

The Power to Connect

Sharon Cain explains why engagement plays a critical role in lawyers' social media briefs.

In a rollercoaster year of unprecedented challenges for the legal sector the importance of delivering communication campaigns which harness the power of social media and video has never been greater. The Law Gazette continues to catapult legal firms' failure to tap into web-based opportunities into the media spotlight – and lambasts those relentlessly churning out 'PR dross' into social media channels such as Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs.

Never before has the pressure for lawyers to engage with clients and sustain excellence in customer service been greater. Yet many firms do not understand that used effectively - and in conjunction with marketing PR and communication campaigns - social media is a powerful engagement tool which enables us to build and nurture long-lasting relationships.

Social media gives firms a 'human' face. It allows us to share, learn, and to engage with clients and prospects when they are not buying from us - with the aim that they will purchase from us when they are ready. Some 'social media savvy' firms are using video on their websites and blogs in the knowledge that this powerful medium is the future for sourcing information online. Enabling businesses to showcase their personality and expertise, video is forecast to grow substantially more than email and search engine marketing.

The seismic changes to the web and how we communicate conversely bring a myriad of challenges including speed of response, how to manage negative comments and online employee policies. They also raise the question of who should have ownership for managing social media.

Yorkshire-based Chrissie Lightfoot, author of *The Naked Lawyer: RIP to XXX – How to Market, Brand and Sell YOU!*, says her knowledge and experience highlights



Championing the 'joined up' approach: Former broadcast journalist Sharon Cain.

that as much as up to 50 per cent of the traffic to law firm websites can go directly to lawyer profile pages – reinforcing that social media should be managed by the individual lawyer and not 'the firm'.

Says Chrissie: "Most firms allocate responsibility to the marketing or business development person; an individual pumping out 'marketing and PR messages' about the firm behind the corporate veil. It's neither engaging nor interesting to the recipient.

"Potential buyers of legal advice want to engage with individual lawyers so the lawyer being visible, available and engaging to the seeker is of paramount importance. It's why having a video clip on a lawyer's profile is beneficial for the viewer because they can begin to relate to the lawyer before they've even met."

At Quest PR, where we deliver 'engagement PR' by fusing traditional and digital PR for maximum impact, we recommend that businesses do not launch into one element of social media - but maximise it in conjunction with marketing and PR campaigns - which in turn underpin the business strategy.

Peter Holmes is the MD of Sheffield-based manufacturer Anchor Magnets which has won the internationally famous "Made in Sheffield" mark, symbolising world-class quality and a proud heritage. He agrees that jumping on the social media bandwagon without a

structured approach is a definite 'no-no'.

He says: "Social media should complement all your communications so your messages are co-ordinated and you are targeting key audiences with great content through a 'Tell them, tell them you've told them, and tell them again' tactic. The world and the web have changed dramatically and businesses need to change with them to ensure their survival."

In the PR world, the myriad of transformations have been a springboard for more online media through which clients can also be profiled as 'thought leaders' in much the same way as they give interviews as 'experts' on radio and TV which remain strong platforms for boosting profile and expertise.

SMEs' hunger to complement their PR and media training skills with video blogging 'nous' has been the catalyst for us to extend our training courses to include video blogging where we teach clients to write, film, present and edit video blogs. Through these sessions, which include helping them to produce 'joined up' social media, PR and marketing strategies, companies generate powerful content to utilise across all their communication channels. In one such example, a legal firm can produce a 'top tips' feature which can be adapted for a blog post and also used to stimulate a LinkedIn discussion.

The power to connect continued...

We've learnt that generating and rolling out well written or superbly filmed content pays dividends – literally. Having launched our own and a legal services blog four years ago when many were sceptical of the new medium, we witnessed how the potent combination of drawing journalists to strong and authoritative blogs generated a raft of new business commissions.

As former print and broadcast reporters we're likewise delighted by the proliferation of journalists embracing social media, with reporters validating their interviewees after reading their blogs and checking out their credentials through their LinkedIn profiles.

The real challenge going forward according to Chrissie Lightfoot is for the

firm and every lawyer to embrace the social media revolution – which demands they adapt, innovate and defy their comfort zones to maximise the opportunities.

"Most of us lawyers are not comfortable marketing and selling ourselves. When you take a look around any networking event, offline or online, we're usually the ones huddled together in a corner somewhere hoping that we won't be disturbed. But, when we are, we're usually more than happy to engage in conversation," she adds.

"It's time to turn the traditional top down triangle marketing mantra upside down to capitalise on each and every lawyer's social capital and human capital. If we view social media as engagement and conversation, it shouldn't be that challenging. We might even enjoy it!"

To download Quest PR's free tips on how to adopt a 'joined up' approach, go to www.quest-pr.com and to read the blog, visit www.questprblog.com.



Entrepreneur in action

Ed Barnett does networking the hard way, so you don't have to.

As a self confessed networking tart, I've done the rounds and met a lot of people. In that myriad of individuals I would describe some as the salt of the earth and some that as not. In writing this column over the coming months I'm hoping the experience I've gained will help you to get more from your own networking by adopting simple phrases, techniques and approaches.

This edition we'll tackle two easily recognisable characters. Various networking organisations will refer to these as 'drains' and 'radiators' so I'll adopt the same tact. Surrounding yourself with these characters will ultimately decide how successful your networking experience is.

Drains get their name by their seemingly effortless ability to drain the energy from

the room. They are unenthusiastic, rarely smile and don't have much to contribute. You'll find yourself in charge of the conversation the entire time and that is hard work.

Beware! Stick around these guys too long and you'll be going home early. Given enough time your energy levels will sink to match theirs so it's time to make a dash!

It shouldn't be too difficult to find the drain's alter ego; the radiator. Radiators are warm, energy filled individuals who greet you with a 'hello', a firm handshake and a beaming smile. They'll confidently engage you in conversation and will be genuinely interested in what you have to say.

Make the most of your time with radiators and get them to introduce you to others in the room. They've probably formed bonds with a few people already and they'll be more than pleased to help you do the same.



So, pay attention the next time you go networking and you'll spot both radiators and drains. Avoiding drains and targeting radiators is a good idea but you need to do so without causing offense.

One last thing... Make sure you adopt polite excuses to leave drains and join radiators. With a bladder the size of a thimble I use the lavatory as a genuine excuse quite frequently but I'm sure you can think of your own.

Ed Barnett is Director of Cartridge Mate www.cartridgemate.co.uk