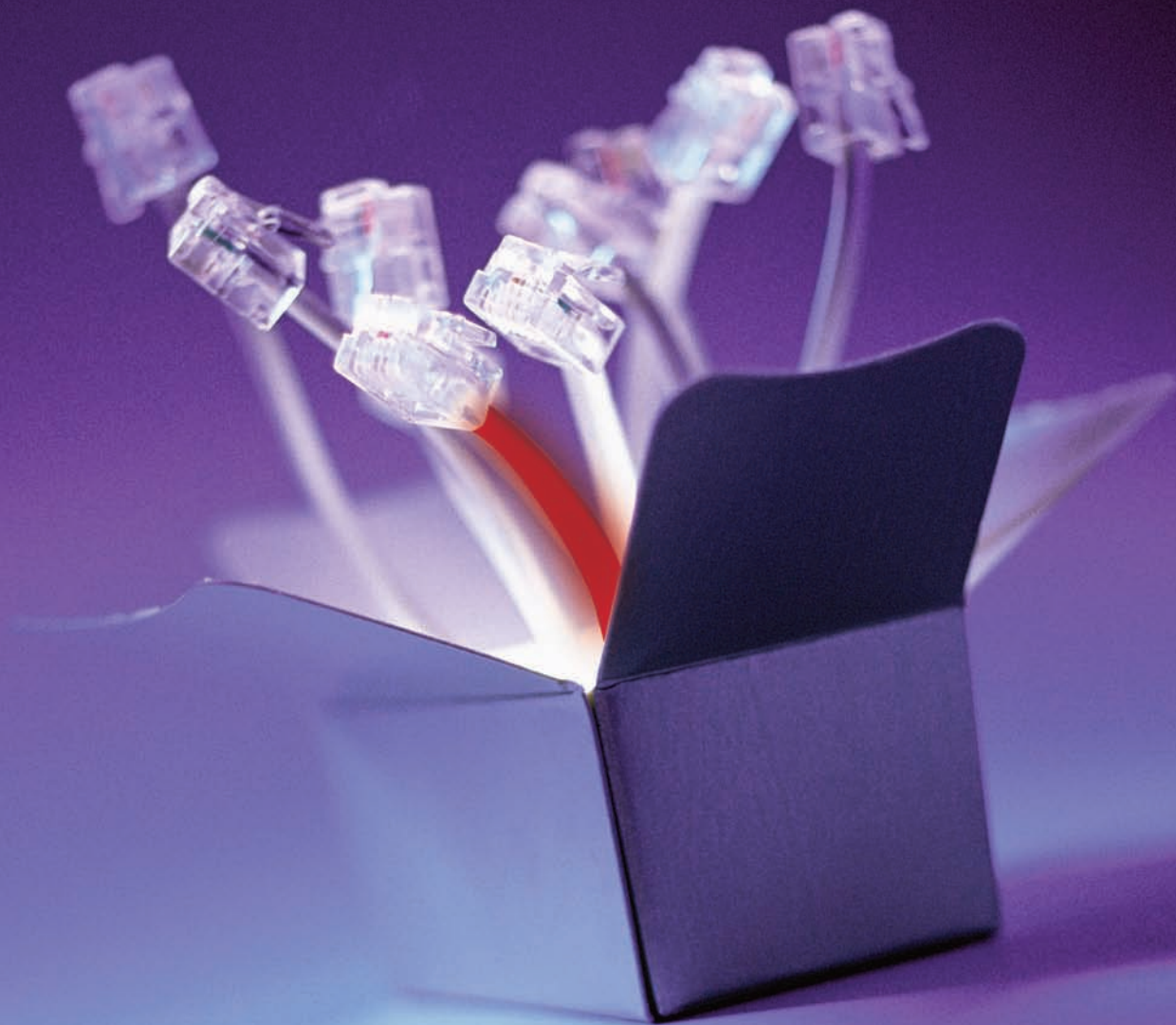


# getting noticed

Technological innovations such as blogs, Really Simple Syndication and podcasts hold tremendous promise for law firms seeking new ways to network with colleagues and reach potential clients.



Historically, lawyers and their firms could communicate effectively with the media and current and prospective clients through printed newsletters, press releases and, more recently, via information on their Web sites. In today's competitive legal marketplace, however, these approaches are still useful, but not enough to make a big difference.

Let's face it: If your law firm does not appear prominently in results of Google searches, you don't exist – at least not to potential clients.

But how does a law firm get into Google's search results? Simply having a Web presence isn't enough. Nearly every firm has a Web site – many of them virtually indistinguishable from each other, except for the lawyers' names. Savvy law firms, however, know of other ways to harness the power of the Internet to market themselves.

The power to self-publish online in Web logs, or "blogs," has freed law firms from depending on the media for publicity. Law firms can now write their own stories online and blast them out to the "blogosphere," where Web users can read at their leisure. Publishing online isn't limited to the written word, either; new technology enables self-publishers to create and distribute audio content, or podcasts, and even create video content for blogs, or "vlogs."

Lawyers and law firm staff who have started using these capabilities report that the greater online exposure has led them to new business – both consumer clients and corporate counsel – and networking contacts.

## MAKING THE MOST OF BLOGS

Blogs are principally online journals written by one or more authors, but they're also dialogues between the writers and readers. Most blogs solicit feedback, usually through a "comments" link. Rather than coming across as a one-way lecture, blogs become more of an online bulletin board.

In July 2004, Stark & Stark – a 100-lawyer Lawrenceville, New Jersey, firm – started its first blog, *braininjurylawblog.com*, dedicated to publishing news about traumatic brain injury cases. A few months later, it started a second, *njlawblog.com*, which covers New Jersey legal affairs more broadly.

Stark & Stark's lawyers update the firm's blogs regularly, writing news about recent developments in state law and their own cases. Doing so takes at least five to 10 hours a week, but the process has paid dividends for the firm in terms of new clients, contacts and referrals, according to Richard DeLuca, Stark & Stark's Director of Marketing.

For example, a recent blog entry about an appellate court decision resulted in a new client with the same issue. On Aug. 30, 2005, Stark lawyer David Byrne wrote a 350-word post about a case the firm had just won on behalf of a condo association that had been sued for water damage. Coincidentally, a condo board president happened upon the post while doing Internet research because his association was being sued over a similar issue. The board president then reached out to Stark & Stark, which signed on the condo association as a client.

## SHORTCUT

Learn how fairly new technologies such as blogs, Really Simple Syndication and podcasts can help your law firm or legal department achieve its marketing and business goals.

And that's just one example. "There's been an uptick in the amount of new business that we can tie directly into people finding our blogs," DeLuca said.

### FIRM-WIDE INVOLVEMENT

Still, it remains relatively rare for lawyers to blog. A December poll of members by the American Bar Association committee on litigation found that 57 percent of respondents read blogs regularly, but only 19 percent had law-related blogs. One respondent indicated that the time requirement was overwhelming: "All of these Web-based communications take a lot of time and effort to stay current and meaningful."

Of course, if a law firm wants to start a blog, lawyers don't have to write the posts. Anyone familiar with the blog's subject – including a firm's manager or legal administrator – can serve as a firm blogger. But, says DeLuca, it's important that the posts are written in a conversational tone, and not with a promotional, sales-copy voice.

While blogging is no guarantee that a firm's Web site will appear near the top of Google search results, many industry observers think it's helpful. Blogs tend to be updated frequently, contain links to other sites and be linked to by other bloggers – all of which tend to elevate sites to the top of results.

All of this activity has historically improved sites' rankings in search engines, says Dennis Kennedy, a St. Louis, Missouri, law technology expert. "Bloggers have a real advantage," he said.

That's not to say that blogging is the magical solution. If it were that easy to rise to the top of the rankings, everyone would blog, says Jennifer Veesenmeyer, a search engine optimization consultant with FindLaw. And, she adds, Google would change its formula if it was that simple to figure out.

### REACHING OUT TO COLLEAGUES

Legal bloggers say they don't just reach lay people through blogs, but also other lawyers, including corporate counsel. When attorneys research legal issues online, they usually go to search engines and type in words related to their problem – much like

people use the Web to self-diagnose medical ailments. In other words, they go to Google and type in "eviction" or "drunk driving."

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, intellectual property lawyer and legal blogger Douglas J. Sorocco said that since he started the blog PHOSITA in January 2004, he's struck up cyber-relationships with lawyers from throughout the United States. And, he says, they've referred six figures worth of legal work to his firm, Dunlap Coddling & Rogers.

PHOSITA, or "Person Having Ordinary Skill in the Art," is dedicated to intellectual property, but many of the posts touch on pop culture. For instance, a Nov. 26, 2005, post dealt with a new Stanford University chemistry department policy giving pregnant grad students 12 weeks of paid leave. And, an Aug. 19, 2005, post informed blog readers that Fiona Apple's CD was released after tracks were made available on the Web for download. These entries have attracted a large readership that extends far beyond intellectual property lawyers, or those who might need their services.

"I look at the Google searches that people come in on," Sorocco said, "and it's obviously stuff that no one would be looking to hire a law firm for."

Nevertheless, the blog has led to new legal work for Sorocco's law firm. He says that's mainly because lawyers have encountered the blog and ended up referring work to the firm.

### RSS AND MANAGING CLIENT RELATIONS

East Alton, Illinois-based Simmons Cooper started a blog about six months ago at the suggestion of two consultants, says partner Jeff Cooper. The firm saw the blog as a means of managing client relations.

"It's a tool to help our clients communicate with us," Cooper said, adding that it seems that more clients hit the "comment" link than have ever called or e-mailed the firm directly. "For some reason, people feel more comfortable in a forum like [blogs]," he said.

Stark & Stark also uses its blogs to manage client relationships. The firm previously sent clients e-mail newsletters but, shortly after launching its blogs, it changed tactics. Now, Stark & Stark communicates

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directly with clients by syndicating its blogs, via RSS, or Really Simple Syndication.

RSS is similar to an online clipping service. Web users sign up to receive news, or "feeds," about topics they're interested in. Online publishers then send the feeds directly to users' RSS readers. Unlike e-mail in-boxes, which can get flooded with spam, Web publishers must be invited into RSS feeds. This means that Web users receive only information that they've asked for – and thus are less likely to delete.

Also, unlike ordinary Web sites – which are inherently passive marketing tools – RSS ensures that people who want to read updates on your Web site know the updates are there. You can always post new content to your Web site, but unless you employ RSS to "get the word out," audiences won't know about your new content unless they revisit your site periodically to take a look.

### **PODCASTS: AUDIO ON THE GO**

New technology also enables law firms to go beyond the written word in marketing their firms. Web publishers also can publish audio recordings, or "podcasts," that users can download and listen to at their leisure. Although the name is a nod to the popularity of Apple's iPod, listeners can download podcasts into any device capable of receiving digital audio files, or MP3s.

Podcasts can be as short as a few seconds or as long as people can talk. They can also be one-time-only broadcasts or part of a series. One of the best-known legal series is by J. Craig Williams of The Williams Law Firm in Newport Beach, Calif., who maintains the blog "May It Please the Court," and Robert Ambrogi, a Rockport, Mass., lawyer and blogger ([www.legaline.com/lawsites](http://www.legaline.com/lawsites)). They do the weekly talk show "Coast to Coast," produced by the Legal Talk Network and available for download.

For people who often seek information by listening instead of reading, podcasts are great way to stay up to date on issues facing legal professionals, and they're essential tools for lawyers and staff at law firms who want more tools in their increasingly diverse marketing arsenals. ✱

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## Great Blogs for Legal Administrators

Your law firm or legal department may already have a blog – in fact, you may manage it or simply contribute to its content. For others, blogs are something to consider "down the road."

Whatever the case, many popular blogs exist with excellent content specifically for legal administrators and law firm managers. Check out the following resources to learn more.

- The Law Practice Management Blog by Freeman Consulting ([www.pa-lawpracticemanagement.com](http://www.pa-lawpracticemanagement.com)) strives to help you and your firm to manage the business side of your practice.
- The blog by legal technology expert Dennis Kennedy ([www.denniskennedy.com/blog/](http://www.denniskennedy.com/blog/)), who also authored several key articles in this issue, is an excellent resource on tech and other issues. He will also be a featured speaker at ALA's 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference and Exposition in Montréal.
- The TechnoLawyer Blog (<http://blog.technolawyer.com>) is considered a leading online resource for legal technology and practice management information.
- The Kohn Communications Management & Marketing Web log ([www.kohncommunications.com/weblog](http://www.kohncommunications.com/weblog)) specifically addresses topics related to marketing and management of professional service firms.
- The LawBiz Blog from legal management consultant Ed Poll ([www.lawbizblog.com](http://www.lawbizblog.com)) covers a wide variety of topics of interest to legal administrators and attorneys alike.
- LexBlog: Building Blogs for Lawyers ([www.lexblog.com](http://www.lexblog.com)) is a great place to start if you want to help get your firm into the "blogosphere." ✱

