

Why Bar Association PR Pros and Bar Leaders Need to Pay Attention to the Blogosphere

*Pertinent Facts, Tips and
Suggestions*

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THE FACTS

Circulation is falling at major daily newspapers.

For the latest reporting period, ending in March 2005, circulation dropped by nearly two percent across the board. This follows a one percent drop in the previous reporting period.

Daily newspapers have had to aggressively telemarket to attract readers. Telemarketing now accounts for more than 43 percent of all newspaper subscriptions.

THE FACTS

Only three major daily newspapers (circ. of 500,000+) in the U. S. showed any circulation gains at all. Overall, the figures are down:

L. A. TIMES - DOWN 6.5%

CHICAGO TRIBUNE - DOWN 6.6%

CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER - DOWN 5.2%

S. F. CHRONICLE - DOWN 3.9%

BOSTON GLOBE - DOWN 3.9%

THE FACTS

Newspaper circulation has been on a general decline since 1984.

And the demographics do not bode well for the future. Adults who read a newspaper yesterday:

65 and older - 60 percent

50 to 64 - 52 percent

30 to 49 - 39 percent

18 to 29 - 23 percent

THE TRENDS

Major network evening newscast numbers continue to slide downward from 52 million viewers in 1980 to less than 29 million today.

Young Americans ages 8 to 18 spend nearly six-and-a-half hours a day with media of all sorts but just 43 MINUTES with print.

THE TRENDS

The fast-growing alternatives to print:

Internet, Web sites, BLOGS

Laptops, hand-helds, Blackberries

Integrated Webphones

MP3s, iPods, Podcasting, satellite radio,
personal information and entertainment

THE TRENDS

The development of “guerilla media” -- a cadre of webmeisters and bloggers who disseminate news, information, observations, opinions, gossip, hearsay, etc. (sometimes via links) in a freewheeling, highly interactive environment.

Fresh, quick, hip, skeptical and irreverent.

THE TRENDS

It is estimated that there are now more than 10 million blogs with about 40,000 more starting each day.

There are four million blogs in China alone, where 100 million people now surf the Web, fueling a quiet revolution that cannot always be controlled by “monitors” and censors.

THE TRENDS

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UNLESS WE AWAKEN TO
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DIFFERENT THAN THOSE FIVE OR SIX
YEARS AGO, WE WILL, AS AN
INDUSTRY, BE RELEGATED TO THE
STATUS OF ALSO-RANS.”

*-- Rupert Murdoch, in an address to
newspaper editors*

THE TIPS

Whatever your definition of traditional “journalism” is, forget about it.

Think about it all anew.

Look at it this way: Anyone and everyone can be a “journalist” because now everyone can instantly “publish” his or her writings on any topic.

THE TIPS

Call most of these bloggers modern-day diarists or “citizen journalists.”

Pick and choose which blogs you want to follow. Be open-minded and surf widely.

Learn to differentiate between true amateur blogs and those written, sponsored or backed by large and/or “legitimate” groups or organizations.

THE TIPS

Remember that many (maybe even most) of the amateur blogs will not succeed.

Look to the more permanent and legitimate blogs for the following:

- Advances on possible future stories.
- Timely analysis on breaking stories.
- First notice on important developments.
- Clues to op trends “inside” a community.

THE TIPS

Look to more permanent and legitimate blogs for:

- First indications of grassroots reactions.
- How an issue is viewed at the extremes.
- An anthology of information on a subject.
- Quick links to other pertinent information.
- Personal interpretations and insights that you won't find anywhere else.

Caution . . .

Take care to differentiate between fact and opinion, rumor and truth, gossip and real, credible information.

But remember that the right blogs can serve as your early-warning system and your link to the zeitgeist.

Blogs can give you a jump on the news and an important pulse reading.

AND ONE FINAL WORD

Be sensitized
to blogs
but don't
become
mesmerized
by them.