

Using Facebook for Your Law Firm

By Samantha Meinke

In 2014, how do clients find you?

These days, odds are very good that at the outset of their searches, they're using Google, Bing, or another search engine to look for an attorney.

A website is a great first step to marketing what you and your firm can do for these potential clients. But with all the information available to search engines, it is important to use other online marketing tools to communicate your skills and the services offered by your law firm, making this information easier to find for search engines and prospective clients.

While there are lots of ways to market your firm, research shows that when it comes to choosing professionals to hire, 84 percent of consumers trust recommendations from people they know, 69 percent of people trust branded websites, and 64 percent of potential clients trust online reviews from other consumers.

You can tap into all three kinds of marketing by creating and using a professional social media presence.

With more than 1.25 billion active users and more than 128 million daily users in the United States, Facebook is a great place to start.

Law Practice Solutions is a regular feature brought to you by the Practice Management Resource Center (PMRC) of the State Bar of Michigan, featuring articles on practice management for lawyers and their staff. For more resources offered by the PMRC, visit our website at <http://www.michbar.org/pmrc/content.cfm> or call our Helpline at (800) 341-9715 to speak with JoAnn Hathaway or Diane Ebersole, Practice Management Advisors.

Create a Facebook page

If you don't already have a Facebook page, visit <http://on.fb.me/ShjUY5> and follow the step-by-step instructions to get started. After filling out a series of four simple forms, you'll have a basic Facebook page.

If you'd like hands-on assistance in improving your Facebook page, visit <http://www.michbar.org> and sign up for the Practice Management Resource Center's June 18 Lunch and Learn seminar, "Facebook 101," at the State Bar of Michigan in Lansing.

Make your page look professional

Once your basic page is live on Facebook, you should spend some time enhancing it. Many prospective clients judge books—or in this case, Facebook pages—by their covers. If your page doesn't look complete, it's not likely going to help you land new business. Know the size and resolution of photos Facebook requires. Your profile picture should be 180 pixels wide by 180 pixels tall at 72 dots per inch resolution. Your cover photo should be 851 pixels wide by 315 pixels tall at 72 dots per inch resolution. Make sure the images you choose to represent your firm fit those parameters. If you don't understand the parameters, consider hiring a consultant to help you get your page up and running.

You also need to ensure that the photos you choose present a professional image to the public. Don't choose pictures of yourself sitting in a hammock, strumming a guitar, drinking alcohol at a party, or participating in a weightlifting competition. Absurd? Yes. But these are real-life examples of what some lawyers have chosen to represent them on their professional Facebook pages, and they haven't done themselves any favors. Appropriate images to consider include your headshot, your firm's logo, and photos of your firm's building, lawyers and staff, and city skyline. For ideas on obtaining images for your page, visit <http://bit.ly/1naGBqW>.

Provide complete information

Having an incomplete page makes you and your firm look unprofessional. Make sure your page accurately reflects your skills and your firm's services. Click the "Update Page Info" button below your cover photo to display the "Page Info" page, which allows you to edit the content. To add or change information, simply click "Edit" to the right of the setting or information you want to revise, make your change, and click "Save Changes."

Before you leave the "Page Info" page, look a little closer. You will notice more headings next to "Page Info" including "General," "Page Roles," and "More." These

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represent three additional groups of settings for your Facebook page. Make sure you review all the options available on these pages. Under “General,” you can set privacy controls, moderating tools, and a profanity filter. Under “Page Roles,” you can identify other people to manage your page; you should make at least one other person a full manager so he or she has complete access in case you are unavailable. Under “More,” you have options to add apps, receive input from your online community, create settings for managing your page from your mobile device, and add featured pages and owners.

Build an online community

You may be tempted to restrict who can interact with your page and how they can do so, but you would be wise to leave your settings as open and interactive as possible. When you build a Facebook page, you are building a space for an online community to gather. The more engagement and interaction people have with your page and your posts, the more your posts will show up in other people’s newsfeeds. This is how you make your page valuable to prospective clients and search engines. Unless you have a specific reason for closing down the privacy settings on your page, leave them open. It’s much better to block the few individuals who are troublemakers than to prevent everyone from interacting with you.

Many attorneys approach new situations with caution, trying to avoid conflict, but if you approach Facebook like that, you are setting up your online marketing to fail. Be as open, honest, and positive as possible. Address problems as they arise—if they arise.

Likes for options

It’s helpful to get a certain number of people to “like” your page.

Once 30 people have liked your page, you can start receiving “insights” (analytics) about your page. Analytics are an important source of information to improve your page to make it more valuable to your community.

Once 50 people have liked your page, more options become available. The most important of these is creating a special Facebook web address for your firm. It will look more professional if the URL (web address) of your Facebook page is specifically branded for your firm rather than a string of random characters Facebook assigns you. Choose your URL wisely and be as concise as possible.

So how do you get those “likes” so you can build an online audience and start using the insight tools?

Start by going to your Admin Panel. The Admin Panel is the series of white boxes at the very top of your page. This portion of your page is visible only to you and allows you to track all interactions other people have with your page, messages your page has received, and your page’s statistics. Click the “Build Audience” button. A drop-down menu will display, allowing you to choose several ways to invite people you know to like your page. Use all of these options to gather likes. Have Facebook send an e-mail to everyone in the address books of all your e-mail accounts. Invite your Facebook friends to like your page. You can also click “Share Page,” which will create a post about your page on your personal timeline that will show up in your contacts’ newsfeeds. Your friends can also share this post with their networks, so it has the potential to reach beyond your immediate circle of friends.

Use tools outside of Facebook to promote your page as well. Work with the person who manages your website to have a “Like me on Facebook” button added to your website. Include a link to your Facebook page on your blog, other social networks,

in the signature line of your business e-mails, on your reception desk, and anywhere else you interact with potential clients.

You can also gather followers by paying for Facebook ads, but you may want to wait until you’re better at using Facebook’s free tools before you start paying for ads.

Use analytics to improve

Once you’ve gotten 50 people to like your page, you need to switch your focus. You can no longer measure your success in a meaningful way by focusing solely on the number of people who like your page.

Instead, you need to analyze the metrics available in your page’s Admin Panel to determine what kind of content works best in your posts within the community you are building. If you decide to purchase advertising from Facebook, you’ll use the “Promote Page” button in the lower-left corner of the Admin Panel.

To make your efforts on Facebook as valuable as possible, you need to post content that will maximize engagement with other users and help build your online community. What you post has to be interesting enough that others will want to like, comment on, and share your posts.

Facebook favors content that inspires these interactions. It works on the theory that people interact and engage with content that has the most value. Social sites reward the best content by featuring it prominently for long periods at the top of users’ newsfeeds. Other content, the kind that doesn’t cause users to take action, fades away without anyone noticing it ever existed.

Bottom line: better content means a bigger, better online community and increased visibility for you and your law firm. ■



Samantha Meinke is the communications manager for the State Bar of Michigan. She regularly consults with lawyers, bar associations, and law-related groups on using social media to their best advantage, and has been a featured speaker on social media at ABA TECHSHOW for the last two years.