



CNW GROUP

CANADIAN LAW FIRMS AND THEIR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social media continues to be a hot topic for professionals from all industries. Wikipedia.org defines social media as “a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information, and content. It is a fusion of society and technology, transforming monolog (one to many) to dialogue (many to many)”. A number of early Web 2.0 adopters have already started implementing strategies into their business and marketing plans. Many, however, remain in the education phase, looking for helpful information and advice. The Canadian legal community is no exception.

The use of social media tools, applications and strategies can have a great impact on both the internal and external communications of a law firm. It helps build and solidify relationships with clients, prospects and employees by increasing engagement and interaction between parties. By interacting with their audience, law firms are able to connect on a deeper level than ever before, developing a better understanding of client needs, issues and perspectives. The days of one way dialogue are long gone. Successful organizations are now communicating directly with their market to build trust, and grow their share of voice, reputation, and ultimately their bottom line.

Search Engine Optimization

Is your news easy to find? Does it appear high in Google rankings? You can have the most incredible website in the world, but if no one can find it, what good will it do?

Clients are increasingly turning to the Internet in search of information. They are making decisions based on Google searches and which links they click upon. A strong Internet presence and high ranking are essential to capitalize on this shift.

Steve Matthews, Founder of Stem Legal, highlights two main ideas to keep in mind when developing a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy. The first is strong content. Make sure the content on your site is clear, concise and easy for search engines to index. Ensure your content is well organized and the back end of your website is not cluttered. The second is link networks. These are extremely important because links into a website are the basis of its strength. The more links you provide to other content-strong sites, the higher your Google relevance becomes. Good quality links don't change and will always work towards increasing your SEO.

STRENGTHEN LINK NETWORKS WITH:

- Sitemaps
- RSS Feeds
- Social Bookmarking
- Blogs
- MediaRoom or News Release Section
- Search Engine and Directory Submissions

As you increase content on your website by adding and including links to new pages, your web presence and Google rank will grow. If used properly, the Internet allows even the smallest firm to build its brand and compete with large law firms.

According to Matthews, many Canadian law firms are still behind when it comes to SEO strategy. Beware of companies who claim they can optimize SEO for you through methods like page coding. Make sure you have a good understanding of how they are optimizing your site, and remember, there are no 'easy fix' SEO shortcuts.

Internal Social Media Initiatives

A number of firms are exploring internal social media initiatives which go beyond an Intranet and help develop intra-firm connections. These, in turn, foster internal relationships between lawyers and practice groups to grow the bottom line. Davis LLP and Torys LLP have found internal communications as a good place to experiment with social media.

Davis LLP is implementing an internal forum for blog posts, accomplishments and information on its lawyers. The platform will allow lawyers to showcase their work to their colleagues. Davis has recognized that employees within the firm are the best low-hanging fruit. Cross promotion to different departments and specialties allows Davis to become a one-stop-shop for clients' legal needs, while maintaining all work in-house.

Torys LLP uses an internal blog for sharing success stories, papers, big wins and recognizing achievements and team players within the firm. This helps even the playing field for senior and junior lawyers and associates giving everyone a chance to gain recognition and build personal brand and corporate image.

To Blog or Not To Blog

Many law firms are currently exploring the "Blogosphere", and still, many more are sitting on the sidelines deciding if their engagement is worth the potential risk. There are certainly risks associated with blogging – conflicts of interest, controversial topics and due diligence are among some of the top issues.

If you have decided to start blogging, you may be surprised by your own success. Garry Wise, Lawyer and Notary at Wise Law, wrote two posts, '[Are Canada's Child Support Guidelines Unfair to "Second" Families?](#)' and '[Supreme Court of Canada to Child Support Payers](#)' which generated a number of comments. As the number of comments grew, an organic community began to form on his blog. This eventually resulted in a grassroots petition aimed at developing new laws and regulations. By bringing the topic to the forefront and engaging his readers in relevant content, Wise was able to witness the strength of social media take hold on his site.

Hull&Hull received great client and lawyer feedback from its blog, [Toronto Estate Law Blog](#), which helped the firm with client generation. The blog positioned the firm as experts, lending help and advice to their market.

In addition to starting a blog, many firms are also looking for ways to get coverage on other blogs for innovative or exciting work they are doing. The best way to get noticed is to do something interesting, different, or unique with your communications and marketing strategies and then bring it to the attention of key bloggers covering your subject matter.

Bloggers are not averse to receiving content as they are often busy, and content suggestion and material helps build their site. PR for bloggers is similar to traditional outlets. For either to be effective, communications professionals must develop relationships with editors, bloggers and journalists in their industry. Spamming media without engaging before and after will not result in coverage of your story.

In his blog post '[Four elements of law firm social media usage](#)' Kevin O'Keefe, CEO of [LexBlog Inc.](#), advises law firms to establish a relationship and get to know him. Most existing law blogs already have large readership and are more search engine optimized than start-ups. A mention in one of these can increase the profile and visibility of your firm.

TIPS FOR NAVIGATING THE “BLOGOSPHERE” AND MITIGATING RISK

- **Due diligence is key.** Make sure you understand your market, your clients, the topics at hand and how they relate to one another. Always be aware of what clients and cases your firm is currently working on.
- **Prepare for disagreement.** Not everyone will always like or agree with everything you post. This goes with the territory. Encourage two-way dialogue that allows you to further your opinion and engage with your audience.
- **Add a disclaimer.** This can help mitigate the potential negative effects of the blog.
- **Write from a general standpoint.** Confidentiality is key. Never include your own cases or use actual names of people involved.
- **Include a social element to your blog.** Link to other sites and information, allow for comments and comment on other blogs. Form relationships with other bloggers behind the scene. Linking and relationship building will also help your SEO – the more links to and from your content, the better.
- **Keep the information fresh, topical and relevant.** Become a resource to your audience; don't simply convert your newsletter into your new blog. Write from your own voice and perspective. Be creative and have fun with it.

Blogs are a great way to connect with your audience, while increasing your overall Internet presence, visibility and SEO. They should not be taken lightly, however, and require constant updates, monitoring, conscious decision making and research.

The Wonderful World of Multimedia

Use of multimedia is no doubt a large part of social media. With the huge technological advancements made in the past few years people are able to communicate more effectively and efficiently through a variety of mediums. Video, audio and photos are becoming increasingly important in communicating your message.



Podcasting

A Podcast is an audio or video broadcast that has been designed for playback on a computer or digital audio or video player, such as an iPod. Podcasts provide law firms with the opportunity to record information and make that information available to their clients and prospects. Firms like Osler and Gowlings currently offer audio podcasts, providing links to the material on their website and iTunes.

Torys LLP and Hull&Hull, have added a video component to their podcasts. Videos give law firms a personality and a face outside of the corporate brand, helping to build trust and relationships before ever interacting with clients in person or on the phone.

Torys has experimented with two rounds of [video podcasts](#). Stuart Wood, Director of Marketing for Torys, noted that the first round resulted in some criticism from both the viewers and the media. This feedback was useful in developing subsequent podcasts that were more successful.

Wood focused on podcasts for two major groups: students and clients/prospects. Student podcasts featured junior associates sharing their work experiences at Torys, offering insight and information on the overall culture of the firm. Client and prospect podcasts focused on specific legal matters for various industries and practice areas. Podcasting led to positive media coverage for the firm and increased overall visibility.

Suzana Popovic and Ian Hull from [Hull & Hull started podcasting in 2006](#), with most of the initial setup done in-house. They started with two every week: one geared towards lawyers and the other towards clients. As the podcasts gained popularity, other partners became interested in getting involved. Now, Hull&Hull has a full channel devoted to video material called [Hull TV](#) on their website, which increases online brand and reputation.



Social Media Releases

A social media release is an add-on to a traditional news release. It allows organizations to attach video, audio, and images with their news release, supplying all of their content to the media in one convenient spot. Most social media releases also

have the ability for moderated comments, providing a platform for audience interaction and discussion.

Links, tags and interactivity included with most SMRs will work towards increasing the SEO of your news. By directing traffic from the SMR back to your firm's website, its strength will also increase.

As online publications continue to grow and gain popularity, traditional and non-traditional media are using multimedia content more than ever. Providing video, audio, and images alongside a strong story will increase the potential for media pick-up.

Social Media Applications



Facebook

[Facebook](#) is a social networking site that allows members to engage and stay connected with friends, colleagues, networks, groups and brands.

Creating a firm group or fan page on Facebook can help promote practice areas and is a great way to stay in touch with clients. Other social media initiatives, such as blogs and podcasts, can be cross-promoted on Facebook, allowing a firm to reach a broader and more diverse audience.

Individual lawyers with Facebook profiles may wish to associate themselves with their firm – you never know when someone will need legal advice. That said, lawyers representing their firms on Facebook, or anywhere online, should always maintain professionalism. Lawyers may wish to keep profiles private, allowing access to only those who have been granted permission.

JD Supra



[JD Supra](#) is a social networking site for the legal community. The application acts as an online repository of useful legal documents such as court filings, decisions, and articles. Law firms and lawyers are encouraged to set up professional profiles and link directly to their documents. The online community, comprised of lawyers, clients, prospects and media, is then able to access all the expertise, experience, and work under the firm's profile.

LinkedIn



[LinkedIn](#) is widely accepted as the "professional" social networking site and is a good way to form connections. Lawyers, students and other members of the legal community interact on LinkedIn, posting resumes and other professional information about themselves. Many companies and firms use LinkedIn as a resource for research and recruiting new hires.

LinkedIn has a high Google Page Rank which also helps increase the page rank of your firm's website. The more links back to your firm's website from LinkedIn, the

higher your firm will appear in Google searches. Posting your firm's website on LinkedIn profiles will also drive traffic back to your site, further increasing your SEO and Google Page Rank.

As LinkedIn focuses on professional details and information, it has the potential to yield high reward with low risk.



Twitter

[Twitter](#) is a microblogging tool used to deliver short, 140 character messages to your audience. Many firms, such as [Gowlings](#), [Osler](#), [Torys](#) and [Davis](#) are currently experimenting with Twitter to determine its impact on their business. As with all social media applications, it comes down to knowing your audience. Where do they go to get their news? Are they active on Twitter? This may vary between firms and even practice groups. It's important to do your homework when deciding which applications to engage.

The key to your firm's Twitter success is providing your followers with solid content and useful information. Firms can use it to communicate new rulings or decisions as they are released, and to distribute links to their blog and other firm information. By providing relevant and helpful information, followers will view your feed as a news source. This helps build trust and highlights your firm as industry experts.

As time goes on more firms will enter the community. In addition to law firms, there are about 500-800 lawyers on Twitter, not including legal students. To find more legal industry professionals on Twitter, see this [Wiki](#).



Second Life

[Second Life](#), it is an "online virtual world, imagined and created by its Residents". Some businesses, including law firms, have been experimenting with the virtual online space – opening businesses, creating personalities known as avatars.

Davis LLP was one of the first firms to open an office in Second Life. Their office was developed for their Video Law Group as a "fun experiment" for which they set up one-on-one meeting rooms and created avatars for each lawyer. This was a great marketing tool, creating buzz and positive publicity.

Davis has since closed the office, noting that although the cost was low, it was highly time consuming.

Hull&Hull launched the Second Life office in August 2008, hoping it will attract younger generation employees and clients to their firm.

While a Second Life office can help increase online visibility, firms face the issue of jurisdiction. Because there are restrictions on legal based jurisdiction, firms are unable to actually offer any feedback or help to clients and prospects.

A Student's Perspective

Many law students are extremely risk averse and concerned about how recruiters and senior partners will view them. For this reason, many are not taking advantage of the online space.

[Omar Ha-Redeye](#) is an exception to this. Ha-Redeye sees social media as a way to showcase his legal analysis and ability to write legal documents and memos. Social media has allowed him to build an online profile and establish confidence in his ability among his peers. He is one of the first law students in Canada to regularly blog and podcast to audiences on legal matters, posting on [LawIsCool](#) and [Slaw](#). He can also be found on [Twitter](#).

It is important to Ha-Redeye to join a law firm that sees the value in social media and general branding of their firm and lawyers. Members of the social media community often develop a following and their readers will track their work wherever they go. This following is a form of human capital and is very valuable in business retention and development for a firm.

Return on Investment

Social media isn't about your firm's bottom line; its primary focus is reputation and the relationship with clients and other industry stake holders.

A successful social media program can impact a firm's brand and reputation, generate clients, build and strengthen client relationships, attract new employees and retain staff, build corporate culture, just to name a few. Garry Wise said that "social media has given us the opportunity to provide legal info to real people in real terms – to help educate them and prepare them to become clients." All of these things can, of course, have a positive impact on revenue.

While the cost for most tools may be low, it is important to recognize that engaging in social media means a large investment in time and effort. Firms looking to engage in social media should spread the workload between lawyers.

How much time and money are you putting into the project? If this is your first trial, it is best to start small. When looking at dollars spent, a lot of the initial projects can be done in-house and will have a very low financial cost. Make small bets before you enlist the help of professionals.

Steve Matthews points out that online marketing has a return on investment that is between 600 and 800 per cent. With a market of \$4.6 billion, social media is definitely worth tapping into. Engaging online will exponentially increase your market reach and allow your business to remain on a steady growth path.

Measurement

Measuring the success of social media engagement depends on the firm's goals and objectives. Each firm will define success in its own way, and therefore measure it differently.

A few ways to measure the success of your social media engagement include:

Ask where new clients heard about you.

Determine if there was a connection between your online efforts and new business.

Use statistics and web reports.

Analytics software and applications help track your website audience; where they come from; how many unique visitors you have, etc. This will help you understand what is working, what isn't, and what needs to be done differently next time. Google Analytics can give you robust statistics and comes with no-to-low cost.

Are you creating a buzz?

Are people interested in your blog posts, Facebook groups, Twitter profiles, and Second Life offices? If people are interacting with your content, you are on the right track. It is easy to measure number of group members, Twitter followers, and blog comments.

WORDS OF ADVICE

Stuart Wood, Torys: "Make a conscious decision about when and where to get involved; making sure you understand the capabilities, benefits and costs"

Sarah Dale-Harris, Davis LLP: "Do your due diligence and try anything once. Constantly add value to your client's lives and remember that you are in the service industry. If you become a resource to your clients, success and ROI will follow"

Suzana Popovic-Montag, Hull&Hull LLP: "Start now and don't stop! Use stats and analytics but don't put up too many barriers or restrictions. Have fun!"

Garry Wise, Wise Law: "Be personal, honest and speak to your audience as though they are your friends."

Steve Matthews, Stem Legal: "Don't skip steps jumping into social networking. Develop a strong strategy and content first. Use social networks as a means to distribute your firm's content and strengths."

Grabbing a piece of the pie

Social media is no longer a novelty, it is now a reality. It is already being used to maximize profits and presence of a firm in its highly competitive market. The longer firms remain on the sidelines the more they stand to lose in the way of opportunities, branding, and relationship building. The longer they remain uninvolved and disengaged, the smaller their piece of the pie becomes.

***Heather Morrison** is currently an Account Executive at CNW Group. In this role she consults with clients to keep them educated and informed on communications tools and best practices. She has taken a keen interest in how different organizations use social media to grow their profile, relationships and overall business. Heather has also recently taken to blogging and goes by @hmorrison on Twitter.*

Resources and Sources

The following legal industry experts volunteered their experiences for this paper:

- Torys LLP (<http://www.torys.com>)
- Stem Legal (<http://www.stemlegal.com>)
- Hull&Hull LLP (<http://www.hullandhull.com>)
- Davis LLP (<http://www.davis.ca>)
- Wise Law Office (<http://www.wiselaw.net>)
- Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP (<http://www.gowlings.com>)
- Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP (<http://www.osler.com>)

Additional Resources

- Wikipedia – Social Media Page (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media)
- LexBlog (<http://kevin.lexblog.com>)
- CNW Social Media Releases (<http://smr.newswire.ca>)
- Wise Law Blog (<http://www.wiselaw.blogspot.com>)
- Hull&Hull Toronto Estate Law Blog (<http://estatelaw.hullandhull.com/articles/blog-posts-hull-on-estates/>)
- Torys Video Centre (<http://www.torys.com/VideoCenter/Pages/default.aspx>)
- Hull&Hull Podcasts (<http://estatelaw.hullandhull.com/articles/podcasts-audio/>)
- Hull&Hull Media Centre (http://hullandhull.com/media_center.html)
- Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)
- JD Supra (<http://www.jdsupra.com/>)
- LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)
- Twitter (<http://twitter.com>)
- Gowlings Twitter (http://twitter.com/gowlings_law)
- Osler Twitter (http://twitter.com/osler_law)
- Davis Twitter (<http://twitter.com/davisllp>)
- Torys Twitter (<http://twitter.com/torysllp>)
- SecondLife (<http://secondlife.com>)
- Omar Ha-Redeye (<http://www.omarha-redeye.com>)
- Law Is Cool Blog (<http://lawiscool.com>)
- Slaw Blog (<http://www.slaw.ca>)