

Reaching out to help others *and* build your practice

Web sites, blogging, social media? Go for it!


Gwilliam

By Gary Gwilliam

I am an old trial lawyer from the '60s. I am still as active as ever in my law firm, carrying a caseload and still trying cases. I am especially interested in disproving that adage that "old dogs can't learn new tricks." That is just not true for so many of us.

In my recent Plaintiff magazine article (August '09) entitled *Old Warriors,* I interviewed some of the state's top trial lawyers, all of whom were over the age of 65. Among the traits that enabled these lawyers to be successful were that they consistently stayed abreast of new communication strategies, kept current on technology and engaged in cutting-edge trial techniques.

I would like to follow up on this theme and address the question of how we, as plaintiffs' lawyers, can promote our work, our law firms and ourselves in an ethical, tasteful and effective manner in the new millennium. In other words, how can we stay visible in this blizzard of new information bombarding us on the information superhighway?

Let me start with a little history of trial lawyer business development. When I became a plaintiff 's trial lawyer in the early '60s, lawyers did not advertise. Instead, we gave talks at bar associations. We took prospective clients and referring lawyers to lunch. Occasionally, we mailed out information about our law firms. Some of the more progressive plaintiff firms even sent out periodic newsletters.

Things changed in 1977 with the bombshell United States Supreme Court case *Bates v. Arizona* (1977) 433 U.S. 350 [97 S. Ct. 2691]. Lawyers now had a constitutional right to advertise! Over the next ten years, the yellow pages were flooded with flashy trial lawyers advertising their wares. Newspapers, magazines and billboards advertised personal injury lawyers. Then came the television and radio ads. PI lawyers used this media to solicit victims of every possible injury, especially auto accidents. Still, advertising by lawyers remained controversial and many trial lawyers did not believe in it.

Introducing our new columnist – Gary Gwilliam

Friends:
When I wrote my book, *Getting a Winning Verdict in My Personal Life: A Trial Lawyer Finds His Soul*, I wanted to tell my life story in order to help others, especially lawyers, learn from my life experiences. I felt that by honestly discussing my addictions, my issues with losing and my long experience with the difficult and conflicting nature of practicing law, I could help others improve their quality of life. With this column, I hope to continue reaching out to provide examples of how not to repeat my mistakes, how to learn from our losses, and how to find peace and happiness in our conflicted work. – *Gary*

The Web changes everything

Fast-forward to the beginning of the new millennium. Something was happening that would dwarf all of the legal advertising of the past 20 years. The Internet was upon us. People were finding lawyers – particularly plaintiffs' lawyers – by surfing the Net and checking out our new flashy Web sites.

Lots of lawyers and law firms created their own Web sites, many of us using the services of a burgeoning cottage industry that focused on helping lawyers find clients through the Internet. Most large law firms and some progressive plaintiffs' lawyers used Findlaw, West Group, or Lexis to help us build Web sites to bring clients into our law firms.

Now, after a decade or so of eye-catching Web sites, we are beginning to find a new way to promote ourselves on the Web. No longer do we have to wait for the clients to find us on the Web – we are now going to them. Welcome to the world of social-media marketing. We can now promote ourselves through networking, writing, chatting and blogging.

Adventures in blogging

So, coming back to me – an old dog trying to learn new tricks. Yes, I am a blogger! I never thought I would hear those words come out of my mouth. But I got help along the way. With the help of the social-media marketing firm, Inner Architect, I

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am now posting articles, creating my own Web site and doing video and audio broadcasting at *www.garygwilliam.com*. Check it out! It is a real testament to the good work of Inner Architect's Susan Hanshaw and Dean Guadagni. And guess what? I am active on Facebook and LinkedIn and, who knows, I may even get into Twitter soon. So, don't tell me old dogs can't learn new tricks. It's working for me. I'm networking big time!

These are exciting times for both newly minted attorneys and us old warriors! By using the latest Web technology we can let the world know about the good work we do as plaintiffs' lawyers, and in the process change the public's often negative image of the trial lawyer.

J. Gary Gwilliam is an Oakland trial lawyer, a veteran of over 150 jury trials, and the author of the award-winning book, Getting a Winning Verdict in My Personal Life: A Trial Lawyer Finds His Soul. *Gwilliam is a past president of Consumer Attorneys of California and Public Justice (formerly Trial Lawyers for Public Justice). For more information www.garygwilliam.com. For information on his law firm, www.giccb.com.*

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