

Rainmaking

Building Your Reputation, Part 2: Blogs and the Media

SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN | Becoming a go-to expert in your niche area requires being visible and credible to your clients, prospective clients and referral sources. You'll be more successful if you are focused and strategic in promoting your expertise through multiple venues. Otherwise, you'll find yourself randomly engaged in marketing endeavors with little effect.

The previous installment of Rainmaking focused on using articles and presentations to get in front of your important audiences. (See the April/May issue.) In this installment, let's focus on using blogs and media relations to help you raise visibility.

Using Blogs to Your Advantage

Many lawyers have found blogs effective in generating broader visibility. There are law-related blogs addressing specific practice areas, legal topics for given businesses and industries, practice management and technology, and different areas of legislation or regulation. Some of them are state specific, others apply nationally or globally. (Check out the impressive list of categories and lawyer blogs at

<http://abajournal.com/blawgs>.)

Blogs can be particularly useful if you are launching a new service area because blogging on related topics can position you as an expert in that niche. The keys are having a defined target audience and subject and making sure that the Web isn't already saturated with blogs of the same focus. There are a number of other advantages to blogging if executed effectively:

- You can reach a broad audience at a relatively low cost.
- Blogs force the hosting or authoring lawyers to stay up-to-date in their areas of expertise.
- Blog visitors tend to return often so you have numerous "touch points" between you and your readers—which includes the ability to invite them to respond to your posts to create two-way interactions.
- Search engines like Google, Yahoo and Ask.com regularly pick up on blog postings, which raises your search rankings.
- Reporters and conference organizers read and monitor blogs and often

contact expert posters for additional commentary or to speak at programs on trends, cases or the like.

■ You can add podcasts or videocasts to your blog home page.

Be aware that blogs require a commitment of time and a passion for writing, as well as some technical investment to have a properly executed site. To get full advantage of links, RSS feeds, categories and archives features, you may want to hire someone to help with the initial design and setup.

Don't forget to include all disclaimers that you are not providing legal advice, and be conscious of the ethics rules of all jurisdictions in which your readers may reside. Remember that the purpose of a blog is not to promote your services—that is what your Web site is for. A blog is for sharing information (not legal advice) and stimulating discussion and inquiries.

Getting Publicity in the Media

Although it typically doesn't result in new clients (at least in the short term), garnering positive publicity in the media can help you build name awareness and credibility in your niche. There are two types of media publicity: proactive, which is generated when you or your client takes the initiative and places a call to a reporter or sends a press release on a certain topic; and reactive, which is generated when a case outcome, internal firm event or some "crisis" attracts press attention. Ideally,



Susan Saltonstall Duncan (sduncan@rainmakingoasis.com) is President of RainMaking Oasis, Inc., a marketing and management firm that provides planning, consulting and training tools to lawyers and law firms. Contact her at (860) 434-5600.

once you develop a relationship with the media, they may think of you as an expert source in your area of law and contact you for background information on other stories going forward.

Remember, news is news only if it has just broken, or if the event hasn't happened yet. Generally announcements about new lawyers, new offices, partner promotions or the like aren't news. Reporters usually are looking for some kind of angle or "scoop," so if you have a rather mundane thing to float to the media, you'll have to come up with an interesting hook. Ultimately, reporters want to write a better story than their competitors and you want to help them do this—legitimately, of course. Most reporters will respect your need to protect your clients' confidences and your inability to discuss certain aspects of cases. You should, however, try to respond in some meaningful way that does not compromise your client and, of course, keeps you strictly within the ethics rules.

Remember, too, that reporters will rely on you only if you can give them reliable information in time for their deadlines. Return their phone calls consistently and quickly (within a half-hour from the time of the call, if not sooner) if you want to be perceived as a good resource.

Long-term, effective media relations share many of the same characteristics as good client relations: mutual respect, patience, perseverance, responsiveness, timeliness and trust between the parties. In that light, here are a few other to-dos to keep in mind when building an effective media relations strategy:

- Try to arrange a personal meeting with a few key reporters, or ask for an introduction from a client or someone else at a chamber meeting or conference. You have to take the initiative.

- Identify reporters who write

on your topic areas and be prepared to compliment them on a story.

- Send reporters articles or other information that you know might interest them, even if it has nothing to do with your particular area of expertise. If your firm sends e-alerts or newsletters, put relevant reporters on the distribution list.

- Be aware of trends that reporters might be too busy to uncover and offer ideas but don't insist on or try to "assign" a piece. The reporter or the publication's editor will decide whether and how to write and edit any story.

Getting Spots on Radio and TV

Many lawyers, particularly those in smaller urban or suburban areas, have found radio talk shows and cable TV shows effective forums in which to demonstrate their knowledge and project their personalities to their markets. If your local cable or radio stations have a regular feature like "Law Talk," find out how you can become a guest speaker.

Or, if there's no such show in

your area, why not put together a proposal for one? Think hard about what would be interesting in content and format, including other potential speakers you could invite. Bounce your idea off of some clients and referral sources. Then approach a radio station or cable station's executive director or producer about producing this type of program. Also, explore whether your show can be re-aired or linked to on the Internet.

By augmenting speaking, newsletters and article writing with blogs and types of media publicity, you ensure that your target audience will learn about your expertise through multiple venues and formats. Whether this broad exposure results in new clients or referrals, or requests to speak or write for an extended target audience, you'll have achieved your goal of developing credibility and visibility.

Other strategies to add to the mix include using leadership and active participation in business and civic organizations. We'll look at those methods in the next Rainmaking column. LP

ADVERTISERS INDEX

ABA LPM Section Publishing..... 3, 5, 6
www.ababooks.org

Accept by Phone
(877) 529-1390
www.accept-by-phone.com

CompuLaw
(800) 444-0020
www.compulaw.com

MSI Global Alliance57
www.msiglobal.org

SunTrust.....5
(800) 321-1997
www.suntrust.com/legal

Tabs3 Billing & PracticeMaster
(402) 423-1440
www.tabs3.com/lp

University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Advertisers For information on print and online advertising opportunities in *Law Practice* magazine, and LPM webzines, please call (312) 988-6115 or e-mail adsales@staff.abanet.org.