

Legal Technology

Legal Blogs Evolving into Valuable Tool for Lawyers

Blogging lawyers benefit but face unique challenges

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With the proliferation of Internet blogs, litigators are finding that this resource has enabled them to market their firms more effectively and to better monitor developments in their practice areas.

"The last few years have seen a proliferation of specialty blogs focusing on specific subjects of the law such as bankruptcy, patents, and criminal sentencing," says Thomas C. Goldstein, Washington, DC, creator of SCOTUSblog, which has provided daily coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court since 2002. By taking a deeper look at narrow subjects within the law, blogs can "create self-defined communities of people with interest in very specialized fields of practice," Goldstein says. As a result, he notes that blogs can help lawyers "make a name for themselves by taking ownership of a special field of practice and being the first mover in that field."

In addition to their usefulness in marketing, blogs "keep practitioners updated when there is not nearly enough time in the day," says Todd H. Flaming, Chicago, Co-Chair of the Section of Litigation's Technology for the Litigator Committee. He notes that many blogs digest key court decisions the day they are released.

Flaming believes that the medium's usefulness in getting lawyers interested in writing fresh content is equally valuable. He observes that some resources, such as the Patently-O patent law blog and Dennis Kennedy's legal technology blog, have become "more and more like professional publications over the

years." But Flaming cautions that readers should remember that some sources post blogs without a significant investment of time or research.

Flaming notes that lawyers can face unique hurdles when posting blogs. Running a useful blog, he says, requires constant attention; and it can be an overwhelming task to contribute entries on a daily,

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let alone hourly, basis. As a result, some law firms have had to delegate maintenance for their blogs to staff or outside attorneys. "If the blog is not fresh and up to date due to the operating lawyers' busy schedules, readers will lose interest and turn elsewhere," Flaming says.

Resources:

ABA Legal Technology Resource Center, available at www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc.

SCOTUSblog, available at www.scotusblog.com.

Patently-O patent law blog, available at www.patentlaw.typepad.com.

Dennis Kennedy, legal technology blog, available at www.denniskennedy.com/blog.

A good starting point for lawyers looking for a law blog in their practice area is <http://legalblogwatch.typepad.com>.

Links to other blog sites are available at www.blawg.org.

In addition, Flaming stresses that blogging litigators must be careful to avoid posting commentary that is at variance with their clients' interests and, thus, should think carefully before posting messages. "Authors of blogs want to give their audience a fast, fair, and accurate take on a published decision or new area of the law," he says. Flaming recommends, however, that bloggers use caution because adverse parties may well be reading their comments.

Catherine Sanders Reach, Chicago, director of the ABA's Legal Technology Resource Center, notes that although blogs originally proliferated among lawyers with an interest in technology, they are now "moving past the early-adopter stage. Solos and small firms can really benefit from the level of exposure that blogs provide," she says.

"Blogs can save these firms money in terms of marketing and website development because there are numerous free tools out there to walk users through the process of creating and maintaining a blog, even those who lack technical expertise," she continues. The website traffic involving a well-run legal blog with regularly updated content might be worth the time it takes to create, Reach adds, because the ranking systems of popular search engines like Google "reward frequent postings and seem to like blogs especially." □