linked In account *and join and follow two user groups*—one related to your practice area and one related to the industry of one of your top clients. Almost immediately, you'll gain new professional contacts, access critical information, and be able to share resources with colleagues and clients. If you're a littler farther along, develop a company blog for your website and rotate blog-post responsibilities, so you always have fresh content drawing hits to your firm website.

2. People Can Bad-Mouth You, Your Firm and Your Clients Through Social Media. Yes, they can. And possibly they already have. But you won't know if you aren't there. At a bare minimum, set up a "Google Alert" for your own name and that of your firm, as well as for the names or issues of any key clients (Hint: you can remove any Google Alert once you don't need it any more). You will now be quickly informed via email on issues that affect your firm and your clients.

But what about staff and new attorneys? We can't let them just be "out there" on social media!

To protect yourself, create a firm policy for social media use. There are plenty of sample policies to choose from as a basis, so no need to start from scratch. Engage your stakeholders—management committee members, managing partners, marketing director, etc.—in a discussion about how SM can propel your firm-wide goals. Are you looking to attract new associates? To learn more about a new client industry? Be more visible in the local community? Develop your strategy intentionally around goals and your social media outreach is more likely to deliver results.

3. People Only Use Social Media to Promote Themselves. Many do. But the saavy users use it to build relationships and gain information for better decision-making and client service. Says Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh, who's got 300 of his employees using Twitter (and recently sold his highly successful company to Amazon for over \$900 million!) "People don't relate to companies, they relate to people." Consider using your Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn updates to share great links and information with your followers, even items not related to the law. This will help them see you as the well-connected human being that you are, not simply a self-promoter.

4. Social Media Isn't for Serious Professionals. Social media is actually serious work, because it is about you and your reputation. So don't be tempted to make your Facebook page a project for your intern. Once you are connected, you'll find benefits for your practice. For example, I use my Twitter feed as a personal newswire, to gain information I need to be on top of my clients' issues. Through my 166 connections on Linked In, I can reach a universe of thousands (with the "get introduced" feature), who can help me find qualified vendors, reach job-seekers, or connect to a colleague with whom I may partner on a project.

5. My Clients Aren't On Social Media. This reminds me of a story. I once was featured in Elle Magazine. I never got more calls from clients about an article—including when I appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and several major business magazines—as I did with those inches in a women's fashion publication. Each client would start the conversation with a disclaimer "I happened to pick this up in the dentist's office" or "I saw this on my neighbor's coffee table." But the reality was the same: clients don't just move in professional circles and neither do you. We live in neighborhoods, we are part of churches and synagogues, we attend childrens' baseball games and symphony concerts. Social media simply connects these worlds virtually. Consider these statistics:

- There are 700,000 people in the legal field on LinkedIn.
- 13.4 M Americans watch video on mobile phones.
- 27 M have listened to an audio podcast in the last month.
- Unique Twitter Use up 1,382%, with 7 Million users as of last February.
- Facebook recently logged its 300 Millionth user.
- The fastest growing demographic on Facebook is Women Over 55.

There's no question that social media takes some work to understand. And you need to determine your tools and your goals. But in my view, no professional who gives advice for a living should be without it.

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