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Who Let the Blawgs Out?

Law Blogs Have Become the Legal Field's Latest Marketing Tool

This is the information age. Or maybe it's the information overload age. Whatever. But there truly is a world of information available at our fingertips and much of it is just a click or two, or a Google search away. That includes legal information and other useful legal advice floating through cyberspace in a law blog, or as those in the legal know refer to it, a blawg.



Tim Duggan



Jennifer Weisberg Millner



Kevin Pollock

Law firms have discovered that blawgs are not only an inexpensive and effective marketing tool, but also a terrific way for presenting information on a whole docket of legal matters of clients, prospective clients, and for communicating and collaborating with other attorneys. At press time, the Website www.blawg.com listed 2,200 blawgs in its directory, and those are just the blawgs that have registered with the site.

Some of the most prolific blawgers can be found right here in Mercer County. Attorneys at Stark & Stark in Lawrenceville have been blogging since 2004. Because the firm has a reputation for being ahead of the technological curve, a blawg was a natural addition to Stark & Stark's Website.

"Blogs are a way to stay in touch with our existing and potential client base," says Rich DeLuca, Stark & Stark's director of business development.

Stark & Stark's *The New Jersey Law Blog* provides readers with information on recent court decisions, legislation and news that impact those living and doing business in New Jersey. Other Stark & Stark blawgs include the *Traumatic Brain Injury Law Blog*, *Nursing Home Law Blog*, and *Pennsylvania Law Monitor*. About 80 percent of the firm's attorneys are active contributors.

With its focus on technology, it's no surprise then that Stark & Stark's blawgs have evolved to include audio and video podcasts. Readers can subscribe via practice area, author, or sign up to receive specific podcasts.

"We've integrated all of our electronic communications—blogs, Website, e-mail, e-marketing—all into one package," reports DeLuca.

DeLuca won't offer specific numbers on the number of hits Stark & Stark's blawgs are receiving, only to say that it's unbelievable and that readership is increasing dramatically.

Readers include clients, potential clients, and other attorneys from New Jersey and around the country.

The most popular topics are those related to current events. For example, when Linens and Things filed for bankruptcy, Stark & Stark posted a blog on what suppliers to Linens & Things need to be aware of and how that would affect them. Hits went through the roof.

Blawg, Blawg,
Blawg, Blawg

and a Valuable Source of Information for the Public

"It got a lot of play in traditional media, then all these suppliers who were Googling Linens & Things found our blog," says DeLuca.

Each blawg is updated at least two to three times a week. Blawgs are scheduled and placed in a queue, but if an issue comes up that is more time sensitive, that blawg moves to the top of the queue for immediate posting.

DeLuca says it's not a big deal for attorneys to post.

"Blogging has become such a normal course of business for the attorneys within the firm, it is second nature."

"It's easy to post a blog or two, however, to keep it going over a longer period of time you do need to find time to write the blogs and that often requires keeping up to date on cases, following trends, and putting information out there that people are interested in," adds Tim Duggan, chairman of Stark & Stark's bankruptcy and creditor's rights group and property evaluation group.

Duggan has been posting for the past two years now, focusing primarily on commercial real estate tax and eminent domain issues.

For Duggan, blawgs represent a whole new way for the public to connect with a law firm.

"It's interesting how people are finding lawyers and how many people are accustomed to throwing in names or ideas into Google," he says. Today, people can find you in all different ways."

Stark & Stark is generating a fair amount of business because of the blawgs.

"The upside is you get new business, the downside is you get a lot of people asking questions and people following up [on a blawg post] and they take a substantial amount of time," says Duggan. "We do our best to take each call."

The most effective blawgs, in Duggan's opinion, are those that are more educational rather than promotional.

"People who have had the most success are those who really pay attention to the content," he opines. "I think people are educated enough and if it's a pure promotional blog they'll go onto the next site on Google."

Stark & Stark's blawggers seem to realize that and make a concerted effort to ensure that they are posting stories that people are interested in reading, and that hopefully inspires them to contact the firm.

Duggan is often contacted by other lawyers who read his blawgs, and recalls one lawyer who contacted him after discovering his blawg while doing research on Google.

"I don't think Google is the best place to do research, but for this person it worked out well," says Duggan. "I was able to share some ideas with her and it saved her a lot of time."

Although many firms do a good job of keeping their posts informational, others use their blawgs to shamelessly promote their firm, particularly some who specialize in personal injury cases, fostering an image of an Internet ambulance chaser. Most, however, tend to be a bit subtler in using their blawg for marketing and promotions.

Fox Rothschild LLP in Princeton might be considered a serial blawger. The firm currently has 16 blawgs on such topics as New Jersey Family Law, New Jersey Real Estate Law, Education Law, Employee Benefits, and Tax Litigation.

Jennifer Weisberg Millner, partner with Fox Rothschild LLP, contributes to the practice's New Jersey Family Law blawg. That blawg provides information and tips on alimony, child support, custody, parenting time, divorce, equitable distribution, prenuptial agreements, and domestic violence.

The inspiration for blawging was the realization that blogs are becoming serious ways that people are communicating and obtaining information.

"That led us to believe that in order to be current and meet our clients' needs, we had to venture into the blog," says Weisberg Millner.

The goal at Fox Rothschild is to post at least twice a week. In addition to providing information, the blawgs are bringing in new business, which has been a pleasant surprise to Weisberg Millner.

"When the blog started, I would have said it was a supplement to our marketing efforts," she says. "To me, it's incredible, and maybe it's my age, but people are truly finding attorneys through the Internet and it's a real significant tool they're using that I didn't anticipate."

Readers can subscribe to the Fox Rothschild blawg they're interested in and are notified via e-mail about the latest post, or they can simply log onto the firm's website and click on the "blog" page. Weisberg Millner also carries business cards that promote the blawg and often directs prospective clients to the firm's Website where they can learn more about her and read her blawg. She's even received referrals from other attorneys located out of state because of the blawg.

Weisberg Millner says the secret to a successful blawg is keeping things current and making sure posts are consistent. By doing this, readers are more likely to keep coming back.

"You can't have a post once a month and three or four in a week," she says. "We post two to three times a week."

It's not just the large law firms who are blawgging. Even small firms have gotten into the act. Kevin A. Pollock has a small practice in Pennington and has been blawging for nearly four years. His inspiration for starting his blawg, which centers on his areas of expertise—trusts and estates, guardianships, tax and asset protection planning, corporate and business law, business succession planning, residential real estate, and sports and entertainment law—, was because he knew someone else who was doing it.

"I thought if they were getting business from it and it was working, I should consider it," he recalls.

It's working. The blawg has helped Pollock's online search rankings.

"It's pretty expensive to advertise in print or on the Web, and by constantly having content, you're getting your Website further up in the rankings without any out of pocket costs," says Pollock.

Pollock's most popular blawgs are those comparing Japanese and U.S. tax laws. Another hot topic is asset protection. He tries to update the blawgs monthly and acknowledges that he's never at a loss for something to write about. Some of the topics he writes about function more like an FAQ where he addresses issues and answers the questions that clients and potential clients might ask again and again.

Pollock's blawgs garner about 1,000 hits a month. Not bad for a small law practice in Pennington. He also gets a fair number of calls from other attorneys inquiring about different legal issues that he either blawgs about or deals with daily.

"There's a couple of reasons to do it," he adds, "partially community service, partially advertising, and partially because it brings in clients. I've found at least seven or eight clients since I've been doing this, and in my business, the low-volume, high-profit business, that's not bad," he says. "It's certainly better than I ever did with the Yellow Pages."

As more law firms take their expertise to the Internet, it's clear that every blawg has its day. No doubt about it, that day is here and now. ■

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