

Using social media to build a reputation

BY JIM MIDDLEMISS

For Law Times

Omar Ha-Redeye has an interesting take on social media.

"It is one of the most invaluable tools that a young lawyer can use these days," says Ha-Redeye, a popular blogger and social media commentator on legal issues.

He says it's "not because only young people are on the Internet these days, but older lawyers are so busy with their careers they haven't had the opportunity to develop the skillset to use social media effectively."

Ha-Redeye says it's a good way for those new to the profession to build their legal profile and brand.

"It's an amplifier," he says. "That's all it is."

Traditionally, lawyers build their network by attending legal conferences and education events, normally with other lawyers. They join trade and industry associations, where they might meet potential clients. They get involved in charities and work their network of colleagues, friends and business associates to drum up business.

For Ha-Redeye, social media is an extension of that. It's a platform where he can engage with people and share his knowledge and expertise.

"It's relationship building and about the interaction," he says.

Whether it's a blog or social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram, more and more lawyers and law firms are building out a social media presence.

Instead of reaching out to a dozen people at a legal event, through a blog post or a tweet, a lawyer can reach thousands or more and engage in ongoing dialogue over time.

Global consulting firm McKinsey & Company suggests that organizations that use "social technologies" can raise the productivity of their knowledge workers by 20 to 25 per cent.

Moreover, surveys suggest that in-house lawyers pay attention to what goes on in the social media sphere. A 2015 study by consulting firms Greentarget and the Zeughauser Group found that 74 per cent of in-house counsel said law firm blogs were valuable.

They also suggest it could influence a hiring decision, though that trend is declining.

The legal business has traditionally been one of the biggest publishers of information, so social media should come as a natural to law firms.

Consumers will go online to learn more about their legal problems, says Ha-Redeye, and that's where lawyers can communicate, and what they say can stand out.

Lee Akazaki of Gilbertson Davis LLP is an avid tweeter



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who also blogs.

He says, "It's important to develop an online presence not just for commercial reasons of attracting clients but to gain the respect and regard of your colleagues."

After all, referral work is key to running a successful law practice. For example, a LinkedIn presence is essentially an online resumé that people can use to check you out and its publishing platform allows lawyers to write about things that interest them or pass on relevant information.

For lawyers, Michael Geist is a Canadian rock star when it comes to Twitter. With more than 85,000 followers, few lawyers can claim such a reach. His followers are influential and include journalists, politicians, policymakers and other lawyers. His tweets are informative, thoughtful and sometimes provocative, often linking readers to longer articles outlining his thoughts on his popular blog.

"It's a really fun part of what I do," says Geist of interacting on social media. "There's an opportunity to engage in some interesting interaction to put the spotlight on my work and the writing and interactions of others that I find interesting."

He said he didn't start with a social media strategy, but he was pushed by students to do it. He began with Facebook and moved to blogging.

"I was relatively late to Twitter," he says.

His efforts have paid off by raising his profile and making him a go-to guy for media commentary and raising his profile as an expert on issues, such as copyright, privacy and Internet neutrality, which all have exploded in a digital world.

He can't identify specific files that he has landed through his social media presence, but he believes it plays an important role overall in building his brand.

Garry Wise, a lawyer at Wise Law Office in Toronto, has been actively blogging for 12 years.

Wise says when he began, "basically, there were none of us."

"The term social media was not coined yet," he says.

"We started out [with] blogs because we enjoyed writing. It was a soapbox for us."

Wise started writing about Canadian legal decisions in the area of employment and family law and his blog took off, though

he says he wants to get back to writing about societal issues outside his practice areas. One of the "unintended consequences," he says, is that his blog became a "digital Rolodex," and he was being called and invited to speak

at legal events and media sought him out for comment on issues relevant to his practice.

He says lawyers have to appreciate that developing and maintaining a social media presence is a time commitment. **LT**