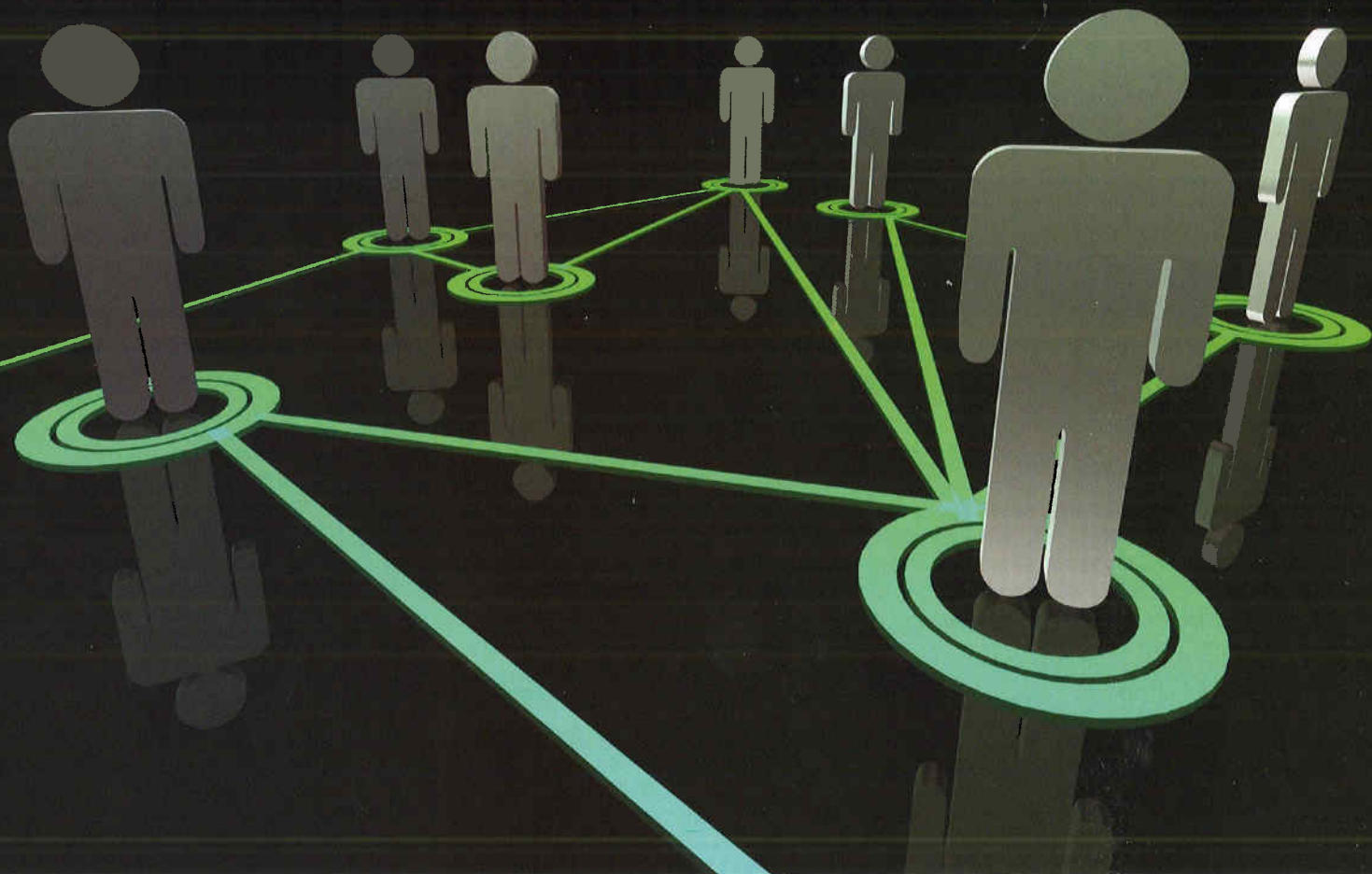


Web and marketing 2.0:



Pleased to Tweet you

Online law firm marketing has now gone beyond the traditional webpage and into the brave new world of social media

The last 18 months has seen an explosion in new forms of media in the mainstream: the rise of Twitter, LinkedIn and, to a lesser extent Facebook, as ways for law firms and lawyers to enhance the way their brand is portrayed across social media and online.

Given all the excitement, has this new technology delivered any real

difference to the way firms market themselves? A Google search of major law firms on Facebook or Twitter reveals a somewhat conservative approach, with many firms treating these outlets as an extension of the firm's own website, uploading snippets of information from the firm's main webpage with no extra information or interaction.

Research provided by Gilbert + Tobin has found that law firms with Twitter accounts typically include the following things: headlines from the firm's press releases, newsletters or blogs, news that a lawyer at the firm has appeared in a media outlet, or has received an award or designation and news about the firm successfully completing a client engagement. This information is commonly presented in the format of a headline with a link to the text.

What is *not* commonly found on a law firm Twitter account is any invitation for the audience to engage with the firm, in the same way that consumer-oriented businesses have done. Perhaps this is understandable, given that to do so would be to open the proverbial Pandora's Box. "Once you open the conversation you can't shut it off. You open yourself up to comment, and you open yourself up to criticism. You can't backtrack from that," says Michael Bradley, the managing partner of Marque Lawyers.

And once a Twitter account is in existence, it becomes another proverbial mouth to feed – something which requires constant resourcing. "Even to run a simple Twitter feed occupies quite a lot of time, because if you're not doing it consistently and frequently, well then you might as well not be doing it," says Bradley. He said the same issue arises with blogging, stating that it needs to be 'topical' and 'fresh'.

Yet providing resources to feed a Twitter or Facebook account is not only limited to writing the content, which can be done by relatively junior lawyers or marketing personnel, but also allocating partner time for the supervision of content to ensure consistency of brand portrayal.

Many law firms have a 'no Tweet without prior approval' policy with respect to staff members. "Individuals can't tweet or update unless the message has been checked with a

partner. It is so staff can think through the ramifications of what they're doing," said Anthea Hancocks, chief marketing officer at Herbert Geer.

Ignore new media at your peril

Despite the costs, there is a sound business case for pursuing new media marketing. A 2010 survey by American Lawyer Media, Zeughauser Group and Greentarget of 164 in-house counsel found that 43% identified blogs as one of their leading sources of news and information. Half of in-house counsel agreed that in the future, high-profile blogs authored by law firm lawyers would influence the process by which clients hire firms. This indicates that with the correct understanding of how to use social media, there is good business sense for law firms to be active participants.

Social media is also an important way for a business to build its employment brand with the younger generation of lawyers, for whom the use of online social media is second nature. Kersten Norlin, head of marketing at Gilbert+Tobin, says that use of social media was an important part of the firm's commitment to being a leading advisor in the technology sector – a factor which would no doubt also be attractive to prospective applicants.

However, given the relative novelty of the technology, it is understandable that many firms have adopted what appears to be a speculative approach. While large national firms have generally embraced social media in all its various forms, this is often more out of an entrepreneurial desire to test new waters and to be at the cutting-edge of technology, rather than a desire to attain any clearly-defined marketing objective. Smaller firms such as Marque Lawyers, meanwhile, are waiting to see what develops in larger firms before heavily investing in social media.

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Henry Davis York

Henry Davis York's communications manager Robyn Tolhurst says looking at the US in particular, where firms seem to be grasping onto Facebook and Twitter as business tools with great success, warrants attention. "It's really a watching brief for us. Our strategy is to assess the benefits and look at trends in the next year," she says.

Best to stay with 'tried and tested'?

Social media is clearly an adjunct, rather than a substitute, for a solid core marketing strategy. Those law firms interviewed by *ALB* continued to nominate good client relationships and industry accolades as the key elements of their marketing strategy. Anthea Hancocks, for example, points out that the simple fact that Herbert Geer won 15 panel appointments in 2010 did more than anything else the firm undertook to raise its profile and gain positive attention. Still, Herbert Geer continues to devote work time to improving its website and electronic newsletters, which can be displayed and delivered in multiple formats depending on client needs.

Marque's Bradley doesn't see a huge role for social media in promoting professional service firms: "I'm not 100% sure that truly interactive social media is really going to be that useful to professional service firms because there is a big difference between a consumer-facing business, such as retail, and a law firm," he says. Bradley intends to remain true to a personal relationship-based approach, noting with typical humour that his firm's greatest marketing expense is lunch. He also emphasises the fact that keeping clients is, and always has been, the hardest task for marketing, and is only accomplished through delivering on promises. "You need to be high quality... you also need to be delivering services in a manner which is consistent with what you said. Law firms are frequently guilty of saying things in their marketing material which don't reflect the actual experience," he said.

It is also interesting to note that the Australian firm with perhaps the biggest marketing budget of all in 2010, Norton Rose, chose to invest in largely traditional methods of promotion. The firm's billboards at major Australian

airports proclaiming the arrival of the Norton Rose brand were hard to miss. Tim Shacklock, chief operating officer of Norton Rose Australia, describes the billboards as the standout success story of the overall campaign. The firm has since expanded again with the acquisition of Canadian firm Ogilvy Renault and South African firm Deneys Reitz, but this time brand communication will be focused on-line.

The emphasis will be on using more traditional electronic media: Web 1.0 podcasts, videocasting, RSS feeds and improved functionality for the website, according to Shacklock. "One of the key issues we had to contend with was ensuring the consistency of the Norton Rose brand across all 23 countries. Our ultimate aim was to achieve a consistent brand across the world so that clients expect to receive a similar level of service no matter which office they are working with," he says.

Social media as HR

One area where law firms have found a clear use for social media is as a way to introduce the brand to prospective employees and attract and retain the best of Generation Y. Kersten Norlin, head of marketing and business development at Gilbert+Tobin, says that the firm has had volunteers from Gen Y put their hand up to offer support and guidance in implementing the use of social media and technology. Facebook and LinkedIn are the most popular services, used to advertise jobs, screen candidates, communicate with the appropriate audience about job openings and generally disseminate the firm's information to prospective employees, according to Norlin.

Herbert Geer also actively encourages lawyers to build LinkedIn profiles and has set up a working group to consider options and act as a 'sounding board' for ideas on how to move forward in this area. Henry Davis York's Tolhurst also notes that social media is a way of 'natural selection' for recruitment and was often the firm's first port of call. Interestingly, Norton Rose's Shacklock mentions that his firm views Facebook and Twitter as more important for engaging with clients than potential employees, a clear indication of the business potential of social media in the longer term. **ALB**