



GONNA' BLOG? GO WHOLE HOG!

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Recently a hotline caller prefaced our conversation about a topic with the statement, “You’ve always been so consistent in your advice about this issue over the years.” It was meant as a compliment, and I took it as such. But I admit that to my mind it created some concern. Often I feel like an old well-worn 33 record album with lots of scratches. The needle jumps back in certain areas, creating a repetitive loop doomed to reoccur every time that area is reached. I worry that for many of you my “consistency” is boring repetition. I worry that you will tune me out.

In my defense, there is a certain amount of repetition required to hit the “call to action” button of many attorneys. It starts with an acknowledgement, “Yep, that makes sense.” Sometimes a message needs to be heard several times before you get there; before I even have your real attention. Then it may take several additional repetitions before you think, “Yep, I should do something about that.” But that’s still not enough. Just thinking about doing something isn’t good enough, because it doesn’t result in action. So, more repetition on my part. Until you actually decide to act, “Yep, I’m going to do x, y and z.” And then start getting it done. Only then have I accomplished the goal.

Two examples include succession planning and emergency planning. I have been on the soapbox for action on these issues for at least 15 years. Yes, a small number of you heard and heeded the call to action early on. But based on the hotline calls and private work on my plate of late, a vast number of solo and small firms are just starting to move from thought to action. For many, it is too late to implement the types of strategies desired. I’m good, but I’m not a magician.

Based on the title of this article, you know where this article is leading. Yes, folks, I am once again returning to the issue of leveraging the power of social media. But this time I will not say what you expect.

I have been a strong proponent of social media since blogs began to dot the landscape. Perhaps you’ve attended one or more of my seminars, where I presented the possibility of using these tools to level the playing field with larger firms. I talked about the potential exposure and the minimal costs. I talked about the ability to leverage your time to be “out there” using these tools.

Early adopters reaped the rewards. This was / is not a “when you get around to it” possibility. Johnny-come-latelys have probably missed the window of opportunity to use this strategy. For example, two solo family lawyers in different areas of the state, both of whom were early adopters of blogging and other forms of social media as they became available, get over 90% of their new matters through the internet. Now they do just enough to maintain their excellent search-engine position. Initially, they put a lot of sweat equity into it. Someone trying to compete in their marketplace today would have to budget significant dollars to get even close.

If your firm practices in areas like personal injury, workers comp, criminal or DUI, you felt the impact of this changing landscape early on. If you were still lingering in yellow pages and relying on traditional networking for workflow, you probably witnessed a slowing of cases in your intake pipeline. By the time your alarm bell went off, it may have been too late to budget sufficient dollars to regain footing.

If you embraced social media early, you were able to gain a foothold that would be cost prohibitive for most firms to achieve today. When I first started talking about these things, it was possible for early adopters to use organic growth to gain good positioning on the internet search engines. The only investment required was time. Now there are so many established players and relative newcomers vying for visibility, that many of you will no longer stand a chance of gaining a foothold without investing in pricey key word purchase strategies.

Lately I have had a higher than usual number of firms reach out to me in this area. By the time their “call to action” button was pressed, they were too late. They look to me for a miracle. They send me SEM proposals (search engine marketing) they’ve received. I often hear that they’ve already invested thousands of dollars with a SEM vendor and gotten not one single identifiable new client. Or that they’ve created their own in-house program, struggled to get anyone to participate, and again, have not gotten any results. What to do?

Let me be very clear on a few points. First, SEM is very hard to value. I have seen proposals for the same volume of work from vendors at one end of the state to another. Prices can range from \$500/month to \$5,000 month for what appears to be the same work. Vendors are in the enviable position of being able to pluck numbers from a cloud. It’s based more on what the market will bear, rather than the effort expended. And they’re fortunate in that most attorneys don’t even know the questions to ask to separate wheat from chaff.



Second, for many of you it is too late to start. If you are in one of the super-saturated practice areas, like PI, you will probably not be able to spend enough to gain sufficient exposure. An exception applies if you are in a geographic area with little competition, but you have to be sufficiently focused to take the work back from larger competitors with bigger budgets in surrounding communities.

Third, and most important — and every single lawyer out there reading this needs to pay attention to this point — this is **not** something for dabbling! The proposals I see, and the lawyer plans I review, do not have sufficient investment of lawyer time. Posting to a blog 2x a month was the most recent plan I reviewed. It's typical. My advice to the attorney? Don't bother. That is not sufficient frequency to have any impact whatsoever. Save your dollars for the ghostwriter.

Yes, the proposals I see, and the in-house plans I review, call for blogging somewhere between 1 – 4 times a month. My opinion is that it's a waste of time if that's all you're going to put into it. When lawyers ask me how often they should blog I don't hesitate when I tell them 2 – 3 times per week. And if you really need to pick up ranking, at least two of the blogs each month should be video.

Blogs are not articles. They are not briefs. They are not treatises. They are not legal advice. Each blog should be somewhere between 250 – 500 words. Each should be from a client's perspective and provide one valuable tidbit of information which answers a question a potential client might ask. It should provide some value. It should contain words important to clients – words they might use in a search for answers.

It's ok to repeat posts several months later. And for goodness sake, if you blog, be sure to mention it and link to in on all your other forms of social media.

So, this is probably not what you thought I would say. If all you're going to do is dabble, at this point don't bother! It will be too little, too late. PBA members who want to be serious about blogging and/or other forms of social media and need help, give me a call and we can strategize.

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