



Précis Paper

Practical Social Media for Lawyers and Law Firms

A discussion of the practical use of social media for lawyers and law firms.

Discussion Includes

- Social media landscape
- Channels of social media
- Content and audiences
- Engagement
- Tips for getting started with social media

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Practical Social Media for Lawyers and Law Firms

1. In this edition of BenchTV, Ryan Shelley (Managing Director – Pepper IT, Sydney) and Alex Brown (Marketing Manager – Pepper IT, Sydney) discuss the increasing importance of lawyers and law firms using social media as a tool to not only increase their exposure to current and potential clients, but also to other firms and businesses.

Social media landscape

2. Traditionally social media has been viewed by many law firms as a recruitment tool, as a way to attract law graduates by getting their attention through social media. However, law firms are now beginning to realise that their social media efforts need to compliment their traditional marketing efforts.
3. Australians of all ages are now active on social media. The size of the audience and the hours being spent consuming social media is unparalleled with any other type of media that is available.
4. On a monthly basis, 15 million Australians are using Facebook, 4.2 million are on LinkedIn, 3 million are on Twitter and another 9 million are using Instagram. There has also been a large shift to business to business marketing through social media, as businesses are no longer referring to the yellow pages to make business connections but are instead using social media.
5. A recent Lawyer's Weekly survey on 'disruption' found that the second biggest disruption to the legal industry was identified to be social media. This means that there is an unparalleled opportunity for firms to present themselves and boost themselves as thought leaders and experts in their fields.
6. In a recent LEAP Legal survey, 75% of principals surveyed identified that social media was going to become a focus for their firm in 2018. Social media is an extremely useful tool in that it allows you to speak directly to your audience, control conversations, monitor news, events and the activities of your competitors. It also provides an ongoing channel to promote yourself and your firm.
7. In practical terms, you are able to promote seminars and events that you attending, you can discuss client's success stories, refer to successors for the business such as awards and

events and so on. It is essentially an extension of your business development and marketing activities.

8. It is also a great way to keep on top of what your clients are doing. You are able to engage a sympathetic ear and provide ad hoc support and unofficial advice to those clients, and see what challenges they may be facing.
9. Pepper IT assisted a professional association with their social media and were able to develop a tenfold increase in their reach and engagement. This association is involved in a very bureaucratic industry and one of the things they were able to do through social media was show support for their members.
10. With this increased support and community, members became more engaged and they perceived more value in being members of the association. The association's membership base increased, as did their membership retention rates. By using social media they were also able to untap a previously non-existent revenue opportunity through sponsorship.

Channels of social media

11. For the legal industry and professional services in general, the first social media channel that is commonly used is LinkedIn. LinkedIn offers a large network of professionals so it is a useful tool for all businesses.
12. The next channel that is impossible to ignore given its large audience mentioned above is Facebook. The CEO's, the executives and the influencers of some of Australia's largest companies are all active on Facebook.
13. Twitter, whilst not as popular as LinkedIn or Facebook, is where the influencers, thought leaders and journalists are. Twitter is where the industry leaders and influencers are building their brands and their profiles, and these are the sort of people that firms and senior solicitors need to be seen by.
14. Instagram on the other hand is perceived as the younger network, with a large number of their users being young people. With this younger generation and growth, law firms need to be seen on Instagram. The challenge with Instagram is that it is very visual, and it can be very difficult to make common aspects of a law firm visually appealing. It provides a 'through the lens' opportunity for a firm to show its values and what it is like to work at that firm.
15. When using social media, it is important to ensure you have enough resources dedicated to its upkeep because nothing decays trust more than a stale and old social media presence.

You should always ensure that if you have limited resources, you should do a few social media channels well rather than attempting to do too much, and risk having a channel become stale and decaying. This comes back to the idea of having a well thought out strategy, knowing who your audience is and who you are sending that message out to through social media.

16. Although it is possible to link many social media account together, Pepper IT highly advises against doing so. In order to be effective, you need to dedicate the time to be able treat each platform separately.

Content and audiences

17. You must consider your values, who your audience will be and where you want to position yourself within the market before you start to consider what content you are going to produce.
18. Your content will be analysed word by word and picture by picture by the algorithms that are sitting behind these social media channels. This will determine what content is shown to your audience.
19. The role of the social media platforms is to show only the most relevant and interesting content to their audiences. This highlights the need for consistency on the message you are sending out, and consistency on timing so ensure your content does not get lost.
20. You cannot be everything to everyone, so you must consider who you want your audience to be, and ensure that the content you are producing is relevant to that audience. In a nutshell, the content has to be relevant, timely and interesting. One of the biggest reasons that audiences were ceasing to follow businesses on social media was because they were bored by the content.
21. It is recommended that law firms and other businesses consider a very simple strategy, often referred to as a 5-3-2 strategy. This means that for every 10 pieces of content you produce on your social media channels, 5 of those cannot be about you or your firm. This is where you attempt to present yourself as an expert in the field by sharing content from the industry, from complimentary businesses, and so on.
22. Your next 3 pieces of content should be where you use your ability to market your business. This content should be specifically about you, your firm, your solicitors, etc. This could mean content about work that has been done, client success stories, awards that have been won, and so on.

23. The next 2 pieces should display your human side. This is where you can show your audience your values and what matters to you. For example, what causes and charities you like to assist, any pro bono work you may have been involved in, the firm participating in charity events, and so on.
24. All content must be written for your audience, you should avoid using legalese and technical jargon where possible. The content needs to be written succinctly, clearly and needs to be understood by your audience.
25. Finding the relevant content to share that you have not produced is an opportunity to follow and share industry news. Finding this content is made easier nowadays. Most firms are doing a lot of media monitoring, and there is a multitude of tools available that allows firms and businesses to monitor news from the industry quite easily. One of the easiest tools of this kind, even for a non-technically savvy person, is Google Alerts.

Engagement

26. Your social media conversations need to be open ended in order to facilitate discussion, thereby increasing exposure. It is also important to make use of tools such as tagging and hashtagging to increase the opportunity for discussion and engagement.
27. Tagging is essentially like the bibliography of the content you are sharing, by tagging you are giving credit to others as if you are referencing or quoting their work. A hashtag is more about the topic or area of interest and is a great way of getting your content seen by others who have an interest in that area.
28. Engagement is a very important piece of the social media puzzle. Engagement is the likes, shares, comments, etc. on a post. Social media platforms see engagement as an indication that the content must be interesting. Once the platforms see that engagement is rising, this opens potential for posts to go viral and/or for the engagement to increase further.
29. Even if you have a large follower base, if you are not receiving engagement then your content is not being seen. One technique that is suggested is to focus upon other individuals and businesses, for example any significant achievements, as this will gain that person's attention, and potentially their following's attention. This opens an opportunity to build rapport with certain people that will engage back with you in the same way that you do for them.

30. A big mistake often seen is not responding to engagement in general. You should always respond, whether it be to positive, neutral or negative comments. This is because when potential clients are googling you, one of the first things that may pop up will be the negative comment or review. If future clients do not see that you have proactively addressed that feedback, they will pass over you and go on to someone else.
31. In responding to negative comments, the challenge is to take control of the negativity and to acknowledge it. You should be seen to be proactively doing all that you can to fix that wrong.
32. Groups on social media are another useful resource. They exist on many platforms and are like a treasure chest of like-minded people who have a specific interest in key areas. However it is important to note that engaging in social media groups is not a quick fix way to gain new clients.
33. When engaging with groups, you should take an organic approach by posting content relevant to the group and take the time to engage with group members, and answer any questions you may be able to assist with, rather than immediately attempting to market yourself or your firm to the group.
34. Once you have built yourself up as an industry expert in the particular area in the group through engaging with the group, you may then potentially begin to very slowly and delicately start to advertise yourself/your firm.

Tips for getting started with social media

35. The first tip to getting started with social media is to develop a strategy. You must make sure that this strategy is aligned with your broader marketing and overall positioning of the firm. You must also ensure that you have all the necessary resources to implement this plan, and continue with the upkeep necessary to run social media platforms. You need to have dedicated resources that can effectively manage and execute your strategies.
36. Next you must make a plan and then get started towards implementing the plan. Essential to this is focusing on your content. Remember the 5-3-2 plan: 5 things about others, 3 things about you/your firm, and 2 things that are personal to your firm.
37. In producing this content, you must write for your audience. As mentioned above, you should keep your legalese to a minimum and avoid technical and legal jargon. You also need to keep in mind that different social media platforms demand a different style of language, for example Twitter posts need to be short and succinct, whereas Facebook posts can be longer and more in-depth.

38. You should also keep connected with like-minded organisations, complimentary businesses and people your firm can associate with. It is important to engage with these people/organisations, as well as with your general target audience.
39. Lastly you need to measure and look at what you can improve on your social media. You should find out what is working and do more of that, and find what is not working and try something else. The process is very much to try, measure and repeat.
40. The advantage of the legal industry being a later adopter of social media is that you still have the opportunity to get ahead of your competitors. The other advantage is that you can learn from other businesses in other industries, and avoid the pitfalls that those businesses may have fallen in to.
41. When operating social media accounts you should aim to ensure consistency, and do not dwell on negatives that may or may not happen, as this is the opportunity to be positive about the opportunities that social media can offer.
42. Always consider your client first, and what their needs and wants for you as a firm or practitioner may be. It is also important not to get hung up on the numbers, as it is not about how many followers or likes you have, but more so about making sure you have an engaged following who is interested in what you have to share.
43. Ultimately you need to ensure you have the appropriate resources to proactively plan and execute the social media strategy you have developed. The time for social media is now – social media for your firm is essential because your competitors are engaging in social media.

BIOGRAPHY

Ryan Shelley

Managing Director – Pepper IT, Sydney

Ryan Shelley is the Managing Director of Pepper IT, a full service digital and social media agency with a growing reputation as the leading agency for providing digital marketing and social media solutions to the professional services industry. Regarded as a social media expert, Ryan is regularly called upon to give expert advice, recommendations and presentations on all things Digital Marketing. He has recently been called upon to provide expert commentary on the likes of Channel 7, ABC News and Pacific Magazines publications, as well as numerous industry publications and national and local newspapers. With over fifteen years' experience working in boutique and consulting roles for some of the nation's largest professional service organisations – from law, real estate, property and private equity to the NASDAQ stock exchange, Ryan enjoys the diversity and complexity of the technical side, while working with his clients to enhance and leverage their online presences.

Alex Brown

Marketing Manager – Pepper IT, Sydney

Alex is an experienced marketing and business development consultant with over 17 years' experience across marketing, business development and client relationship management in the professional services sector. Alex has worked for leading global and top tier law firms including Herbert Smith Freehills, Clayton Utz, DLA and Pinsent Masons.