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**Law office management**  
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## Build your practice with a blog

**Writing a blog can help you share information, interact with potential clients, and establish yourself as an expert. It can also be a lot of fun. Here's how to set up a good one—no tech degree required.**

### Benjamin W. Glass III

When developing a marketing plan for a law firm, you have an almost endless selection of media options. But with more and more consumers turning to the Internet for help with their buying decisions, that's the medium you have to use to stay competitive.

How? A blog is one good way. Starting and maintaining a blog is not complicated: All you need is the ability to write—and something to write about. It is relatively inexpensive, costing less than many traditional forms of advertising.

Bloggging can be time-consuming, but the payoff is high visibility on a search engine's results page, the most valuable real estate on the Internet.<sup>1</sup> Like the back cover of the Yellow Pages or a television ad during prime time, a listing on the first page of a search engine's results is highly sought-after territory, and competition for it is fierce.

Keep in mind that Internet users tend to be smart consumers, and most have figured out that the "sponsored" listings that usually appear at the top and on the right-hand side of a results page are paid advertisements. And they're understandably skeptical that they can find what they're looking for in a sponsored ad.<sup>2</sup> They're likely to click on the nonsponsored listings, assuming the links will take them to Web pages (like blogs) that the search engines have determined are relevant to the search terms. Consumers feel that a sponsored ad will be less likely to be relevant than a Web site vetted by the search engines. That's why creating and maintaining a blog should be a part of your Internet marketing plan.

A blog is simply a Web site designed so that the average person (even the average attorney) can update it easily and frequently. Originally set up as online journals where the tech-savvy posted their daily ruminations, blogs now cover everything from politics to fashion. Popular bloggers have become "personalities" with credibility as experts in their fields.

Blogs are also interactive. Most allow readers to post comments, and usually the blog author approves posts before publishing them. This ensures that only quality content appears on the blog, and it allows the blog owner to filter out useless or inflammatory posts.

The primary difference between a traditional Web site and a blog is that a blog is typically updated much more frequently. It is also more hands-on: While updating your Web site may involve calling your webmaster and waiting for that person to make the changes you want, a blog lets you create and post an article instantly, and you don't need much technical know-how to do this.

From a marketing standpoint, however, none of that matters if people who are using the Internet to find a lawyer can't find your blog. As with real estate, location is everything, so it's necessary that you have a basic

understanding of Internet real estate.

Blogs are typically published in a data format called a “Web feed,” which publishes or “pushes” the blog’s entries out to Internet “aggregators”—programs that periodically scan the Web for news and pull recent posts on topics users select into one page. You do not need to understand this part of the technical side of blogs other than to know that most Web sites rely on search engines to find their data. If you want your site noticed on the Web, having information on it pushed to—rather than found by—search aggregators is a good thing.

Search engines rank Web pages, including blog posts, according to their relevance to the search query. Of course, relevance is subjective, but some of the most important factors in the search engine algorithms<sup>3</sup> are currency or “freshness” of content, the “density” of the relevant subject matter (meaning how often the search term appears), the frequency of your updates, the age of your site, and the popularity of the pages (as judged by links from other reputable sites). A blog is a cheap and convenient way to update your site frequently with current information, to generate discourse among your peers and even your opposition (resulting in more link popularity)<sup>4</sup>, and to provide proof that you are an expert in the subject matter.

Moreover, if you have a well-positioned Web site—as well as a separate, well-positioned blog—you can double the amount of real estate you occupy on a search engine’s results page. Doing so also eliminates one of your competitors from that page. If your message in either spot is interesting enough, the consumer will stop his or her search and start a conversation with you.<sup>5</sup>

Most consumers don’t know how to find the best lawyers for their cases any more than they know how to find a good neurosurgeon—and lawyers haven’t done much to teach them. Getting something you have written published is a great way to steer potential clients to you because it establishes you as an expert on the topic you have written about. A blog instantly makes you a published authority.<sup>6</sup>

Think about it: When you see a new book on a store display, you presume that the author knows the topic inside-out. As with writing a book, the point is not just to call yourself an expert but to write in such a way that the information you provide establishes your expertise in the mind of the reader.<sup>7</sup>

That same expertise can also make you an invaluable source for news reporters. When reporters are working on stories, they need comments and informed opinion, and in today’s world of 24/7 news, they need them right now. They, too, use the Internet for research and are likely to use news- or -blog-related search engines, like Google Blogs, to broaden their search.<sup>8</sup>

Blogs can help you influence public opinion. The insurance industry and big business spend tens of millions of dollars getting their message out. Media access, ads, and publicity campaigns have imbued the public with a tort “reform” message. Now, thousands of trial lawyers are getting the other side of the story out through blogs and Web sites. Just type “tort reform” into any search engine to find the insurance industry’s message being countered by the People Over Profits Web site, which is sitting on the first page of Google.

## Get the blog rolling

When you’re ready to tap into the blogosphere’s marketing potential, the first thing you should do is read other blogs to find out what is already out there. Is one of your competitors already blogging in your market area? If so, what is his or her focus? Is there an information gap you can fill?

Type “personal injury lawyer [your city and state]” into a search engine and see what turns up. Did you find any blogs on the first page of results? If so, pay attention—those bloggers are doing something right.

Next, navigate to [www.blawgs.com](http://www.blawgs.com) and <http://blawgsearch.justia.com>, two great collections of legal blogs. Spend some time browsing the blogs that interest you. Get a feel for content, frequency, and style. Also, visit—and bookmark—Kevin O’Keefe’s site *Real Lawyers Have Blogs* (<http://kevin.lexblog.com>) and read his posts.

Don’t just read the legal blogs. Take a look at some business-marketing blogs, including Seth Godin’s at [http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog) and Duct Tape Marketing, found at [www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog](http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog).

Once you find some blogs you would like to follow, set up a “blog reader.” A blog reader reads the RSS feeds that the blogs push to the Internet.<sup>9</sup> You subscribe to blogs that interest you, and the reader puts their headlines all on the same page for you. This means that you don’t have to keep a list of separate blogs in your Internet browser’s

“favorites” list. Instead, you can see the newest posts on your favorite blogs instantly.<sup>10</sup>

You don't even need your own blog to start blogging. When you post a comment on someone else's blog, you add content that can link back to you. When you post meaningful, substantive comments, the blog owners will recognize you as someone who adds value to their blogs, and later, when your own blog is up and running, they will reciprocate.

Most blogs keep a list of other blogs that the blogger finds particularly insightful or intriguing. It's free and valuable advertising for the bloggers who get on that list. This is one of the reasons blogging has become so popular: Bloggers constantly promote and cross-promote each other's blogs.

## Building a better blog

There are three different ways to get blogging. You can start from scratch by building your blog with simple, free—or low-cost—programs and tools; you can go to one of what I call the get-started-in-lawyer-blogging platforms and pay for the technical bells and whistles to get well positioned on search engines quickly; or you can join a blogging network.

**Do it yourself.** Wordpress.com, Blogger.com, and TypePad.com are three popular Web sites devoted to helping people build their own blogs. With Wordpress and Blogger, you can get a blog up and running at no cost in a matter of minutes.

These sites will help you design a professional-looking blog and publish it quickly, and they all have upgrades you can buy to improve both the way your blog looks to readers and the way it “looks” to search engines. Remember, it doesn't matter how attractive your blog is if the search engines' computers don't think it's interesting and position it near the top of their results pages.

Starting one of these free (or nearly free) blogs is a good way to see if you will develop the habit of posting entries to your site frequently. Try keeping up a blog for six months to see if you like doing it before investing in anything bigger. No technology will write your blog for you, and a blog will not do anything for you if you do not pay enough attention to it.

**Get help.** Once you know you like blogging, you may want to sign up with a company that's in the business of helping lawyers build, use, and promote their blogs. This is a more expensive option, but if you know you will keep up your blog, you should take a look at sites such as [Lexblog.com](http://Lexblog.com) and [Justia.com](http://Justia.com). These are hosted solutions, so you don't need to install any software.

When using these tools, you simply log into the hosting company's server and do everything there—you don't need blogging software on your own PC. You can use your own domain name. They have designs that you can customize to your taste and budget. Both sites also have lots of advice on the publishing, marketing, and networking aspects of blogging.

**Join a network.** Blogging networks are the Cadillac of blogging, allowing a newcomer to join an existing, branded network like [InjuryBoard.com](http://InjuryBoard.com) or [Corante.com](http://Corante.com). Fees and methods of joining a network vary. [InjuryBoard.com](http://InjuryBoard.com) is “area-exclusive,” meaning there is only one blogger per advertising market area on the network. You must apply and be screened before you can join. With other blog networks, such as [Law.com](http://Law.com), it's less clear how you become a part of the network. Blog networks are a developing area of the blogosphere, and hard-and-fast rules are hard to find.

A blogging network will give you a jump-start from the technological side and also with marketing. You will get a well-designed template—no fussing with formats and HTML coding; all you need to do is type your words in—and the day you start your blog you will have “strength” in the search engines because the blogs already established on the network have hundreds of links leading readers to information in the network. These networks also market themselves, making you, in essence, like a franchise owner, paying for—and benefiting from—this mass advertising of a known, well-established brand.

## Spreading the news

Once you've got your blog going strong, you've got to tell people about it. One of the best ways to do this is to register your blog on [Blawg.com](http://Blawg.com) and [Blawgsearch.justia.com](http://Blawgsearch.justia.com)—both known for their lists of legal blogs. You should also add your blog address to your e-mail signature and your business card. Include a link to your new blog from

your firm's Web site. Tell all your favorite bloggers that you have launched a new blog of your own.

Most important, continue to comment on other blogs where you have some valuable insight or special knowledge. Even nonlegal blogs frequently discuss legal issues, and visitors regularly seek input from lawyers on these subjects. Be alert to these opportunities.

The late Mark McCormack, founder and chairman of the International Management Group, once said: "All things being equal, people will do business with a friend; all things being unequal, people will still do business with a friend."

Most traditional law firm Web sites are businesslike, but a blog allows you to show your personality. You cannot personally know all the people who are reading and commenting on your blog, but they can feel like they know you.

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## Notes

1. The most popular search engines are Google, MSN, Yahoo, and AOL, but Google is clearly dominant, handling about 66 percent of all queries.
2. There is a way to get consumers to click on your "pay per click" ad. It's all in the message: An ad that says "Hire the Smith Law Firm" will likely generate little or no response, while an ad that offers "Free Information to Fight the Insurance Companies" will generate interest.
3. The algorithm is the program by which the search engine determines the relevance of your site. Whatever you do on the Internet, you are serving two readers: the human reader and the electronic reader. Both must find your Web page interesting and useful for your Internet marketing dollars to be well spent.
4. People will come to your blog and post comments critical of you and the position you take. This is more than OK—this should be encouraged because it provides more content for the search engines to mine.
5. Benjamin W. Glass III, *Make Yourself the Obvious Choice*, TRIAL 38 (Mar. 2006).
6. The term used by bloggers is "thought leadership," as in: "By your blog, you can develop your 'thought leadership' on a topic." It was coined by Joel Kurtzman, founding editor-in-chief of the magazine *Strategy + Business*.
7. See Elsom Eldridge, *How to Position Yourself as the Obvious Expert: Turbocharge Your Consulting or Coaching Business Now!* (MasterMind Publg. 2004).
8. While few blogs are indexed in the news-focused search engines, some blog networks (and individual blogs in those networks) are.
9. An RSS feed allows people to subscribe to your blog and have your new blog posts and comments fed to an RSS reader. This allows someone to keep updated with your blog posts without having to go directly to your blog's Web page every time they want to see what is new.
10. Several blog readers offer free services, including [www.reader.google.com](http://www.reader.google.com) and [www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com). The easiest method is to start a free account at Google ([www.google.com/accounts](http://www.google.com/accounts)) and set up an "iGoogle" home page that will track not only blogs, but any other Web sites that you want to monitor.

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