

Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

Practical Tips For How And Why To Use Social Media

What is social media and why should it matter to you? It is really pretty simple; social media, blogging, podcasts, and webinars are “tools” that enable you to become visible and credible to your target market and referral sources and enable you to build, maintain, and expand relationships. Potential clients will also more likely find you if they search your legal specialty on Google.

Your clients, potential clients, and referral sources do not want you to pester them. They do not like being one of 1,000 people to get an email alert from your firm that does not address their needs. But, out of sight is out of mind. It is important to be someone they think of when they need a lawyer. Social media gives you that opportunity, and if you do it well, your use of it will be welcomed, not condemned. Social media also levels the playing field for young lawyers.

When I was busy practicing law, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites were not around, and no one had heard of blogging, podcasts, or webinars. Even though social media



and blogging were not available, I used different tools to accomplish the same objectives. I read every industry publication my clients read. I wrote a monthly column for *Roads and Bridges*. I wrote and published guides for contractors. I made presenta-

tions at industry meetings and created videotapes and later DVDs of those presentations. I conducted telephone workshops. As a result, the content I created was widely read and that helped me get hired.

I believe it is increasingly important for both law firms and lawyers to have a social media game plan. Kevin O’Keefe, a legal social media expert, recently posted a blog entry titled: *Social media raises the bar on*

what’s required of lawyers in client development. In his post, Kevin says:

“With the advent of social media, the world has been turned upside down on the ‘establishment’ in the legal profession. When else have lawyers who have not been practicing for decades or who are not practicing in a ‘politically correct’ law firm been given the opportunity to compete with the ‘haves’ in our profession? The easy decision is to stick your head in the sand as to all this social media junk, hoping that it will all go away. ... But all the while you’ll be looking less and less fabulous.”

Cordell M. Parvin built a national construction practice during his 35 years of practicing law. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development and planning and client development. You can subscribe to his Blog at <http://www.lawconsultingblog.com/>, connect with him on LinkedIn at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/cordellparvin>, join his Facebook Fan Page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Cordell-Parvin-Lawyer-Coaching/222291473905?ref=ts>, and follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/cordellparvin>.

Each day, I see more young lawyers and law firms using social media to establish themselves. They are blogging. They are doing podcasts, webinars, and Internet radio shows. Some have even created fan pages for their legal specialty on Facebook. Why does it work? Because most clients consider lawyers for a first project based on recommendations by friends, colleagues, and others who influence them. Those recommendations typically come from business acquaintances.

Recently I read *The Anatomy of Buzz Revisited* by Emanuel Rosen. In the book, Rosen mentions a study on how people found their jobs done by Mark Granovetter, a graduate student at Harvard. To his surprise, Granovetter found it was rarely from recommendations from a close friend. People more likely found their jobs based on recommendations by acquaintances. This phenomenon he called “the strength of weak ties.” Importantly, for lawyers it goes well beyond just the job market.

What should you take away from this study? Strong tie buzz will spread the word through a certain cluster, whereas weak tie buzz spreads the word from one cluster to another. In other words, people with whom you have strong ties likely run into the same people and go to the same places you go. People with whom you have weak ties see people in different groups and go to different places than you go.

You need to consider the possibility and even likelihood that weak ties will recommend you to potential clients they know. I look back and find that most all of my best clients came to me as a result of recommendations by weak ties.

If you are on Facebook or LinkedIn you have found many weak ties that you likely had not heard

from in many years. If you are on Twitter you have likely connected with people you have never met in person. Social media is an effective and efficient way to communicate with weak ties.

So how should you use social media? As a starting point, use social media as another tool to learn more about your clients’ industries, their businesses, and the issues impacting them. Social media is one more source of information for you.

Second, use it as a tool to get your content to a broader audience. If you create blog posts, podcasts, and webinars that your clients, potential clients and your weak ties find really helpful and insightful, those clients, potential clients and weak ties are likely to pass it on to others. For example, if you tweeted about an article or blog post you have written and those following you on Twitter found it valuable, they will likely retweet it to the people following them.

One final important point: Do not use social media to “sell.” Just as you are put off when someone is trying to sell you in the real world, your potential clients and referral sources will be put off if you are trying to “sell” them using social media. Remember, social media is about building relationships, learning more about your clients, their businesses and their industries, and then finding ways to provide content they will find valuable and that they will spread.

As Kevin O’Keefe correctly notes, if you are not using social media and your competition is, you are likely falling behind. So, what is your social media game plan for 2010?

Please share your ideas and suggestions about social networking with the author at coaching@cordellparvin.com.

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