

Making it Rain: Effective Lawyer Marketing in the Digital Era

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“We don’t believe in digital marketing. We believe in marketing in a digital world.”
- Clive Sirkin, CMO of Kimberly Clark

And a digital world it is. We live in a world where three year olds have their own tablets (and operate them quite expertly, thank you very much) and people can work on a project across the globe from their kitchen table in their pajamas. While it is an exciting time, it is also a very challenging time to reach people and to stand out effectively in the crowd. Understanding Mr. Sirkin’s quote is a great first step. The basics of marketing have not changed (networking, creating/maintaining client relationships, word of mouth, etc), but the world in which we market has. It’s a fast-paced, ever-evolving digital world and lawyers must stay vigilant, educated, creative, and honest to stay in the game.

The Basics

At the very least, every lawyer and firm should have a website and email address. And NOT an AOL or Gmail address. These days, you must have an email address with your own domain to appear credible to potential clients. The website should look professional (no cheesy clip art, no gavels or scales of justice) and give clear information on who you are and what you do. It should also have an easy way to contact you. There are tons of options for website hosts these days that are affordable and user-friendly, so there really is no excuse for firms not to have one.

While a website is a basic step, it is an imperative one. Your website will serve as your cornerstone in the digital world. It will either be the first thing potential clients will see as they search for a service online or it will be where they come back to after seeing something on social media (yes, we will get to that). Your website can make or break the transition from potential client to actual client. If you don’t know about Search Engine Optimization (SEO), you have two choices – hire someone who does or invest a good chunk of time to bring yourself up to speed.

Social Media

Now we enter the overwhelming world of social media. There are so many different social media sites to choose from and they all have different layouts, themes, focuses, etc. One commonality is that they are an essential tool for marketing in a digital world. You as a lawyer and/or your firm (preferably both) need to be on social media. You can make a personal and company page on most social media sites and it’s highly recommended that you do so (if you have not already). Your presence on these sites

will increase your digital footprint and allow for more opportunities for a potential client to contact you and your firm.

With all of the choices out there, it is important to find the right venues for you and your firm. Instagram is all about pictures, YouTube is all videos, LinkedIn is heavily focused on professional connections, Twitter is lightning speed news and information sharing, while Facebook is all of the above. These are all great places for potential clients to get a first glimpse, not to mention see reviews, read conversations and articles you post, and get to know you. However, whichever sites you choose, you must have a plan to stay active on those accounts. Be sure to share your own material, but also interact with others by commenting, liking, sharing/retweeting, and tagging. Having a page (or multiple pages) is great, but you must be an active participant for this effort to be effective. Perhaps dedicate a small portion of your day, 20 minutes or so, to this form of marketing.

Remember, quality over quantity is key. While posting more frequently can help to get your firm more “hits”, these hits don’t usually convert to leads or business all that often. It’s the quality of a post or content that will take your efforts further and convince people to share your work or contact your firm. This also holds true for the number of followers you have. It’s easy to be discouraged if you only have a few hundred followers while other firms or businesses have thousands. Keep in mind, users can buy followers or many of those followers could be bots or inactive accounts. If you are having great conversations and making new contacts on your social media sites, then you are doing quality work.

If you are a solo lawyer or small firm worried about having the time to do this, there are social media managers out there like Hootsuite or Buffer. However, these are frowned upon by marketing experts since these managers cannot customize posts for each platform (they are not human). These managers also cannot converse with followers or share posts, which are important elements of a successful social media presence. But for a lawyer in a pinch, social media managers as a digital tool can be very helpful. Wait, did someone say digital tool?

Digital Tools

So you have your website, email, and you are on social media. Now what? All of these steps will help your organic reach out in the digital world, but if you want to increase your reach and up your SEO there are tools out there to help. The list of options is long, so here are just a few top contenders for you to consider.

First, videos are arguably the most popular form of content online right now. While an adorable dog howling “I love you” may be what you are thinking of, lawyers can use videos too in order to set themselves apart. For instance, videos are a great way to newsjack. Newsjacking is “the practice of taking advantage of current events or news stories in such a way as to promote or advertise one's product or brand.” Many times, news stories are lacking the legal perspective of a situation, so if you can be the person to give it, you can attract great attention. You could do this in blogs or articles as well, but videos are a great way to get news out there quickly. You could use FB live, Periscope (Twitter), Instagram Stories, YouTube, etc. to do these videos. Newsjacking is just one example of effectively using videos, but there are many others. How-to videos, newsletter videos, customer references, and short, concise interviews can be beneficial as well.

Next, we've all heard the phrase “there's an app for that” and well, it's true. All of the above mentioned social media and video streaming options are themselves apps or they have apps. There are scheduling apps, fitness apps, note-taking apps, communication apps, weather apps... you get the idea. The list is endless. Some law firms have created and customized their own apps. Now that is a little extreme, and beyond the financial reach of most small firms, but it gives you an idea of the possibilities. Just as with social media, you need to find the apps that work for you and your firm. Want to make your photos look nicer? Get a photo editor app. Need to organize your contacts and leads better? Download an app for that. Just make sure the apps you want are made by reputable companies and have good reviews before you download them. If you end up downloading an app that your phone or computer software then identifies as a “low reputation” app, uninstall it and look again!

Last but not least are online advertisements. The days of billboards and park bench signs are dwindling. Today, you can run ads on Google, any social media venue, blogs, new sites, etc. You can customize these ads to target certain keyword searches or audience demographics. Facebook even has a specific “lead generator” ad you can run. Now lawyers may see dollar signs when they hear the word “advertisement”, but online ads don't necessarily have to be expensive. Of course, the more money you can spend on them, the better, but you can still push out a great ad and not break the bank. It may take a little time to find the most beneficial venue and advertisement for your firm, but your time will be well invested.

Test, Track, Analyze

None of the above-mentioned techniques or venues are worth anything unless you test, track, and analyze your marketing efforts. Testing, tracking and analyzing results is

marketing 101 and as we established at the beginning of this article, we still need to implement basic marketing strategies... we are just doing it in a digital era now.

Luckily, tracking is fairly easy these days thanks to tools like Google Analytics. You can track all the activity on your website - where did a user come from? Which page(s) did they visit? How long did they stay? Every social media site has a "Analytics" tab or section for you to view how well posts performed, how many "likes" you received, how many new followers you gained, etc. Any ad you run online should have a report to access at the end of your campaign. So the "how" is easy, but the difficult part is the "doing." Lawyers must track these results in order to see what is working and what may need to be improved or stopped. Without this critical step, all of your marketing efforts are for naught because you are not measuring your return on investment (ROI) with respect to both money and time.

It's also important to remember that trying something new, testing it out, tracking and analyzing it to conclude that it does/did not work does not mean it is a complete failure. In the legal world, where lawyers either win or lose cases and have definitive lines of success versus failure, it's easy for them to feel defeated when something does not work out exactly as they were hoping. Mistakes are learning tools. You know that test did not work, so move on and tweak it or try something new. "Rome wasn't built in a day" and neither was any effective marketing strategy!

Human Connection

If there is one point you take away from this article, let it be this... humans need human connection. The most effective marketing strategies in the digital era will involve strong human connections. In a world where everything is becoming more and more automated and digital, these primal connections will become increasingly important.

So what does this mean for lawyers and marketing? Let people know why you are practicing law. What drives you? Show your human side on social media - do you have hobbies? Favorite recipes you can share? Are you a member of charitable organizations? There are so many different ways you can reach people and make connections by just being you. As in all things digital, be careful not to overshare – common sense will guide you.

Where does honesty come into play?. Do not push a persona that is not you because you think it is more marketable. You need to be able to live up to the expectations you set online. Being someone's lawyer is both a professional and a personal relationship, so why not give potential clients a preview of who they are hiring? And never forsake any connection, unless they prove problematic in some way. You may connect with

someone who does not need a lawyer at the time, but that may change or they may end up recommending you to a friend who needs legal assistance. Jayson Gagnard, a Canadian entrepreneur & networking specialist said, "...in today's day and age we are drowning in contacts, but we are starving for connection." If you can build that bridge from contact to connection, you will foster and maintain very meaningful and beneficial relationships for you and your practice.

What Works for Us?

As stated previously, finding what marketing efforts work for your law practice will take some trial and error. We have been at this a while now and while we are not a law firm, our findings and best practices could be beneficial to lawyers and law firms. One of our most popular marketing and networking items is Sensei Sherlock. He is a stuffed Scooby Doo (dressed as Sherlock Holmes) that we take with us when we give presentations or travel for work. We take pictures of him at various events and with various people. Then we post these pictures on our social media accounts and on our website. We make sure to tag the person/people in the photo and/or link to their company/firm. We have had great networking and human connection successes from this! People eagerly request to have their picture taken with him now.

Other popular social media posts involve eye-catching photos or headlines, happenings around our office (employee promotion, decorating contests, etc.), and funny technology themed comics. We also see greater reach and engagement numbers when our employees (particularly, our President) share posts from our company page to their personal pages. This is extremely helpful especially if you have an employee with a large number of followers – the more eyes on posts, the better!

Sensei also produces blog posts, podcasts, and articles (like this one) that aid in our marketing efforts. These help in getting our name out there and often lead to contacts from the media or prospective clients. We push these out on social media as well and tag, link to whomever we can. People are very grateful to see themselves tagged, linked to, etc. As you can see, *everything* we do goes on social media.

While we have experienced positive returns on most of our efforts, not everything is a success. We are constantly tracking and experimenting with changing features or new ideas. Something may work for a while and then suddenly not work, so we have to stay alert and be ready to switch directions if needed. Luckily, we have a great marketing team that keeps the ship on course!

A Word of Warning & Conclusion

We would be amiss not to warn lawyers of the possible perils of a large digital footprint. The more information you put out on the internet, the more susceptible you are to cybercriminals doing their best to steal your data (among other things). In this case, make sure you use well-reviewed, secure apps, don't overshare on social media, and give out only work contact information. Be sure to take steps to keep yourself, your firm, and your clients safe online.

In conclusion, the basic principles of marketing have not changed much over the years but the mediums have evolved at dizzying rates. Do your best to keep up with the changes, educate yourself, come up with creative ways to stand out, stay safe, and be authentic! There is a pot of gold at the end of the marketing rainbow!

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