



SOCIAL MEDIA IN A LEGAL WORLD

Best Practices to Drive Word of Mouth



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PRACTICES FOR DRIVING SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

FindLaw is committed to helping you be effective and efficient social media users. This helpful guide includes some basic concepts and practices that can get you started on the road to social media success.

These ideas are by no means a comprehensive or detailed guide. There is no “social media rule book,” per se any more than there are codified rules for any human conversation or relationship. With that being said, there are some general practices that are recommended to help you grow your social media presence into a powerful tool for engaging potential clients, word of mouth referrers, your colleagues and your community.

Our guide is intended as a general overview only. Please refer to our training site (engagement.findlawtraining.com) for frequently updated training materials developed by social media experts here at FindLaw. These training articles will expand on the concepts presented here and introduce more advanced ideas and practices to help you maximize the value of your social media presence.



REACH AND ENGAGEMENT DRIVES WORD OF MOUTH

Actively Communicate and Make Connections

SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS

Being an effective social media user involves more than just creating profiles on key social media sites. Establishing that critical presence is a start, but it's also how your firm leverages that presence that determines the level of your effectiveness.

There are two primary components of an effective social media strategy – Reach and Engagement.

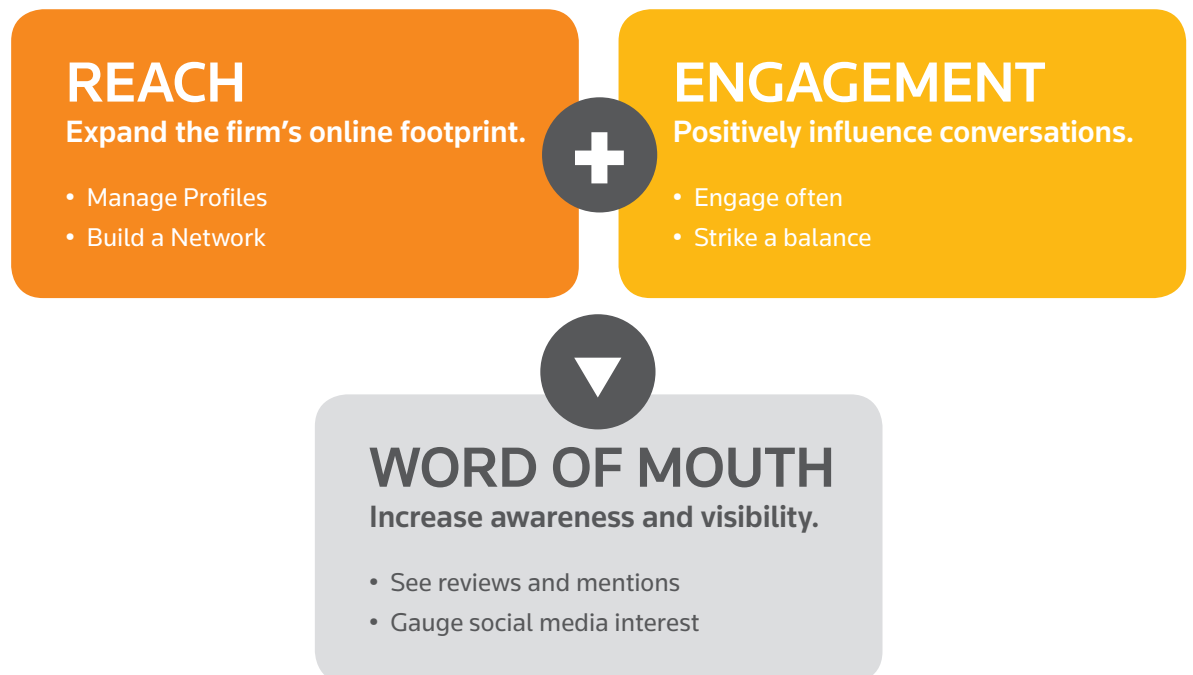
Reach: Expand your online footprint

- Number and completeness of key profiles (on and off social media)
- Size of the firm's social media network (followers, fans, and connections)

Engagement: Positively influence conversations

- Frequency of the firm's social media activity
- Balance across the types of activity (posts, reposts, and comments)

By expanding your online footprint and engaging in conversation, your firm can more effectively influence word of mouth.



REACH

Expand your online footprint

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Social networking can provide insight into the interest of clients, reach top-of-mind awareness, and elevate individual attorneys or firms as thought leaders within their practice area. FindLaw provides services to help law firms get started and take the first step towards establishing a network, completing data fields with relevant firm information and uploading a photo, as well as sprinkling in pertinent keywords.

Too often, businesses establish Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and other social accounts as placeholders or virtual billboards, broadcasting information, but perhaps not truly interacting with the audience. This is unfortunate, as the key to reaping the most benefits from social media is leveraging those profiles to drive word of mouth.

STARTING OUT SMALL

The size and effectiveness of a social network behaves similarly to how real life networking and word of mouth marketing does: the more social media activity, the more growth. Everyone starts out with a smaller group of friends, colleagues and followers with which they can engage. Though the audience for the message may be small at first, each follower has his or her own network with which they may share content. As a post's reach grows and elicits discussion around it, reputation and web rankings may begin to increase, networks grow bigger, and word of mouth spreads.

A study by Ning, a platform for creating social websites, has found **it takes just 20 people to create significant interactions** and bring an online community to a meaningful level of activity. Though expanding a social network takes dedication and regular engagement, this is a number almost any business can achieve. Once the momentum has started and as long as it is maintained, the potential for reaching new audiences will increase exponentially.

To get started with expanding your online footprint, refer to the following important tips and channel-specific guidance provided in:

- **Concept 1: Expand your Profiles**
- **Concept 2: Build an Audience**

CONCEPT 1: EXPAND YOUR PROFILES

Incorporating a social media presence allows lawyers to effectively educate, build relationships and receive word of mouth recommendations.

FindLaw provides the core information to establish consistent firm branding across its multiple online platforms. You have the opportunity to expand on that information to provide further insight into your firm. By providing additional insight into your firm, you increase your likelihood of connecting with and relating to prospective clients.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- Expanded company description
- Listing firm publications
- Announcing upcoming events
- Connecting with organizations or causes you are involved in or support
- Noting areas of interest (practice areas, general concepts) in the relevant fields

TIP: KEEP YOUR PROFILE CURRENT

Make sure any new accomplishments or changes in your firm are reflected in your profiles. Without periodic attention, your profile can start to look stale. An out-of-date profile can send the wrong message to your current and potential connections.

You can also use your profile settings to deliver additional value or to enable better management. Two quick recommendations you can do early on:



Security Settings:

Set your security settings on your Facebook and LinkedIn business profiles to allow for maximum visibility. You may wish to raise security (and lower visibility) in the future, but keeping an open profile early on will help you grow your presence more quickly.

[Note: this advice applies only to the business-level profiles. We recommend that our clients default to maximum security with personal Facebook profiles, unless you have a very clear understanding and a high level of comfort around that channel.]



Mobile Notifications:

Whether you use apps (for your Android, Apple or Blackberry device) or the email/text message notification options built into many social media channels, we recommend you set up a service that will “ping” you when a user comments on a post (or mentions or retweets you on Twitter).

This will allow you to respond quickly, a key to driving engagement. Again, as your presence and comfort level grow, you may want to deactivate these services. They can be very useful, however, when initially developing your presence.



CHANNEL-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE:



Facebook:

Users on Facebook will generally expect to gain insight into the personality of your firm through your profile. Focus on creating a relatable mission statement. Don't shy away from allowing your profile to convey what you are passionate about. Remember that Facebook is geared toward casual conversation. Don't be afraid to portray the relatable, human aspects of your firm along with your experience, expertise and professional accolades.



Twitter:

Twitter profiles are very simple. Users will choose to engage with your firm based upon the content of your "Twitter stream" – your tweets, retweets and replies. Twitter users expect your profile to be a brief, matter-of-fact description of your firm. For your profile, focus on what you do and where you are. Let your stream convey your personality and interests.



LinkedIn:

A LinkedIn profile provides many opportunities for you to note professional accomplishments and affiliations. In addition, your connections may be seen to be part of your LinkedIn profile because they inform users about who you are and what you

are up to. Effective ways to expand your profile is to –

- Actively seek out and connect to those with whom you share an existing professional relationship or areas of common interest
- Join existing LinkedIn groups focused either on topics germane to your practice or to the practice of law in general
- Obtain professional recommendations from peers or even clients, but do be aware that recommendations from clients may be held to the same standards as client testimonials. (Be sure to understand your local Bar rules around the proper use of such materials.)



Google+:

Google+ provides another opportunity for your firm to provide a comprehensive profile that adds credibility to your business. Optimize your profile for relevant and local search terms by including local keyword phrases, descriptions and content which is shared.

In addition, the right hand column of your profile provides great opportunity to display important links such as other social media profiles, your firm's website, blog, etc. These links enable you to direct people to your personal branding elsewhere and to connect them to your firm.

CONCEPT 2: BUILD AN AUDIENCE

To further your firm's reach, it is important to build out an audience. Establish "friends," "connections" and "followers." Consider connecting to businesses, people and pages relevant to the firm and its practice areas.

Aside from simply following others on Twitter, friending them on Facebook or connecting to them on LinkedIn, here are some creative practices that have proven effective at building an audience:

- Connect with members of your local Bar
- Connect with fellow attendees at legal events, seminars and CLEs
- Join online legal professional or practice-area specific networking groups
- Comment on others' blogs, Facebook posts, tweets, community pages, etc. (shows you are an active member, puts your name – and your content – in front of an established audience)
- Include "connect" messages in your printed materials and any television or radio advertisements

Also, a successful social media network requires more than just following others. An ideal balance between the number of people you follow compared to the number following you is a 1:1 ratio. Research indicates that approximately 10-15 percent of people you follow will reciprocate by following your profile.

In addition, based on industry statistics and FindLaw research, a reasonable network size target for a law firm is of approximately 300 relevant people and businesses across Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. Since Twitter tends to be the most interactive medium, we are recommending networks of sizes similar to below.

NETWORK TARGETS BY SOCIAL MEDIA SITE



150 Twitter followers



50 Facebook fans



50 LinkedIn connections



50 Google+ connections

CONCEPT 2: BUILD AN AUDIENCE CONTINUED

CHANNEL-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE



Facebook:

It is certainly not necessary to connect with thousands of Facebook users to have a robust presence that drives engagement (and potentially business) to your firm. Assuming you promote your Facebook presence through some or all of the methods listed above, your primary job will be to accept invitations to connect and to then engage with those individuals and business who have sought you out.



Twitter:

Much of your success on Twitter – and the value you derive from participating in the conversation – will be driven by following the right people – and following enough people. It is a distinct negative to most Twitter users if they see you only follow a few others. Task number one will be to identify at least a hundred users who are actively engaged in conversation around topics germane to your area of legal practice.

One easy way to identify these potential follows is to use Twitter's search functionality. Simply search for a word or phrase that is relevant to your practice.



LinkedIn:

Step one is to connect to those with whom you already share a professional relationship. Step two is to connect to colleagues in the legal profession you may know more casually. After you have taken these steps, the approach can be driven more by your interests and the level of time you are willing to commit to engaging through LinkedIn.

We suggest joining or creating groups focused on areas of interest or expertise. These can be great venues for growing your audience, but only insofar as you are an active participant in the conversation. Comment frequently. Engage other users positively, and they will want to connect with you.



Google+:

A unique feature of Google+ is the circle concept where you can organize your connections into groups. The default options for business pages are Following, Customers, VIPs, and Team members, but you can add your own custom circle like Professional Network. Start with people you know then use the Google+ search function to find industry leaders who perhaps have large followings.

Once you place someone in a circle, they will be notified of your add but they won't know which circle you put them in. They will only see the content you elected to share with the selected circle, much like in a real life setting where different things are shared with different people.

ENGAGEMENT

Positively influence conversations

Engaging a social network is not the same as expanding it. What is the good of hundreds or thousands of followers and fans if none of them are paying attention? To gain influence and increase reach, encourage engagement by both creating content and joining conversations.

ELEMENTS OF ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

There are effective and ineffective methods for engaging with social networks. The three most basic strategies for energizing interaction and word of mouth are as follows:

- **Post: Initiate a new conversation**
It can be original and unique or curated from a third-party source, but posting content to social media networks is one of the easiest ways to inspire engagement and build thought leadership recognition
- **Repost: Promote an interesting post written by another social media user**
The act of reposting is to share content that a contact has previously shared. On Twitter, it takes the form of retweets, whereas on Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+, it is as easy as clicking the Share button on a colleague's post.
- **Comment: Join a conversation initiated by another social media user**
Read comments and respond to them. Comments add to conversations, encourage active engagement and build relationships. On Twitter, comments are made using @mentions and @replies. On Facebook and LinkedIn, they are directly attached to posts and links.

POST

Inspire engagement and establish expertise

REPOST

Create trust and build relevant network

COMMENT

Engage in dialogue to build relationships

TIP: FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE

Don't just broadcast your thoughts. Likewise, don't expect others to always initiate the conversation. Positively influence conversations by targeting at least 10 social activities per week, striking a balance in time spent on each tactic: **45 percent posts, 45 percent reposts and 10 percent comments.**

For more detail on how you can positively influence conversations, refer to the following:

- **Concept 3: Communicate**
- **Concept 4: Engage**

CONCEPT 3: COMMUNICATE

To maximize that value of having a social media presence, it is important to leverage that presence to establish industry expertise and firm branding. This will help build the audience needed to attract prospects to your firm.

While the style of communication may vary subtly between LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Google+, there are some general rules that can help drive engagement and authority in any social media channel.

Remember to check with your local bar association's rules and guidelines around social media activity.



Rule Number One: Listen

It may seem paradoxical, but one of the best communication tools you have at your disposal is an ability to listen to what people are saying in social media channels. Whether you set up a Google Alert for a particular topic or simply devote a small amount of time each day to scanning the updates of the people you follow on Twitter, active listening will inform you about others' interests and give you insight into opportunities to add to the conversation.



Rule Number Two: Invest Time in Social Media

It is important to set aside time on a regular basis to update your profiles, respond to comments and thank individuals who have liked, reposted or retweeted you. Setting aside a little time for communication (we recommend five minutes a day) will help ensure that your profiles are engaging and that users who want to connect with you do not feel ignored.

Leverage the Compose box in the FindLaw Social Media platform to draft, save, schedule and publish social media content. You will also have the option to publish to one or multiple social media profiles.



Rule Number Three: Don't Be Afraid to Have Fun

Although the issues dealt with in any area of legal practice are serious and important, most users of social media will respond positively if you take the periodic opportunity to lighten the mood and put a relatable, human face on your firm. We recommend that every week, you set aside a few moments to go back over your updates and ask yourself a few questions –

- Are my updates “push only,” in that I'm only sharing information and never asking a question or responding at a human level?
- Would my updates give a viewer the impression that I am highly focused (a good thing) and professional (also good), or that I'm overly serious and lack a sense of humor?

Feel free to rely on your natural conversation skills to guide you. Remember, even on LinkedIn, the communication style in social media tends to be more conversational.

We will go into these and other rules for driving social media success in greater detail in future training articles.

CONCEPT 4: ENGAGE

Beyond posting new content, it is important to engage with the audience and those your law firm follows. You can do this by re-tweeting, commenting and responding to comments on FindLaw's Social Media platform. Just as traditional networking requires personal interaction, social media requires listening and interacting with others.

Although there are many tips and tricks for creating an engaging social media presence, most boil down to a simple axiom: In order to drive engagement, you must engage.

CHANNEL-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE:



Facebook:

There are two main activities that drive engagement on Facebook –

- Joining relevant groups and contributing to the conversation there
- Responding to all comments in a timely fashion and at a human level

It is not necessary or desirable to view Facebook as a space to broadcast marketing messages or to directly try to identify and develop potential clients. When someone comments on a post or shares experiences relevant to your practice, it is more important to respond with empathy than with “contact me, I’ll represent you.”



Twitter:

For Twitter, there are some general “rules of thumb” you can apply to help ensure your presence there is organic and engaging. Ideally, we would like to see ten percent of your activity dedicated to conversation – commenting on another’s posts, replying to a comment, etc.

We also suggest you aim to have about one-in-twenty posts be a retweet of another’s post that you find interesting, engaging and of high quality. This ratio can vary. Remember that any Twitter stream that has no retweets or is all retweets is not likely to be engaging.



LinkedIn:

Like Facebook, one of the best ways to drive engagement on LinkedIn is to join the many conversations that are already



happening in groups that are relevant to your area of legal practice or to the legal profession overall. Joining just a few of those groups and setting aside a bit of time to engage in the conversation there is an excellent first step to developing an engaging LinkedIn presence.

We suggest you have a little time set aside each week to keep up with the conversation. It is perfectly acceptable to be strategic about your engagement. It does, however, send somewhat negative messages if you join a lot of LinkedIn groups and then find you don’t have time to participate. Our advice, start small and learn as you go.



Google+:

Once you’ve started adding people to circles you will be able to see in your Google+ stream what people share and how they interact with each other. Use your stream to share things you’ve read or a blog post of yours and even engage your followers by directly asking questions that start discussions. You can make your posts public so people can find them using search, or use Circles to tailor specific messages to specific followers.

WORD OF MOUTH

Impacts and learnings

Social media marketing effectiveness can be tricky to determine. However, there are several ways for a firm to evaluate its efforts.

MEASURING BY NETWORK SIZE

The first evaluation to consider is reach. Start by identifying how large the firm's social media network is. The larger the network, the greater potential for expanding market reach and word of mouth. There is no magic number of fans, followers or connections that can measure this alone, as it is a qualitative measure.

MEASURING BY SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS

The second method of measurement regards social media interactions in terms of both quantity and quality. The more replies, comments, shares and other interactions, the greater the potential word of mouth. If those interactions are of an informative and positive nature, they further enhance the firm's online reputation and increase the potential for even more engagement.

Additionally, FindLaw's Social Media platform offers the unique ability to track firm mentions and re-posts. This helps your firm better understand:

- **What are people saying about your firm and topics relevant to your legal practice?**
This can be a great source of ideas for posts and updates. It can help you direct your conversation toward topics of interest to your connections.
- **What type of activity or post generates the most comments, responses or re-posts?**
Users will tell you what interests them and what they find engaging. Monitoring your social media channels will help you keep your content relevant.
- **Who is most engaged in the conversation?**
These are relationships it is worth cultivating.
- **Overall, what type of content is most valuable to your followers, friends or connections?**
This can guide your strategy and help you be more engaging overall.

MEASURING BY MENTIONS

A third method of measurement is to move beyond the social network to discover user-generated reviews and web mentions. For example, reviews left at Google Places or Yelp can be good indicators of a positive impact and online reach. Web mentions from blogs or news sites can also contribute to an evaluation for online marketing effort effectiveness.

The difficult nature of measurement doesn't diminish the value of social media. Beyond specific interactions, social media can increase brand awareness, network size and potentially traffic to a firm's site. With proper engagement and keyword usage, social media can push a firm's website to the first page of search results, producing even more traffic from search engines.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND TRAINING

Want to learn more about engaging in word of mouth and spreading firm awareness through social media? FindLaw's Engagement Training website is a robust training site designed for attorneys and law firms engaged in social media spaces.

This website houses product information, frequently asked questions, as well as a repository of articles that cover topics such as best practices for social media content, social media profile maintenance and technical training tips for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+.

Visit the site at: <http://engagement.findlawtraining.com>

For more information about social media best practices, please visit engagement.findlawtraining.com.

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