Social Media Marketing for Mediators and Arbitrators

By Natalie Armstrong-Motin

Since the launch of the internet and social media platforms, some of the ways in which dispute resolution professionals build a practice have changed. Many things have stayed the same. For example, our clients still hire us primarily because they know us, like us, and trust us. Establishing trust and creating relationships with prospective clients is still a requirement of our marketing efforts. In fact, it’s the primary asset that we’re building.

But many things have changed. No longer is it sufficient to run an ad in a periodical or on TV to bring new clients our way. Permission marketing through social media, networking, writing, speaking, and training are the activities that get our phones ringing and ultimately deposits in our bank accounts. And only connection – direct connection, does that.

The internet has changed the way that we offer our services. The biggest change has been the way that clients can research our practice. This is called social proofing. It’s what most of us do when we’re looking for or at a new business service or product. We log on to Google and search for social proof that the business not only exists, but provides the exact service we need in the right location for the right price. We also want to know what others’ experiences have been through testimonials or recommendations.

Working under the assumption that you already have a professional website (if you don’t, you really need one), that you already belong to your primary and secondary target markets’ associations, and that you network, write, speak, or train for them, let’s concentrate on integrating social media platforms to optimize those assets and activities.

It’s easy to get lost or overwhelmed by all the choices in social media platforms. Consumers know that there are many choices for resolution services. Whatever platform you want to use is fine, as long as it leads to a direct connection with your primary, secondary, or tertiary target markets. Use the platform your target market is most comfortable using. You may not like Facebook, but if that’s where your clients are, you need to get really good at using Facebook. The same goes for Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, Instagram, etc.

Starting with the basics and regardless of the social media platform(s) you choose to use, your profile can either encourage the viewer to keep clicking and reading about you or it will do just the opposite and send them running to your competition. Prospective clients don’t study your profile. They make snap judgments. An effective profile can make all the difference.

First, your screen name should be either your name or your practice name. Ideally, your screen name should be the same on every platform. Make it a screen name that’s easy for people to remember and that promotes you or your brand. Using a trendy or clever name can actually harm your professional image. You probably already have one or more screen names and might now want to change them. The longer you wait to do it the harder it will be to change it later.
Next is your avatar. Every platform lets you post a photo as your avatar (the little square or circle not the larger cover photo space). Your avatar should be the same on all your platforms so that prospective clients can verify that it’s your account. Use a photo that is happy, professional, well lit, and consisting largely of your face. Platforms also give you a space for a cover photo. This is a larger and usually rectangular piece of platform real estate where you want to post a photo that tells a story. Choose a photo that shows what you do or how you do it. If you speak publicly to promote your practice, post a photo of yourself doing exactly that. If you’re an author, post a photo of you signing your books, and so on. This is the space where you highlight your passion.

Next, be sure to take advantage of the opportunity to get a vanity URL. For example, on LinkedIn, in the upper right corner of your profile page, click on “edit public profile or URL.” Choose a URL that is either your name or your company’s name. What you never want to do is link to the default URL that is 20 randomly assigned numbers and letters.

If the platform you choose offers a space for a tagline, use it wisely. This is where you want a short statement about you or your practice that is positive, has a benefit orientation, e.g., “I empower families,” and uses positive active verbs. In one sentence or phrase, tell viewers who you are, what you do, or how you do it. Graphics and the use of emojis or use of the word “guru” in this space are not recommended.

Additionally, platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook allow you to provide prospective clients your contact information. The goal of listing yourself on social media or other sites is to make it easier for potential clients to connect with you. If you work from home, it’s understandable that you might not want to post your home address. But, at a minimum, post your company name, city, state, phone, website, other social media accounts and your direct business email. Do not use a freebie email address like gmail. When you post an email address from a gmail account (or other provider) you’re not using your business website domain name.

Here’s an example: madamemotin@gmail.com

If I post that as my email contact account, the reader doesn’t get to know anything about me.

Conversely, if I post Natalie@HowToMarketMyMediationPractice.com, people can simply remove my first name and go to my website. This little change can make a big difference.

Where to focus

For most dispute resolution professionals, LinkedIn is the platform of choice but you can apply the advice in this article to all of them. LinkedIn is a great way to connect and to establish credibility, authority, and availability. Make best use of messages to invite people to connect, thank them for connecting, offer to be a resource for them, and provide them something of value.
(this is permission marketing). Each of these will start the all-important dialogues that create trust and build business.

Spend time expanding your contacts by connecting with colleagues and clients. Your contact list should grow in number each week. If you have connected with previous clients, ask them to endorse you or write a recommendation – the best way to do this is provide an endorsement or recommendation to them first. Use LinkedIn to find groups and interact with them. Comment on the posts made by your connections. Just giving a post a thumbs up does nothing for you or your contacts. Again, connection is key.

Regardless of your choice for social media platform, regularly log on to your account profile and with a critical eye update your bio, update your photograph, and make sure that your contact information is complete and correct. Link to any other platforms and your website. The goal is to make it easy for prospective clients to confirm your professionalism and contact you.

Content creation vs. content curation

For most of us there’s no need to write and post a white paper. Content can be a quote that our prospective clients would enjoy or appreciate, a graphic, an opinion piece, an event invitation, a recommendation or referral, a link to a survey, a video, a celebration of a serious or funny holiday, a compliment to one of your contacts, a cartoon, or photo or more. Ultimately, the goal of every post is to create an interaction with the viewer. The best way to accomplish this is to ask for it. A call to action, a request for information, etc., starts that all-important dialogue.

When you are looking for content, Cision.com, Smartbrief.com, and Alltop.com aggregate articles and press releases that are searchable by topic and geography. Feedly.com and Flipboard.com are RSS aggregators that collect information from blogs and websites, making it easier to search and share.

One of the biggest challenges is finding the time to post content every day or minimally every week. You can use social media content calendars to plan out the next few months of content to make it easier. Hubspot and Hootsuite are good resources but you can just easily use an Excel spreadsheet. Within these calendars, you design content dissemination ensuring that your social media uploads are once day, multiple times per day, weekly, etc. It’s a great way to create a balance between serious articles, graphics, photos, and event announcements. On those days you don’t have content to post, be sure that you comment on the posts made by clients or prospective clients (better yet, reshare their post).

And of course, you can always pay a compliment to your clients and prospective clients by sharing their posts. Sharing is caring.
Getting followers

Getting followers takes time and quality posts. Maintain your dignity and don’t ask people to follow you or share your posts (except on YouTube). Instead share lots of good stuff regularly. Within each email, post, and profile, include the link or icon to all your social media accounts. If you’re giving valuable information to readers/listeners, they will naturally follow you. A good start is to follow your clients and prospective clients first.

The point is this … don’t get lost or overwhelmed by all the platforms and then not use any of them. Being in many places is far less important than occupying one space extremely well. Keep your social media marketing consistent with who you are and who you want to be in your practice. Building connections for direct communication on social media platforms lets prospective clients learn that they can trust us with their cases and reminds previous clients of our professionalism, authority, and credibility.

End note: Spending lots of money on Google Ads, Facebook Ads and the like, is usually a poor investment unless you’re committed to an ongoing advertising campaign, which is cost-prohibitive for most mediators. The problem with advertising is that the person who needs your services must see the ad at the exact moment that he or she needs your services. Your chances of hitting a target on the first few tries are slim. Limiting your ads to platforms read by your target markets or their gatekeepers is more effective, but given the expense, your return on investment will generally be too small to be worthwhile. Your money and time are better spent elsewhere.

Natalie Armstrong-Motin is the author of “The Essential Guide to Marketing Your ADR Practice”. She is frequently invited to speak around the globe on the successful marketing strategies of the resolution and legal industry.