

Tips For Lawyers On Making The Most Of Social Media

By **Steve Rudaini and Emma Maule** (April 20, 2023)

"I hate LinkedIn," is what I told the audience at the recent inaugural Planning Law Women event on the subject of social media, where I was a panel member.[1]

However, I added that it had become a professional necessity to be on the social media platform.

The fact the PLW chose social media as the topic of their first event shows how far the legal professions in England and Wales have come when it comes to LinkedIn, Twitter Inc., and other digital communications platforms.

In our combined years of working with communications in the legal sector, the change has been rapid and ongoing, with even the recent pandemic and lockdowns affecting the way lawyers interact with the digital sphere.

Although the benefits of lawyers having a prominent presence on social media are numerous, challenges remain, albeit not insurmountable.

The Benefits

Visibility is vital, perhaps more so since lockdown when the traditional face to face tactics of building a practice and network vanished. Social media platforms allow lawyers, law firms and chambers to be visible to other lawyers and potential clients.

That appears to have carried on post-lockdown, with increasing numbers of our clients requesting social media training or support.

Arguably, a greater benefit is how the legal profession is perceived by the outside world, including future lawyers.

While for many our legal sector is still perceived as an old boys' network of bewigged, pale, male and stale toffs, the reality is different and social media has a part to play in demonstrating a more diverse and inclusive profession.

It is by no means perfect, but even if a handful of people see a more diverse makeup of lawyers across social media and choose to pursue a career at the Bar or as a solicitor, it is worthwhile.

The U.K. Bar Council's social media campaign, #IAmTheBar, is testament to that approach. It was designed simply as nothing more than a social media campaign involving barristers from nontraditional backgrounds sharing their career stories, with the aim of inspiring others to join the Bar, irrespective of their social background.

It morphed quickly into an annual campaign, reaching the national press and becoming a central theme of the Bar Council's career efforts.

The campaign lacked a policy or long-term strategy, but has helped paint a more accessible



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barristers' profession with a very different image to the default "Rumpole of the Bailey" perceptions.

The Flaws

We would be naïve and out of our jobs if we were to conclude that lawyers had social media wrapped and perfected. While some have truly mastered the art of using social media to build their networks and their practices, such as the anonymous Twitterati "The Secret Barrister" and "Crime Girl," others have struggled.

It is not helped by the lack of training and guidance offered to all aspects of the legal profession on how to make the most of social media.

Although there have been extreme cases of getting social media wrong, even having a presence on it but not using it is failing to get the most out of what is effectively a free-to-use marketing tool for lawyers.

Not training lawyers in the potential pitfalls of social media and how to avoid them, as well as how to make the most of social media can also prove costly for their employers or chambers in the case of the self-employed Bar.

Reputational damage for those affected can be crippling, as seen by the recent Gary Lineker-BBC stand-off over the former's tweets regarding the government's small boats policy. Humiliation for the BBC.

What Social Media Can Achieve

Social media has its downsides, but its opportunities for increasing a business are unlimited — depending on time and budget, of course. It is fantastic for networking and building connections — lawyer clients tell us they have won work through social media.

Social media simplifies the task of demonstrating thought leadership. By sharing blogs, articles and guides, or simply commenting on the issues of the moment, shows someone is up to speed in the marketplace.

When a client is considering working with a lawyer, the first thing they will do is search for them on Google. Lawyers, therefore, need those search results to paint an appealing picture, and what they post on their channels will form this digital avatar.

So, lawyers should use this to their advantage and post a regular stream of content that provides insight, educates, informs or entertains in order to boost their online profile.

Keywords used on an individual's LinkedIn or Twitter account will feed through into Google search results, so bios should be crafted with this in mind, and maintain a complete LinkedIn profile accentuated with language that clients might use when searching for a legal problem or lawyer, to boost a lawyer's chances of coming near the top in search.

What the Regulators Say

Regulators have very little to say on this. Lawyers in England and Wales seem to be one of the most regulated professions in the universe with, perhaps, the exception of pharmaceutical companies.

However, when it comes to social media, there is little that covers what solicitors and barristers can or cannot do.

Both the U.K. Bar Standards Board and the U.K. Solicitors Regulation Authority provide guidance, but it is clear they are not out to stifle free speech. The statistics back that up to. The Bar Standards Board dealt with 2,517 reports about the conduct of barristers between April 2021 and March 2022, but just 36 barristers were dealt with for activity unbecoming of a barrister on social media.

Our examples of individual success stories are mainly those of barristers. This is because, due to the self-employed nature of their work, they are much freer to express their opinions on social media, not having to consider the consequences of blowback on their employers.

Solicitors, by and large, are much more cognizant of their law firms' social media policies and are usually wary of expressing anything that could be considered an opinion.

The Bar Standards Board has also recently provided useful case study examples for the Bar to show what would land them in hot water and what would not.

The International Bar Association also provides useful guidance, but falling foul of regulators and professional bodies is probably the least of any lawyers' worries when it comes to social media. Reputational damage is what can cause the serious problems.

What the Future Holds

As the next generation of lawyers comes through the ranks, it is likely that the legal profession will take full advantage of social media in highlighting its expertise and developing and growing its networks.

Having grown up on "socials," they will be more in tune with the benefits of social media.

Nevertheless, LinkedIn and other social media channels are constantly changing and developing, which means anyone who understands it today may not be making the most of its potential in a year's time.

The need for training and regular refresher updates should be part and parcel of all lawyers' professional development, even if they hate it.

Tips to Make it Work

Optimize the social media experience and get the most out of the platforms with these tips:

1. Complete the profile sections — fill in all the sections available. Upload an eye-catching and on-brand banner image and use a recent, professional headshot. Having a complete profile gives the best impression on any platform, while on LinkedIn, completing your profile will unlock rewards. Users with complete LinkedIn profiles see 40% more reach for their posts and improved listing for their profiles within search.
2. Research the platforms and learn about best practice — educating oneself on the intricacies of the platforms is a no-brainer. For example, how should a post on LinkedIn be structured compared to a tweet? What number of hashtags hits the sweet spot and how many will be pushed into spam territory? Do not waste time constructing a post that will not be seen by anyone. Learn what format the algorithm prefers and adhere to this for best

reach.

3. Join and watch for a while — set up a profile and log in a couple of times a week to see what people are talking about, how posts are formatted, and to get a feel for the rhythm of it. Look at competitors and peers, see what is working for them and emulate the parts that are appealing.

4. Be authentic — the best way a lawyer or any professional can make their personality shine through and make connections. People respond to other humans, so make the language sound natural. A good tip is to speak a post out loud and then transcribe it for a genuine feel.

5. Commit to a certain number of times per week — platforms love consistency. Establish what frequency and cadence works on each platform, e.g., two tweets a day on Twitter but three posts a week on LinkedIn, and then commit to this. Diarize thinking and posting time. When consuming content — reading the news or sector publications, listening to the radio, using any social platform — be on the lookout for content that resonates, and share that content on social media channels.

6. Be generous and there will be reciprocity — do not just broadcast a couple of posts a week then logout. Stick around to "like," comment on and share other's content. Other users will reciprocate, and some platforms, reward this activity. For example, on LinkedIn, interacting with three people's posts after sharing a new post, will get 30% more reach.

7. Measure treasure — keep an eye on the metrics provided by the platforms. There is a wealth of information here to delve into. Look at what resonated with audiences and replicate this. Keep vanity metrics, i.e., stats that look good but do not translate to business growth, in mind; impressions and engagement rates are great, but also see if a post has generated referrals, direct messages, profile views, etc.

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[1] <https://www.womeninplanning.org>.