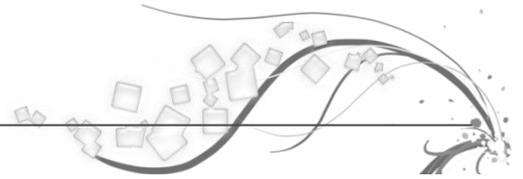


How law firms can get started with social media

April 2013





Getting started with social media

Introduction

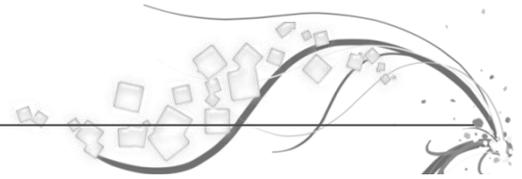
This guide is for law firms who have decided to embrace social media. It outlines the most important steps to take in planning, designing and delivering a successful social channel strategy.

Business Tendrils is a social media company that understands the specific needs and concerns of practising solicitors and helps many legal businesses to compete and succeed online.

How you develop a dynamic social media strategy for your law firm will depend on why you're embarking on this campaign and what your practice needs to get out of it.

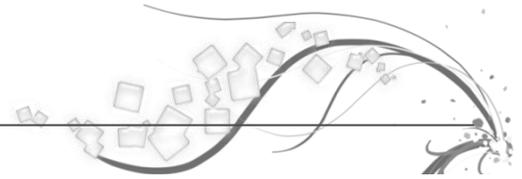
No two firms' strategies will be the same but there are certain considerations that you must always take into account when you're planning, designing and delivering a social media campaign that will really make a difference.

This guide is not an exclusive list of things to do – you'll discover many others as your campaigns proceed – but getting started well is paramount and strategies can only succeed with an intimate understanding of how your firm operates and what its communication challenges are.



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Step 1: Plan

Objectives

Clear objectives will shape your social media strategy and make it stand out from everyone else's.

If you are looking to *create awareness of your brand* for instance, your social media activity needs to target a large audience with content that will interest the widest community. If you are just looking for *leads*, this will take longer and require very targeted efforts to pinpoint your ideal clients and get them to respond to you.

Many firms require both brand awareness and lead generation but we advise you to work out a ratio of needs first so that you can focus your social media strategy and meet your objectives.

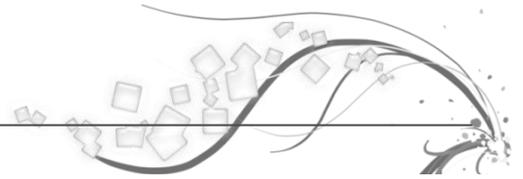
It's worth remembering that leads are not sales – sealing the deal requires additional effort and involvement. Partners and solicitors who are prepared to be active and vocal in forums will give your campaign real energy. Outsourcing this function will help you to filter the number and type of forums to get involved in and it will give you the time and confidence to focus on identifying the leads you want.

The nature, tone and content of your online 'conversations' however, are yours to define.

Target market

Knowing and understanding exactly what clients you're looking for will help you work out where to find them and this knowledge will direct you to all the forums, networking events and other meeting places that they inhabit.

If you're not absolutely clear about what kind of clients you want to attract then you need to do more research to clarify this or else your



social media campaign will lack focus and fail. The deepest understanding of your chosen market will drive you to the online platforms that give your services the best exposure and help you bring in new interest and ultimately, sales.

Size of the firm

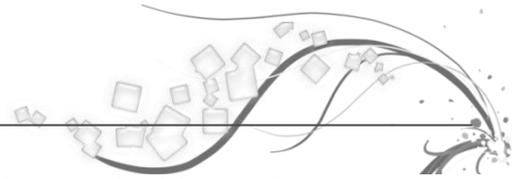
Think hard about how many partners, solicitors and employees you have in your firm before you work out the complexity of your social media setup and know what internal resources are available to you to keep the campaign active and exciting. If you can identify a social media champion inside your firm your programme is very likely to succeed and keep gaining momentum – whether you run it in-house or outsource it.

Exposure of the team

A social media champion will benefit from the support of a team of colleagues who are happy to represent the firm online. Collaboration adds interest, weight and credibility and keeps activity lively. Nominated people are not necessarily going to be involved in the day-to-day running of the campaign but they need to be prepared to be the voice and the face of the firm offering consistency, intrigue and rigour to any social media communications. Establishing who this lead person or team is early on will add real energy and gravitas to any campaign – creating clear rules about consistency and confidentiality is essential. Never forget that your social media footprint is an extension of your company website and always in the public domain.

Spend

If you already have a dedicated marketing budget you could adjust it to give you more scope to try social media properly.



Clear information about your current spend will help you decide on the complexity of your social media marketing strategy. The more platforms you choose, the more profiles you will need and the greater the level of support you will require.

Bear in mind that paid online advertising is a separate cost even if the service is provided by the same social media company or agency.

It's advisable to allow enough in your budget to measure the success of your social media campaign and calculate your ROI (return on investment).

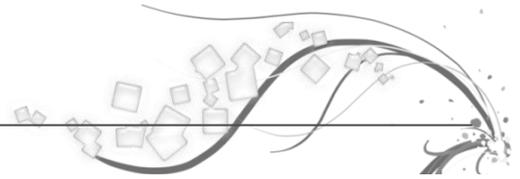
Potential for benchmarking

In order to assess the real commercial value of your investment in social media you will need to measure its success against current marketing activities taking into account things like effort, information and data relating to conversions. This research will give you a quality benchmarking system to analyse the results of future social media efforts.

When developing your online strategy these key questions will help your firm to build a targeted approach to networking online, generating leads and creating brand awareness:

- What is your service?
- What problems does your service resolve?
- Why should clients choose you?
- What is different about your firm?
- What is different about your service?
- What is the DNA of your ideal client?
- What are your firm's values and why?

Our document [The True Value of Social Media for Law Firms](#) will help you achieve valuable benchmarking analysis.



Competitor and market analysis

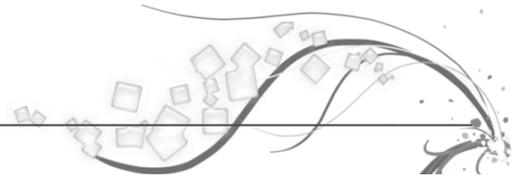
Carry out your market research or ask a social media company for the [online review report](#) to help you identify what your competitors are doing online and where your target market is. This will direct you to what platforms are most useful for your firm.

It may be that LinkedIn will be crucial for your firm's business development needs and Twitter will give you a better monitoring tool for your target market's core interests. Familiarise yourself with the benefits of each social media platform before you start designing your action plan.

Some platforms are best used just to register your firm's name and allow tracking in terms of brand and reputation management but other platforms perform better for building relationships and winning business.

From our experience you should base your decision about which platforms to engage with on an understanding of the services you provide. For instance, if you deal with employment law and represent individuals in these cases then Facebook will be important for you. If you tend to represent businesses only, then LinkedIn is more likely to be a critical platform for you.

Some platforms are best used just to register your firm's name and allow tracking. Other platforms may be better for engagement.



Step 2: Design

When you're ready to start developing your strategy, we recommend that you carry out the following tasks to give your social media campaign as much punch as possible.

The set up

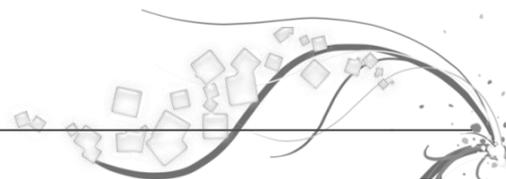
Whichever platforms you decide are right for you and your firm make sure that all partners and staff have strong profiles supported by the following guidelines:

- Links to each other and the correct company profiles
- SEO for individual and company profiles
- Carefully worded content in all individual profiles (particularly important with the company name)
- Tracking and monitoring tools to keep you aware of anyone who is talking about your firm
- Configuring of the privacy and account settings on the chosen accounts and profiles.

Once your profiles are complete, remember to feature your 'vanity url' (the website address specific to your profile) on email signatures, business cards and any other marketing material – quick and consistent publicity for you.

It's worth noting that on LinkedIn all data relating to employees is populated automatically in the company profile. Anyone viewing this can see who is associated with the company.

Don't forget to add your services to the company profile – these will attract specific recommendations for you and add credibility to your firm's expertise.



Knowing your market

Find out where your target clients are spending their time online and focus on getting closer to them. If you find that some of them are active in specialist LinkedIn groups then make it your business to join too and take part in their discussions.

Post and Engage

Time

If you post regularly and engage with your audience your social media campaign cannot fail. Time restrictions are often used as an excuse for not doing this but a regular 30-60 minutes a day will make every difference. Punchy and relevant posts in the right places supported by rigorous engagement with interested commentators in your groups and forums will reap dividends.

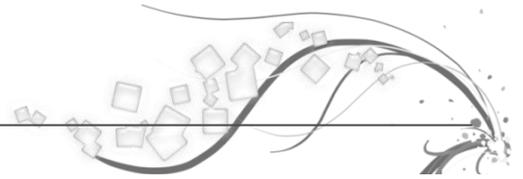
Choose carefully

Source well-written sector-specific *features* that you know will enhance your reputation as experts. Anything else isn't worth posting and will damage your reputation. Your social media agency can help you access a wealth of features that will significantly boost your firm's credibility and expertise.

LinkedIn groups are a great place to engage in commercial *dialogue* and show off your knowledge. Use keyword searches and language (eg 'legal' and 'law') to identify useful groups and where appropriate become a member.

If you offer a service that will interest small businesses for instance, you should join groups that are set up for SMEs such as The Business Support Network or Business Networking Berkshire – both of which would generate useful leads.

A public conversation is seen as an invitation to join in. So never hesitate to join – but always try to add value, not sell!

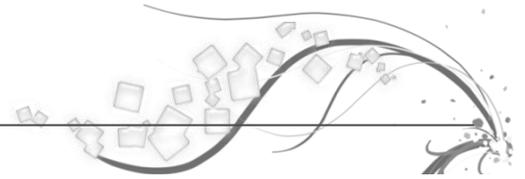


Engage wholeheartedly

Don't allow one-way traffic. If you look at another firm's Facebook page you can measure its success not just by the number of *likes* or *people talking about this page* but by the response rate of their posts. If there is no response there is generally no result. The same applies to your page and your interaction with your contacts' pages.

Twitter allows you to join in conversations informally. You can search for keywords and find tweets and twitter users associated with them. The great thing about Twitter is that its messages must always be short and to the point. Anyone in the legal industry must be careful not to refer to a client or a client's matter due to strict client confidentiality regulations.

The same rules apply to Facebook communications where people often think that their personal statuses will go unnoticed – always be discreet and don't get caught off guard. Be cautious when you're contributing to your firm's Facebook page too but don't restrict yourself to just writing about business. The most successful company Facebook pages often encourage conversations about completely different topics from their products and services and so add tremendous colour and personality to their firm's image. Join in, have fun and make a difference to how your company is perceived publicly.



Step 3: Deliver

Now is the time to get going

Go through the business cards you've collected, choose those you want to stay in touch with and contact them online to connect with you. Your first conversation has started.

**A starting point:
find the business
cards you collected
recently, then
connect with each
and get the
conversation started.**

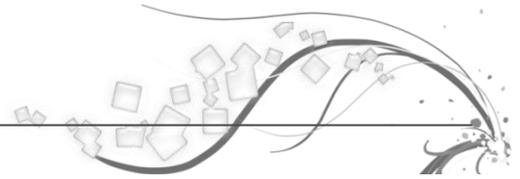
Look out for things that might interest your new contacts and share them – a friendly gesture that will tell you a lot about the people you're newly in touch with and encourage relationships that might turn into money.

Make sure you regularly brainstorm ideas with your team about how to maintain a vibrant social media presence and don't forget to keep an eye on the benchmarking you worked out earlier. Make a note of time spent online for your own information – this will help you determine your ROI which is the key indicator of your success online.

Extend the reach of your social media presence

Apart from linking team members from your company website to their LinkedIn or other profiles you should try networking at events organised by your peers. Use Twitter hash tags to bring people together at online events and find out about the many features you can use to enhance the experience whether the event is yours or one that you are attending. Events published online allow you to start networking with attendees prior to the event.

Google+ is another online resource which allows you to use a 'hang-out' to create a real-time feed for people who couldn't make it to the event but showed interest.



Corporate videos

If you don't already have a corporate video, arrange to have one made and use it on your website.

Filming a delighted client who is prepared to stand up and say what makes you special is the best endorsement you can get.

You can also use videos to explain your services and share your views about topics that interest you or the firm – this encourages interaction and emphasises that you're real people with big personalities and genuine professional expertise.

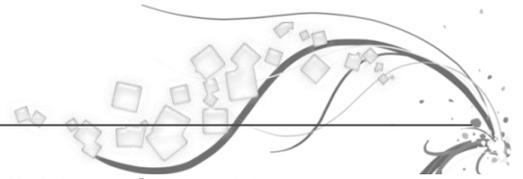
White papers and having an opinion

Law firms have a lot to say about the issues that affect most of us at some point in our lives and these opinions can all be broadcast online. The papers and linked documents you write are your way of maintaining valuable content online and if they contain a brief summary or description written by a partner or solicitor in the firm, their appeal will soar.

More information about the Law Society's practice notes on posting comments and opinions is available in our document *The Law Society and social media* (based on the SRA Handbook and the Law Society Practice Notes) available at www.businesstendrils.com.

Keep on top of the new stuff

Make sure you stay on top of new forums and are clear about the potential downfall of existing ones – for example, blogs and twitter accounts can be registered with a number of directories so that they can be found by category, industry, location or keywords but some of these create spam. The status quo changes all the time so keep an eye on even the ones that have behaved well in the past – this will help you



reduce incoming spam messages and incorrect publishing of your blog and twitter accounts.

Paid advertising

For most firms, some online advertising on specific platforms is valuable but paid advertising is like the stock market – a very tricky tool to use and something that many people have invested large sums in for little return. Continuous monitoring is the only way to gauge its worth and you really need experienced individuals to do this properly.

Paid advertising is like the stock market – it needs continuous monitoring and adjustment.

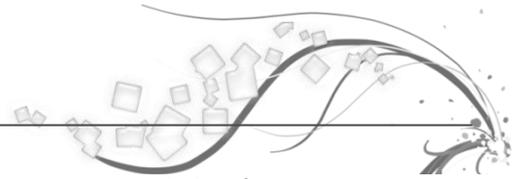
Blogging

Blogs are online journals of our views – they work as formal and informal opinion features and can trigger interest from many different places on the web.

Blogs can help clients find you and they reassure the reader that your firm is the one for them because you offer the right services and are reliable, knowledgeable, entertaining and professional.

People find your blogs by using longer search terms which may include 'how to' or a location that is either included in your copy or in the tags associated with it. Make sure your blog is tagged with all the right keywords relating to your practice as well as being registered to feed into other social networks.

Use this medium to demonstrate your expertise, include the relevant keywords and post links to the blog in all appropriate places – this will boost your readership and allow people to experience the value you offer.



Don't hesitate to write short articles as and when you can and don't listen to the people who insist on very regular blogs written to a specific length. Anything goes in the digital world and many well-known bloggers don't stick to a regime but always produce wonderfully succinct and informative articles when they do publish their work.

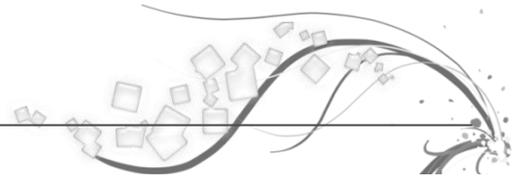
Your own momentum will come with time and confidence and you may need to start small and infrequently just to get going.

And finally

It can take time to see a return on online activity though sometimes it happens very quickly. If you know you have the resources to cope if everything goes crazy in a positive way then you have nothing to fear.

Social media is indeed wonderful – but it is not magic. Overnight success is rare unless you win X Factor. Most of us do it the longer way round but a great grasp of this kind of marketing will certainly spiral your business forward. And for those of you who want to publish a song, please feel free to – this is not against any regulations issued by the SRA or the Law Society practice notes.

Just don't swear or sing about your clients!



For more information

Call: +44 (0) 20 8144 8875

Email: info@businesstendrils.com

Read these additional documents on our website:

The benefits of social media for law firms – a practical guide to what every law firm can achieve through social channels.

The Law Society and social media - Contains an analysis of the Law Society Practice Notes on social media and also references the SRA Handbook on Principles and Codes of Conduct for solicitors. We provide a practical interpretation of how to avoid breach without compromising social media activity.

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