How Lawyers Can Use Social Media to Make it Rain

BY GUY ALVAREZ
WE WORK IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY. The rapid evolution of technology has enabled the world to operate as one big market. Competition is fierce and many of the products and services that were unique at one point have become commodities. Technology is having an incredibly disruptive effect on business, all businesses but particularly legal services.

There was a time when lawyers were able to merely focus on honing their craft. Lawyers devoted themselves to practice without worrying about marketing or business development. Times have changed. It is no longer sufficient to be a “good” lawyer. Especially if you are looking generate leads and bring in new business.

This book is designed to help you understand how to take advantage of digital and social channels in order to generate business. You’ll also learn how to use public social networks to enhance your personal brand and build a reputation as a thought leader.

THIS BOOK WILL HELP YOU:
■ Understand how to build a strong presence on LinkedIn
■ Clarify when and how to use Twitter and Google+
■ Create an action plan for your practice platform

As marketing consultant who works with high-achieving, experienced legal professionals from all over the world, I have the privilege of guiding my clients to consciously set and accomplish their goals. When many of my clients first come to me, they are overwhelmed and frustrated because they know they need to leverage the power of social media, but they can’t figure out how to tap into it. They know they need support, accountability and a plan.

NOW IS YOUR CHANCE. This book will help you hone in and focus on what matters most when it comes to building your personal brand online. And I’m here to guide you.

Get started now!
Warm regards,

Guy Alvarez

“In order to be truly effective today, leaders in business and society must change how they engage, and in particular how they establish and maintain relationships via digital channels.”
— Charlene Li
IT IS NO LONGER ENOUGH TO HAVE GONE TO THE RIGHT SCHOOLS OR EVEN TO BE A REALLY GOOD LAWYER.

THE OLD DAYS
In the old days, business development simply meant another lunch at the club, or attending an occasional event where you could mingle over cocktails. Or if you were a real go-getter, you would give a talk at a seminar or conference that would let you highlight your expertise to a roomful of eager young professionals. But guess what? The old boy network falls far short in today’s hyper-connected, ultra-competitive world. The rules of business development have changed, even for the most established of firms. It is no longer enough to have gone to the right schools or even to be a really good lawyer.

In the hyper-connected world a law firm must now engage with the rest of the business world through social media. Quite simply that’s where your clients and competitors already live.

Consider for a moment the differences between the old school and new school approach to business development and you’ll quickly appreciate why the old tools and techniques are now so outdated:

OLD SCHOOL APPROACH: If you’re serious about working your connections the old-fashioned way, you’ll stay busy attending a few events a week, pressing the flesh. But how many of the people you meet are really interested in what you do and how much opportunity do you have, with a brief handshake and introduction, to explain your expertise? And how does a brief personal meeting translate into a marketing opportunity so you’ll be “top of mind” if a person you meet some day needs your services?

And don’t forget the simple physical limits on the old school approach of networking. How many events can you attend in a week? How much time and money will that cost you? Will it put a strain on your marriage or personal relationships if you’re out night after night networking? And what if you are looking to network with people who live overseas? Are you going to travel all over the world attending cocktail parties and handing out business cards?

And even supposing you’re prominent enough to get invited to speak at a conference, how many people will you reach on that given day? No matter how many events you speak at in the course of a year, they will never provide you a platform to reach a worldwide audience.

NEW SCHOOL APPROACH: Now consider the reach and engagement you can generate by actively participating on social media. With a well-crafted social media strategy, your message can be delivered to hundreds or even thousands of people — people with a known interest in your expertise — without leaving your desk.

Social media and social technologies enable lawyers to position themselves as thought leaders in their area of practice, develop a following and engage with a broader community online, all of which provides an opportunity to form meaningful trusted relationships with prospective clients, colleagues and influencers around the world. Instead of mingling at yet another Bar Association event, spend the time developing a micro-site, writing a weekly blog post and curating content on a daily basis.

Social media provides enormous leverage for the time and energy invested. The contacts you make begin to share your message with their personal networks, amplifying your reach, literally extending to people all over the world.

So that’s the new paradigm for business development. The old boy network is fast becoming an irrelevancy in light of the power and ubiquity of social media, a reality that law firms can only ignore at their peril. That is not to say you should stop attending networking events and...
speaking at conference. Quite the contrary, you should continue to do the things that work for you but enhance them with new methods and tools that are now available in the digital arena.

So where do you begin to adopt the new paradigm? How do you go about building your personal brand on social media so that you can turn into the ultimate virtual rainmaker? (The rain should be real – only your techniques should be virtual!)

It seems like a daunting task since you can anticipate your firm executive committee’s response will most likely be that social media is nothing more than a passing business fad. Most law firms are incredibly conservative and painfully slow to incorporate any innovation. And all too often a managing partner’s first question is: “what are our peer firms doing?” instead of judging a new idea on its own merits.

The good news is that you don’t need a buy in from your executive committee to get started. There are a few ways to begin experimenting and learning about social media that are more modest or experimental. It’s all part of the journey.

GETTING STARTED WITH LINKEDIN

The best place to start is LinkedIn, which bills itself as the networking site for professionals. Or you might think of it as Facebook for the corporate world. Started a decade ago, it already claims more than 220 million members worldwide, about a third of them in the U.S.

If you work at a large law firm, it’s likely you already have a LinkedIn profile, as many firms upload staff bios to LinkedIn the same way they do to Martindale and West. But LinkedIn is much more than an online directory and it’s definitely worth exploring it in order to see how the business world is acclimating itself to social media.

Whether or not your firm has already uploaded a profile for you, it’s a vital first step to create an updated profile that provides detailed information about your practice, interests and experience. I would also recommend injecting a personal touch or two into your listing to avoid making it too bland or formulaic. Of course, it’s a good idea to check out how lawyers at other firms have presented themselves and it’s worth reviewing listings for other professions.

Any lawyer who hopes to attract new clients or be known as a thought leader in their area of practice or wants to leverage their professional network should start with this initial task: make sure that your LinkedIn profile is as sharp as it can be, that it’s optimized and completely filled out. Success for a lawyer depends on conveying to prospects and clients that you’re at the top of your practice area and a stellar LinkedIn profile can help you do that.

Lawyers with complete profiles are forty times more likely to be noticed through LinkedIn than lawyers with an incomplete profiles because complete profiles rank higher in LinkedIn’s search results. LinkedIn wants to make sure its results are accurate so the algorithm promotes profiles that are filled out before they display those that are incomplete.

One way to ensure that your profile is complete is to look at the profile strength meter on the right side of your profile. The more information you add, the more powerful, robust and complete your profile is.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU REACH ALL-STAR STATUS:

1 | Update your photo. It should be recent, professional and represent you or your firm.
2 | The Headline a.k.a. the most crucial 120 characters on your profile should standout, include important key words that are specific to your practice area and make
people want to learn more about you.
3 | Write your summary in a tone you would use to address clients over coffee. Your description should make them want to hire you.
4 | Make sure your background and work experience is relevant to your current practice. The most important information should be at the top. Don’t just regurgitate your resume and take advantage of the chance to expand on topics that don’t fit on an 8.5 x 11 inch piece of paper.
5 | Provide specific instructions for potential clients to learn more about you and your firm. Share specific links or documents that will help them contact you.
6 | Join groups. There are hundreds of groups related to law on LinkedIn. These give you the chance to increase your relevancy, find new people and send direct messages to thousands of people who aren’t in your network.
7 | Connect with all of your clients. They are your best source of referrals, so reach out and thank them!
8 | Share a status update every day. This is an easy opportunity to share relevant information, demonstrate your experience in your field and stay prominent in your network.
9 | Use the alumni search feature to expand your network. You can connect with your colleagues from law school, roommates from college and make new connections.
10 | Publish your work on LinkedIn. This is especially useful if you or your firm don’t currently have a blog because it will enable you to demonstrate your knowledge and analysis on substantive issue of law that pertain to your practice.

Experiment and take advantage of all of the features on LinkedIn. You can share a portfolio, publications you’ve written for and even mention your volunteer experience. Your coworkers and potential clients notice these things and that could make all the difference.

With your profile complete, the next step is to start adding people to your network. LinkedIn makes this easy by allowing you to enter your email contact list and then identifying which of your contacts are already on LinkedIn. Another way to do this is by entering your college, law school or employment information, here again LinkedIn will provide you with information about members of your network already on LinkedIn.

Once you establish your personal network, you should spend time exploring LinkedIn groups. There are thousands of them, many with sizable and very active memberships, including a number of them devoted to legal practice areas. However, don’t just join groups for lawyers. Remember one of LinkedIn’s greatest strengths is that its membership is drawn from across the business world, so this is a great chance to see and be seen as a member of non-legal groups that relate to your practice as well. As an M&A lawyer you may find it useful to join a group devoted to the telecom or energy industry. Or a tort litigator might be interested to join a pharmaceutical industry group. Some groups you will be able to join right away, others require the acceptance of the group owner.

As a group member, you’ll be able to monitor questions or topics posted by other members and read through the discussion threads spawned by those questions. Most groups will notify you via email when there are new discussions or new comments on older discussions. Here is where you can start to make a mark in the social world. Look for opportunities to demonstrate your knowledge and experience. If you see people posting questions or starting discussion where you have something valuable to add, then by all means do so. And be sure to use this
as an opportunity to start building relationships and establishing yourself as a thought leader in your field.

But remember, particularly when posting comments in one of LinkedIn’s non-legal forums, you want to avoid any risk of creating an inadvertent client relationship. (Most firms automatically append a disclaimer to the footer of email messages but this will not be included when you post a message into a LinkedIn group.) So it’s important to look carefully at your jurisdiction’s applicable rules to see how they affect participation on LinkedIn and other social networking sites. Many jurisdictions do require disclaimers and if your jurisdiction is one of them, you must include it, but all lawyers ought to include some form of disclaimer on their LinkedIn profile.

Once you have contributed to other people’s discussions and you feel comfortable with the style of the group, then, and only then, should you start posting your own content or start your own discussions.

**SO WHAT ELSE SHOULD I CONSIDER?**

The next step is to think beyond LinkedIn. Most lawyers who have taken steps to build their brand on social media have the mistaken belief that all you have to do is to participate on LinkedIn. This is shortsighted thinking for developing an effective social and digital strategy. Lawyers need to leverage multiple social networks in order to reach their target audience. The challenge is figuring out which are the right networks to use for any particular effort. For example, if a lawyer is interested in reaching international clients, then leveraging the size and power of Google+ or the reach of Twitter would likely provide a more effective means than LinkedIn.

Fewer lawyers use Google+ than LinkedIn so the chances a lawyer’s content will stand out and be noticed by prospects and clients may be significantly better on Google+ than on other platforms. Google+ is the second largest social network and similar to LinkedIn it has thousands of thriving communities (the equivalent of groups on LinkedIn).

It’s also worth noting that reporters and the media constantly monitor Twitter for ideas and trends. They look for interesting content and frequently contact lawyers who they deem have specific knowledge or expertise pertaining to a particular topical subject or industry trend. If a lawyer is looking to gain exposure through traditional media channels and develop press relations, then it is essential to deploy Twitter to build a following among reporters and influencers.

**WHEN IT MAKES SENSE TO TWEET**

Since it’s founding in 2006, Twitter has mushroomed into one of the most active sites on the Internet, boasting more than 500 million registered users, who collectively post more than 340 million tweets a day.

For those reared in a world of broadcast media, Twitter represents a fundamental and somewhat bewildering change in the mode of communication. It is a self-organizing and decentralized network that consists of individual broadcasters and their followers. Followers, in turn, may be broadcasters on their own so an interesting tweet will often be rebroadcast (or retweeted) by the initial recipient and thus information propagates rapidly across the network precisely because of its decentralized nature. This is part of the reason Twitter has proved to be an invaluable tool for social activists, including the highly visible role it played in the Arab Spring movements. Dictators can seize control of the TV station but it’s much more difficult to silence the Tweeters.

But it’s not everyone’s cup of tea and it is really only well suited to certain types of messaging. Since all tweets are subject to a strict 140-character limit, brevity is the key driver of Twitter’s success, but it also inherently limits the network’s suitability to information that can be successfully packaged in short bursts. For most lawyers, accustomed as we are to endless footnoting and qualifying clauses, this may seem like a crippling constraint.

Perhaps it’s most helpful to think of Twitter as a powerful tool for quickly monitoring and gathering information on clients, prospects, competitors and influencers. Twitter can also serve as a sort of daily alert service where you can track the latest developments within your
practice area and follow the people and sources that regularly publish updated content.

Set up your own Twitter account to get started; this is useful even if you don’t intend to originate tweets yourself. Make sure it looks professional. Once your account is set up, you’re ready to begin searching for people you know or influencers in your space. You can search for companies or individuals or you can key word search for tweets that relate to topics of interest. Once you find a Twitter source of interest, you simply sign up as a follower. It’s pretty damn simple. Even a senior partner ought to be able to do it.

If you sign up to follow a number of feeds, you will also likely find it helpful to build one or more Twitter lists in order avoid being inundated by the flood of messages. Twitter lists enable you to segment feeds by category. You can create a twitter list that pulls together feeds on M&A, or the Telco industry or any other topic of interest in your practice.

■ Hashtags are another important feature of Twitter that people use to categorize posts by keyword. People insert the hashtag symbol (#) before a relevant keyword or phrase (no spaces) in their post to categorize those posts. If you post a message with a hashtag on Twitter, anyone who does a search for that hashtag may come across your post. Clicking on a hashtagged word in any message will return a list of other tweets marked with that keyword. Hashtagged words that become popular will often be highlighted as Trending Topics.

If you’re using Twitter for promotional purposes, it’s important to use hashtags effectively since they can help make messages much more visible on the network. Here are a few tips for using hashtags correctly.

■ Don’t #spam #with #hashtags. Don’t over-tag a single post.
■ Best practices recommend using no more than 2 hashtags per post.
■ Use hashtags only on posts that really are relevant to the topic.

Although the 140-character limit renders Twitter inappropriate for long substantive messages, Twitter has proven to be extremely effective as a marketing and business development tool. For a lawyer who creates and publishes valuable content on a firm website or blog, Twitter provides the most cost-effective solution for driving traffic to that content. It gives you an easy tool to extend your reach across Twitter’s pool of 500 million users. This will work most effectively with valuable content that can then be promoted through Tweets that make effective use of hashtags. This way your promotional messages will be visible to your pre-existing followers as well as to users who are reading and searching for those hash-tagged keywords. Anyone who finds your post valuable may re-tweet it to his or her followers and so on, extending your reach across the network.

For active users, Twitter has also proved to be a very good tool for developing relationships with influencers and others who share your interests and concerns. These relationships typically develop as a result of the way information is shared or passed on over the network. This sharing — more formally called curation or curating third-party content — is an important part of the ethos of social media. After you find people who are influencers or frequent commenters on your area of interest, you may decide to re-tweet or mention their posts in messages to your own followers. There are two benefits to this:

1 | You are providing something useful to your followers: content that you believe is informative and high quality, which enhances your value as an information provider to your followers.
2 | This also gives you the opportunity to develop a re-
relationships with those people whose content you curate and share. Thanks to the sharing ethos of social media, this may prove especially helpful if they are influencers in your area and have large followings. By sharing their content and mentioning them (engaging with them) they will be more likely to share your content and mention you when you have something valuable to add, which enables you, over time, to reach a larger audience.

Twitter is unlike most other distribution channels. In order to create true engagement, lawyers should focus on creating valuable and worthwhile content that educates the reader or provides them with meaningful, actionable information. Legal analysis, white papers, interviews, tips, videos and infographics are all examples of content strategies that work, no matter what the size constraints of Twitter may be. Once you have something valuable to share, the key then is to write a clever and engaging post in 140 characters or less (including hashtags) making people aware of the valuable resource you’ve created.

POUR YOUR EFFORTS INTO YOUR OWN MICROSITE

After experimenting with LinkedIn and Twitter, the next step for the rainmaker is to create a blog or microsite. Blogs (an abbreviation for Web logs) actually pre-date the advent of social media and have been commonplace on the Web for well over a decade. By providing a simple and standardized suite of authoring tools, a blog enables any individual or organization to quickly start publishing content online. You can literally set up your own blog in less than five minutes using a free platform like Wordpress or Blogger.

Before you set up your blog however, I strongly recommend looking around to see what other lawyers are doing. Given the low-cost and ease of use, legal blogs have proliferated over the last few years. There are thousands of them out there on a wide variety of topics, some with extensive legal commentary, some more personal in flavor, from solo-practitioners, mid-sized firms and practice groups at the largest firms.

You can get a quick idea of the extensive range of blog resources from The Blawg Directory compiled by The ABA Journal which currently lists more than 3,600 law blogs, organized in dozens of categories. If that sounds overwhelming, the ABA also runs an annual competition where it selects the top 100 legal blogs called the Blawg 100.

Or if you prefer, you can create your own customized blog clipping service. After you find blogs with content of interest to you, there are a few tools you can use to manage the overwhelming flow of content. I recommend Feedly or Flipboard, both of which are easy to use and enable you to subscribe to multiple blogs, view them in a single page and organize the content according to your own preferences.

After examining and reading blogs by other lawyers, it is time to start creating your own content. This is the most important part of a lawyer’s social media strategy. You have to determine and find content that is valuable to your target audience. Coming up with ideas or topics for your blog is critical if you want to succeed. There are a couple basic categories that legal blog posts generally fall into:

1. Generic practice pointers/checklists, etc. This is often a staple of legal blogging. These items can be bland and hard to present in narrative form, but they can still help drive an important marketing objective; you can make these value-added resources available to download only after a visitor to your microsite registers with their email address. This enables you to grow you contact database.

Examples of these sorts of blog posts include checklists such as “10 pointers to consider as you prepare for your securities filing or corporate tax return,” “5 tips on how to maintain your corporate records in good order” or

AFTER EXAMINING AND READING BLOGS BY OTHER LAWYERS, IT IS TIME TO START CREATING YOUR OWN CONTENT.
“Key tips for your company’s email retention policy.”
Start by looking through your files and seeing what kind of generic advice pieces you have on hand. If you don’t have this sort of material already in hand then you should think about putting a few items together.

2 | Client stories. Ideally these stories should involve a specific situation or problem and illustrate your approach to handling it. Names and details will often need to be changed or omitted to avoid disclosing client confidences but the stories should include enough specificity to be real and convincing. The best story items are those that illustrate a specific issue or practice problem. For example, consider how to tell a short story about the importance of building client confidence. It’s hard to effectively represent a client if they don’t tell you what’s really going on. Still some clients are hesitant or reluctant to share information that they think will give you a bad impression of them or their business. But how can you defend them in a deposition or help in a negotiation if you don’t really know the details of what’s going on? So do you have a story about a client who was reluctant to share a critical piece of information with you?

3 | Reacting to recent legal developments. This is an important staple of all legal blogging. In the legal world, there are new releases from the SEC and IRS every day. Interesting cases are decided and lawsuits are filed. Any of these items may present an opportunity for a new blog story. Set up a procedure to track new developments and then come up with your own twist or explanation of why it’s important for people to know about it. For example, on the SEC site this morning I find the latest news item, “SEC warns investors about Marijuana” (truly a great headline) and I think “Is the SEC all of a sudden confusing itself with the FDA?” But clearly this is an issue of potential significance in the micro-cap world and one, which could make for a lively and entertaining short blog post. It’s worth noting that items like this don’t need to be ripped straight from the headlines. In other words, this release from the SEC is dated May 16 but as a blogger, you could publish an item about this any time in the next 60 days and it would still be relevant and timely.

4 | Personal stories that relate to your life as a lawyer.

There are a number of things you do in the course of your daily life that might provide grist for a blog post. Maybe you sit on the board of a non-profit agency or are active in a section or committee of your local bar. Or maybe you’re reading an interesting book or magazine article that touches on a current legal or business issue. These sorts of items can be turned into colorful blog posts but it’s always important to connect the conversation to an issue or problem that relates to your legal practice. Always try to make it relevant and useful to your clients and prospects.

Remember that variety is important in order to retain the interest of readers over the long haul. The best blogs do not stick to a single formula or approach, they provide readers with a mix of content. I strongly recommend that our clients utilize more than a single approach in order to keep their blogs lively.

LET IT RAIN!
The booklet presents a few concrete suggestions about how you can get started today implementing a social media strategy to help develop and promote your legal practice. But it’s important to bear in mind that making it rain using social media takes time, patience and dedication. You have to think about your target audience and then develop a steady stream of valuable and engaging content. Lawyers expecting to be able to land clients overnight by using social media will be sorely disappointed. In the real world it takes time and effort to build trust with a prospective client. Social media is no different, but if used properly and with authenticity, it can be a marvelous source of new and repeat business over the course of months and years.

I hope you enjoyed this book and found it of value.
Note from Guy:

Gaining clarity on how to use digital marketing and social media to enhance your personal brand and develop your reputation as a thought leader in your industry is an important first step in enhancing your rainmaker skills.

Now, you need to take the next step.

You need to take the lessons you have learned from this book and put them to use. You need to figure out your social media strategy and start executing it. You may feel overwhelmed at this point and unsure of where to go next.

I can help. Set up a 15-minute Call with me, and we’ll discuss how you can start to develop your social media strategy and what steps you need to take next. I can help you get there.

Are you ready? No more excuses. It’s time you set up a call and begin your journey to becoming the ultimate rainmaker.

Warm regards,

Guy Alvarez
P.S. Look forward to connecting with you.
ABOUT GUY ALVAREZ

I am a former attorney and Chief Engagement Officer at Good2bSocial, LLC, a consulting company that helps lawyers and marketing professionals at law firms understand how to use digital marketing and social media to add value to their clients, engage with their prospects and position themselves as thought leaders in their areas of practice.

I started out as a lawyer practicing international trade law at a boutique firm. It was there that I learned how to use the Internet to attract new clients, so I decided to stop practicing law and focused on helping lawyers harness the power of the Internet to market their services.

I have worked with many lawyers at some of the leading law firms around the globe including Dentons, Baker Hostetler, Cadwalader, Reed Smith, Patterson Belknap and many others. I have also consulted with top companies in the legal vertical such as ALM Media, Lexis-Nexis, Practising Law Institute and Kinney Recruiting on digital marketing and social media.

WHAT OUR CLIENTS ARE SAYING

“Guy has been a terrific resource for our marketing department and attorneys, helping us understand the ins and outs of social media for law firms. Through group and individual training sessions and consultations, Guy has supported us during the development and launch of a practice-specific microsite and two blogs, and has continued to help us navigate the world of social media well after launch. Guy’s experience as a ‘recovering lawyer’ helps him connect with our lawyers and address their questions and concerns about the use social media.”

- Jenni Dickson,
Business Development and Marketing Manager
at Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP

“Guy and Joe are forward-thinking experts on not just how to market, but when to market, and what content to provide to effectively get your message across. As social media has come of age and into the forefront of marketing, Good2bSocial is perfectly positioned to harness that power. Guy and Joe have guided me through the redesign of our firm website, and insured the website had rich and engaging content. They also set up an editorial calendar to help my firm both create and curate content in order to provide value to our prospects and clients. I’d recommend Good2bSocial without reservation.”

- Joshua Brinen, Esq.,
Managing Partner, Brinen & Associates

“Guy Alvarez of Good2bSocial has been an excellent resource to our business in creating winning social media strategies. He jumped-started our efforts to attract customers and build engagement online. Guy was able to quickly dive into our challenges and make solid recommendations that could be implemented quickly. We have already seen significant results.”

- Maura Donovan, Vice President,
Law School Marketing at LexisNexis