

The Pluses and Minuses of Using Social Media

By Roberta M. Gubbins

The lawyer sitting next to you at the conference is busy writing a tweet. Another is taking a selfie to post on Facebook. It seems everyone is busy using social media to market his or her practice. Should you jump on the social media bandwagon?

Maybe, maybe not

Social media has good and bad points. To understand what is best for you, analyze your practice and the legal services you offer. Know the demographics of your target market—age, income, education, and so on. This knowledge will help you sort out the pluses and minuses of social media use and determine which platform is right for you.

What is social media?

Social media is defined by *Merriam Webster* as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.”

Think Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and so forth. Each attracts a particular audience; if that audience includes your target market, consider joining.

Social media advantages

- It's free marketing; you can sign up, create a profile, and post information without paying.
- You can reach consumers who never attend your speaking events, read your newsletter, or visit your blog. Your tweets will find new readers who will comment or retweet to their followers, leading to an even larger audience.



- You gain name and brand recognition.
- People come to know you by your choice of words, style of writing, and topics you discuss. An easy-to-read style offering real information shows consumers you are approachable. They will become loyal and frequent readers.
- It builds relationships.
- Visitor analytics and readers' comments help you learn more about your audience. Knowing their interests gives you topics for discussion.

Social media disadvantages

- Content must be written, edited, revised, and published, and time spent on social media is not billable. If you start using social media, set aside the time to keep your accounts up to date.

- Social media places demands on your talent. Posts must be relevant to your practice and interesting to a variety of readers. Fortunately, you have access to many topics of discussion via the SBM e-Journal and Newslinks.
- Readers can leave positive and negative comments on everything you publish, which can lead to losing control of the content.
- Social media provides no quick return on your investment. It allows you to build relationships and loyalty over time; you need to commit to the long haul.

Social media can bring many benefits and increased profits to your practice, but it has its limitations. With good planning, you'll succeed. If you start a social media account, you could be taking selfies and posting items for your readers at your next conference. You'll be in good company. ■



Roberta M. Gubbins has served as the editor of the Ingham County Legal News. Since leaving the paper, she provides services as a ghostwriter editing articles, blogs, and e-blasts for lawyers and law firms.

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