

To blog or not to blog: That is the question

Information, please! Blogging opens the door to the legal world

Tami Kamin-Meyer

Although it steals precious time from their already demanding schedules and financial reward for their efforts is questionable, numerous Northern California attorneys contribute to their law firm's blog, short for *Web log*.

Some blog as a way to express their frustration with the outcomes of some cases while others do it because they perceive it their duty to inform the public about their legal rights. While some dismiss the World Wide Web as fodder for a younger generation of lawyers, many senior attorneys say they're conversant not only in e-mail but in blogspeak, too.

According to Randall H. Scarlett, the namesake of San Francisco's Scarlett Law Group, his blog was a natural outgrowth of the Web site his firm has had for several years, "before it was fashionable." He not only publishes blog posts on his firm's Web site, he also publishes other entries he finds on the Internet focusing on traumatic brain injury (TBI), his litigation specialty. Of course, says Scarlett, if he publishes the work of others, he attributes the pieces and also includes a link to their site, if possible.


Scarlett

Spencer Pahlke, an associate at the San Francisco law firm of Walkup, Melodia, Kelly & Schoenberger, has been licensed to practice law since November 2007. He is an active contributor to his firm's blog, primarily contributing pieces about personal injury matters. But Pahlke's blogging habits didn't just start when he was admitted to the practice of law. As a student at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, he regularly contributed to 'Nuts and Boalts,' a blog featuring posts about attending law school at that institution housed in, not surprisingly, Boalt Hall.


Pahlke

He says contributing to Walkup's blog is a fantastic outlet for him to express his opinions on plaintiff's rights. "It also helps that I'm younger [than many attorneys] because I read quite a few blogs when I was in law school," says Pahlke.

Surf and ye shall find these blogs

Jim Ballidis: www.allenflatt.com
John Bisnar: www.californiainjuryblog.com
Bruce Nye: www.calemployeerights.com
Spencer Pahlke: www.walkuplawoffice.com
Randall H. Scarlett: www.scarlettlawgroup.com

For the love of blog

For John Bisnar, a partner with Bisnar and Chase, blogging offers a way to express the intense passion he has for plaintiff's rights. Blogging, he says, "is like a mission to me."


Bisnar

Bisnar gets *upset* when he hears about attempts to reform tort law, which he equates to whittling away a plaintiff's access to justice. He turns to blogging to "help me fill my need to inform others about their rights."

Scarlett says his blog is not intended to promote his law firm but rather to "solely educate" readers about TBI. His site includes posts about pending or recently passed legislation relating to brain injury from California and beyond and information about the latest medical techniques for treating TBI.

Bruce Nye, a name partner with Adams, Nye, Trapani & Becht in San Francisco, where some attorneys toil in defense work while others practice in the firm's expanding employee rights section, is not the only attorney contributing to the firm's blog. True, the firm maintains two wholly separate blogs to accommodate their disparate audiences, but Nye says both blogs are fairly active. "I blog at least once a week, but I try for three," he says. "Sometimes," he adds with a smile in his voice, "the practice of law gets in the way."


Nye

The "prose" and cons

It's not often attorneys agree, but the majority of lawyers who maintain a blog say the biggest negative about having one

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is the amount of time required to keep its content fresh and pertinent.

"I try cases and run a law firm, so it's hard to keep the blog up to date at times," says Scarlett.

Bisnar wholeheartedly agrees. Writing a blog, he says, "is not an efficient use of time." For that reason, Bisnar is among the minority of Northern California attorney/bloggers who utilizes the services of a ghostwriter for their blog. That's not to say he doesn't write his own posts. "Many of my posts are either roughed out and sent to my writer to polish and post or I send my writer information on a story, and she roughs it out and sends it back to me to polish," he says.

Moreover, some posts on Bisnar's blog are written by staff and others by Bisnar's college-age daughters, one who attends NYU law school. Training his regular ghostwriter to pen a piece in a way that mirror's Bisnar's opinions took "about the first 100 articles for her to understand my style and my bias," he says. However, now that they've persevered past that awkward training period, Bisnar admits there are times he can't tell "who wrote the majority of an article," once it is posted.

When he blogs, Nye says he has to be careful not to tip off his adversaries with too much information. "I can't be too strategic because I know the other side reads my posts," he says. And that's not just ego talking, says Nye, who says he's had opposing counsel tell him point-blank they peruse his blog posts seeking any advantage. To be sure he doesn't tip his hand, Nye says he refrains from blogging about specific cases and certainly never about anything currently pending.

Conversely, partly because blogging allows for a free-flowing, all-access method for communicating with clients, lawyers and even potential clients, Nye enjoys to blog. Not only is it "profile elevating," Nye calls it a "nice change to my routine."

Jim Ballidis, a partner with Allen, Flatt, Ballidis & Leslie in Newport Beach, thinks blogging is important because it "generates interest in our firm and keeps you in the forefront on the World Wide Web." Although he doesn't track it now, when he did count the number of hits his firm's site received in an average month, the number approached 3,500. When he last checked


Ballidis

that figure, about a year ago, his firm was advertising itself on Google, but they aren't anymore, he says.

For Bisnar, who immerses himself in the law by not only successfully representing clients in various tort matters but also by mentoring several attorneys in law office management and law firm marketing, blogging serves another purpose. When other attorneys call Bisnar seeking his advice about their client's case after reading one of his blog posts, he is thrilled.

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