

Blog the Blogging Blogger: Blogs for Lawyers

Toby Brown

Wouldn't it be nice if there was a technology that was 1) cheap, 2) easy to use, and 3) able to help you get new clients? One such emerging technology, catching on very fast in numerous markets, is that of Blogs.

What is a Blog?

The term blog comes from the fusion of the terms web and log. Blogs are a type of web site that is very affordable to establish and quite easy to manage and input content. They are structured in a 'journal' format, with entries posted chronologically. The combination of cheap and easy has made the technology of blogs very attractive to individuals and businesses.

Initial instances of blogs were mostly personal. People started posting up information about various aspects of their lives (sometimes much more personal than good sense might dictate). Beyond personal blogs, the next group to pick up on this and run with it was the consultants. Two great examples from the legal technology market are Dennis Kennedy (www.denniskennedy.com/blog/index.html) and Ernie the Attorney (<http://ernieattorney.typepad.com/>). These two sites have become top-tier resources for lawyers wanting to stay abreast of developments in legal technology. As well, Dennis and Ernie have become very well known across the country and as a consequence are getting speaking requests and business on a regular basis.

Ranking Well

One very interesting 'side effect' from blogs appeared in the way search engines (e.g. Yahoo and Google) handled them. Due to the way blogs manage and incorporate links, search engines rate them very highly. This means that a blog can be found very easily and ranks highly in most search engines. As one report puts it, a blog is a "Search Engine Optimization Powerhouse."

This aspect is very interesting to business, since it means a web site (blog in this case) can be ranked very high in a search engine such as Google without spending a lot of money.

An example from the law practice management world of this phenomenon can be seen with Jim Calloway's Law Practice Tips blog found at <http://jimcalloway.typepad.com/lawpracticetips/>. Jim is the Director of the Management Assistance Program for the Oklahoma Bar (www.okbar.org). In early January (2005) Jim set up his blog. By the first of February a search on Google of either "Jim Calloway" or

“Law Practice Tips” brought up his blog as the FIRST hit. To come up number one in a Google search is normally very difficult and/or very expensive.

Lawyer Blogs

Kevin O’Keefe, a lawyer from Seattle, saw blogs as a tool lawyers might use to build their practices. He established a company called LexBlog (www.lexblog.com) as a means for helping lawyers do this. His efforts have led to the creation of a number of practice specific blogs. One example is the Asbestos Law Blog (<http://asbestoslawblog.com>). This blog is maintained by a law firm in Washington State that specializes in this type of practice. They have lawyers periodically post up information about asbestos law, such as news and articles. These lawyers do not need to know anything about running a web site. They very easily insert text into a window, and then click on a button. This uploads the text to the blog. They can easily add links within the text to other sites or blogs. If they have established categories, they can specify those at that time as well. Categories for such a blog could include; cases, articles, scientific data, etc. This allows searching by category in the future. This is not a necessary feature, but a useful one.

The Blawg web site has emerged as a useful index of law related blog sites – www.blawg.org. This is an excellent listing of law blogs and even includes court sponsored blogs, such as the West Virginia Court blog at www.state.wv.us/wvsca/Clerk/Recent/, which posts recent cases and the Utah District Federal Court e-filing blog at <http://utd-cmecf.blogspot.com> which has updates on the Utah e-filing project. Check the Blawg site often for new ideas and law blog concepts.

The Solo / Small Firm Example

A search on Google for “Iowa Family Law” brought this site up as the number one hit: <http://www.iadivorce.com>. This blog is obviously for finding information about getting a divorce in Iowa. The left hand navigation of the site is actually the category list for the site and includes listings such as Alimony, Child Support and Custody. This blog / site is a great example of how a small firm can spend a little money and get a tremendous marketing impact. Clients searching the Internet for a family lawyer in Iowa will likely come across this site.

How Hard Is It?

There are two basic ways to set up a blog. The first is to go to a web service that hosts blogs, sign up, then start adding content. The second method is to acquire blog software then have it set up online with an Internet Service Provider (ISP).

Hosted blogs are the simplest way to set up a blog, especially for an attorney who may not be overly tech-savvy. Although some very tech-savvy people use this method as well, for instance Jim Calloway’s blog mentioned above is hosted through Typepad

(<http://www.typepad.com/>). Typepad offers a variety of options for hosting a blog. The cheapest is \$5 per month (or \$50 / year). The most expensive option is \$15 per month.

Movable Type is an example of the blog software alternative (www.sixapart.com/movabletype/). Cost for the basic version of this \$70. If you already have an account with an ISP (for web access or e-mail), you may already have the online location to set up such a blog. This approach requires you know a little bit about loading software, but is still not that difficult. Lincoln Mead, the IT Director for the Utah State Bar, took this approach. He paid \$100 for the 'pro' version of Movable Type and it took him two and a half hours to set up this blog containing the *Utah Bar Journal* - www.utahbar.org/barjournal/index.html. He says most of the time was spent setting up the color scheme to match the rest of the web site, not actually loading or configuring the software. Admittedly Lincoln is a geek, so you may want some help in taking this approach. Your ISP might have a resource, or you might have your regular IT staff (in-house or outsourced) handle it.

Getting To It

If you have avoided adopting new technology in the past due to its complexity and cost, blogs offer a refreshing alternative. Blogs truly are a cheap, simple and effective (at getting clients) technology opportunity for lawyers to explore.