The ABA 2016 Legal Technology Survey Report was conducted by the American Bar Association’s Legal Technology Resource Center between January and May 2016. The portion of the survey that focused on web and communication technology included questions about the use of blogging and social media both by the respondents themselves and by their firms. What information can we glean from these responses, and how can lawyers benefit from this information?

**Blogging**

Blogging is an effective way for lawyers to generate traffic; demonstrate their expertise; develop relationships with strategic alliances, referral sources, and potential clients; create resources for clients, and more. However, it takes commitment and can be time consuming. An outdated or abandoned blog can leave a worse impression than no blog at all. With the everyday pressures of running a law practice, handling clients, and keeping up with legal work (not to mention outside obligations), carving out the time to blog isn’t easy for most lawyers.

For the past four years, (2013 to 2016), the percentage of firms that report that their firms have a blog has remained statistically steady at approximately 26%. Not surprisingly, the larger firms are more likely to report that their firms have blogs: 56% of lawyers from firms of 100+ attorneys reported that their firms had blogs, including 60% from firms of 500+ attorneys and 52% from firms of 100-499 attorneys.

When it comes to blogging, larger firms have two advantages that smaller firms do not: 1) they often have in-house marketing departments to help the firm identify topics of interest, interview lawyers, draft or edit blog posts, and take care of the mechanics of posting to the firm’s blog and promoting those posts, and 2) they have more lawyers among whom they can divvy up the work it takes to run a blog (if indeed the lawyers are the ones writing the posts).
One of the ways this is demonstrated in the 2016 Survey is in the contrast between the 26% of firms that report having blogs versus only 8% of respondents who reported that they personally maintain a legal topic blog.

Out of the leading primary practice areas, respondents most likely to report that their firm has a blog fell into the following practice areas: personal injury (35%), litigation (31%), and employment and labor (27%). Based on these statistics, it seems that blogging is more popular among firms with business to consumer rather than business to business practices.

Social Networks

Overall, 74% of respondents in 2016 report that their firms maintain a presence in social networks, while 26% report that their firms do not maintain such a presence, and 10% report that they don’t know. From 2013 to 2016, respondents report presences in the following areas:

LinkedIn remains the most popular network among lawyers: of respondents whose firms maintain a presence in social networks, 91% of firms of 100+ attorneys maintain a presence on LinkedIn, followed by 85% of solo respondents, 76% of firms with 10-49 lawyers, and 63% of firms with 2-9 attorneys. Since LinkedIn is known as the “professional network,” and revolves around business, rather than more social and personal topics, this is not unexpected.

In total, 78% of respondents report that their firms maintain a presence on LinkedIn. This represents a drop from previous years, when this number topped 90%. This could be due to a greater understanding on the part of respondents that a firm presence on LinkedIn (a law firm business page), may be different than firms requiring or encouraging their lawyers to complete their individual LinkedIn profiles, or it could mean that firms are not seeing the value of firm business pages on LinkedIn and prefer to focus more on individual lawyers profiles and networking to gain visibility for both the lawyers and the firm.

Among the respondents who individually use or maintain a presence in a social network for professional purposes, over 85% of lawyers from each firm size report a presence in LinkedIn, with 40-49 at 85%, then 50-59 years old at 81%, and 64% of those 60+ years old, again all remaining reasonably consistent from 2013 to the present.

Out of the leading 2016 primary practice areas, respondents who report the following as primary practice areas are the most likely to report individually using or maintaining a presence in a social network: employment and labor (83%), commercial (80%), contracts (79%), and litigation (78%), representing a mix between business to consumer and business to business based practices.

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DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A SUCCESSFUL ATTORNEY ON SOCIAL MEDIA?
(HINT: YOU DO)

DISCOVER WHAT IT IS AT LawyerMarketing.com/SocialPaper
the lowest being firms of 2-9 attorneys at 85%, followed by 91% of solo respondents, and 99% each of respondents from firms of 10-49 and 100+ attorneys.

Facebook

Facebook remains the second most popular social network. Respondents from firms of between 2-9 attorneys are most likely to report a presence in Facebook (62%), followed by firms of 100+ attorneys (61%), firms of 10-49 attorneys (55%), and solo respondents (47%). Respondents under the age of 40 are most likely to report that their firms maintain a presence in Facebook (67%, compared to 62% in 2015, and 61% in 2014 and 2013), followed by those 40-49 (65%, compared to 61% in 2015, 62% in 2014, and 69% in 2013), 53% of respondents between the age of 50-59 (compared with 64% in 2015, 47% in 2014, and 57% in 2013), and 48% of respondents 60+ years.

Although solos were the least likely to report a firm presence on Facebook, they were the most likely to maintain an individual presence on Facebook for professional purposes, at 48%, followed by respondents from firms of 2-9 attorneys (41%), 10-49 attorneys (22%), and 16% of respondents from firms of 100+ attorneys.

Eighty-six percent of respondents reported that they use Facebook for personal, non-professional purposes, including 89% each from solo firms and firms of 2-9 attorneys.

Twitter

Twenty-one percent of respondents report that their firms maintain a presence on Twitter, with respondents from most firm sizes continuing to report increased presence on the platform. Twitter use among firms of 100+ attorneys increased from 29% in 2013 to 40% in 2016, firms of 10-49 increased from 9% in 2013 to 19% in 2016, and firms of 2-9 increased from 17% in 2013 to 18% in 2016. Solo firms decreased from 16% in 2013 to 12% in 2016.

A full 40% from firms of 100+ attorneys did not know whether their firm maintained a Twitter presence. This begs the question: if the firm’s own lawyers don’t know whether the firm is participating, how effective can those firm Twitter accounts be?

Twenty-five percent of respondents report that they personally use or maintain a presence on Twitter. Respondents under the age of 40 years old (39%, compared with 35% in 2015, 13% in 2014, and 19% in 2013), and between the ages of 40-49 years old (35%, compared with 31% in 2015, 13% in 2014, and 18% in 2013) are the most likely to report using or maintaining a presence on Twitter, followed by 29% of 50-59 year olds.

Other Social Networks

Twenty percent of respondents report personally using or maintaining a presence in Martindale for professional purposes. Respondents from firms of 2-9 are the most likely to report a presence in Martindale (28%), followed by respondents from firms of 10-49 attorneys (21%), solo respondents (15%), and firms of 100+ attorneys (13%).

Solo respondents are the most likely to report a personal presence on Google Plus for professional purposes, at 17%, followed by respondents from firms of 2-9 attorneys (9%), firms of 10-49 (5%), and firms of 100+ attorneys (1%). Google Plus is used personally by 12% of all respondents, including 16% of solos, 11% each from firms with 2-9 and 10-49 attorneys, and 10% of attorneys in firms of 100+.

Why Are Lawyers Using These Tools?

Overall, 72% of respondents who report they personally maintain a legal topic blog do so for client development, while 51% do it because they
enjoy the writing and outreach, and 44% do it for career development/networking.

Of those who do personally maintain a legal topic blog, 42% responded that they had a client retain their legal services directly or via referral as a result of their legal topic blogging. Another 27% don’t know.

Although fewer lawyers report knowing that a client had retained them as a result of their blogging activities, it is clear that lawyers who blog still believe that blogging is a valuable activity—not only for building their client base, but also as a networking and career development tool.

Of the 76% of respondents who report that they personally use or maintain a presence in social networks for professional purposes, they do so for the following reasons:

The most popular reason cited by respondents for personally using social media for professional purposes is career development and networking, at 73%. Respondents who are under the age of 40 are the most likely to report personally using social networks for career development and networking (88%), followed by respondents between the ages of 40-49 years old (83%), and 74% of respondents ages 50-59, consistent with surveys since 2013.

Client development ranks second among reasons respondents personally use social media for professional purposes, at 51%. Respondents who are between the ages of 40-49 years old are the most likely to cite this purpose, at 58%, followed by those 60+ years old (50%), those 50-59 (49%), and those under 40 (48%).

Respondents also indicated that education and current awareness was a reason for their use social media for professional purposes—35% of respondents use these tools for this purpose, with those under 40 citing the most use at 44%, followed by those aged 40-49 at 40%.

Of those respondents who do personally use or maintain a presence in a social network, 25% report that they have had a client retain their legal services directly or via referral as a result, 51% report they have not, and 24% report that they don’t know. Solos are most likely to report having a client retain their legal services directly or via referral as a result of their social media use (34%), while the least likely to report clients retaining them directly or as a result of their social media use (at 16%) were respondents from firms of 100+ attorneys.

Twenty-nine percent of respondents between the ages of 40-49 years old (the group most interested in client development, according to the survey), report having a client retain their legal services directly or via referral as a result of their use of social networking sites for professional purposes, followed by 26% of those under 40 or 60+ years old, and 20% of those 50-59 years of age.

Seventy-three percent of those who use Twitter do so for social or personal use, 35% for education and current awareness, 29% for career development and networking purposes, 20% for client development, and 7% for case investigation.

Only 2% of respondents who report using or maintaining a presence on Twitter report they have had a client retain their legal services directly or via referral as a result of their use of this
platform; 83% report that they have not, and 15% report that they don’t know.

**How Can Lawyers Get Better Results from Blogging and Social Media?**

The *2016 Survey* states a 42% success rate for blogs, 25% for all social media use, and 2% for Twitter. Can attorneys do better using these platforms as networking and client development tools? Let’s take a look.

Respondents were asked to characterize their use of social media, online communities, blogs, and Twitter. The most popular response, at 47%, was “consume content regularly and participate seldom,” followed by “consume content only,” at 41%. Only 12% report that they “consume content and participate regularly.”

Respondents from firms of 100+ attorneys are the most likely to characterize their use as “consume content only” (48%), followed by firms of 2-9 attorneys at 43%, solo respondents at 37%, and respondents from firms of 10-49 attorneys at 34%.

Respondents from firms of 10-49 were the most likely to report that they “consume content regularly and participate seldom” (54%), followed by solos at 47%.

Among the 12% of respondents who characterize their use of social media, online communities, blogs, and Twitter as “consume content and participate regularly,” 16% are solos, 13% are lawyers from firms with between 2-9 attorneys, 12% from firms with 10-49 attorneys, and 9% from firms with 100+ attorneys.

Given these statistics, it is not surprising that lawyers don’t see results from blogging, Twitter, and social media activity. The *2016 Survey* results do not tell us how lawyers are using these tools beyond simple consumption or a broad “participation;” even those who are participating may not be maximizing the opportunities that social media and social networking has to offer.

Lawyers report using Twitter mostly for social or informational purpose. In light of that stated purpose, it makes sense that participation, and therefore, client acquisition, is limited. If lawyers intend to use blogs and other social media platforms mainly to network or develop clients, they need to increase their participation. According to the *2016 Survey*, of respondents who use these tools, 88% participate either never or seldom participate. In order to get the most from these tools, participation is key—it’s about developing relationships and providing value to your intended audience.

Law firms and lawyers on social media who do not participate do not capture attention or generate interaction with others. As a result, they will not see a reward in terms of clients from their use of social media, and it is not surprising that many in those categories do not know whether their activities bear fruit or not.

**Participate and Provide Value**

Two of the strengths of blogging and social media for professional purposes are creating
From Novelty to Necessity:
Pragmatic Social Media for Law Firms
By Mark Jacobsen, FindLaw Sr. Director of Strategic Development & Thought Leadership

Simply put, for many people (legal consumers included) Facebook is “the web.” Particularly with the recent rapid increase in mobile and portable devices, social media apps are often the primary lens through which consumers view the internet. People expect your firm to be present and active in social media, and they make buying decisions based on that expectation.

Need evidence? In a recent FindLaw.com poll, nearly 45 percent of respondents indicated they use social media to evaluate professional services. And roughly 40 percent of the respondents to that same FindLaw.com survey said they would be more likely to use a lawyer with a social media presence. In short, consumers are actively using platforms like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to find out more about the people and places they buy from.

All this can scare firms that have been slow to adopt a social presence. But if yours is one of them, there is good news. As an attorney, you almost certainly already possess all the skills you need to succeed on social media. You just need to learn to apply those skills to this new environment.

Everything you already know about connecting with people, developing networks, generating a positive word-of-mouth reputation and encouraging referrals will serve you well on social media. But to understand how to apply them effectively online, you need to understand why people care about and use social platforms.

These platforms of one kind or another have existed for centuries, and while there’s obviously no direct historical analogue of Facebook, the idea of building trust and credibility through shared experiences, values or sentiments is far from new. In some ways, business-to-customer interactions through social media are tapping into the very old idea of simply working with someone you like and trust.

In 2015, FindLaw conducted a survey of legal consumers to better understand how they act and interact online, and there were clear signals of the growth of social media as a deciding factor: where 35 percent of consumers said they have looked up a lawyer on a social network such as Facebook and 43 percent said the same of LinkedIn.

In a separate Thomson Reuters 2016 survey, 54 percent of all respondents indicated they’d be likely to hire a lawyer with an active social presence. If you isolate that to millennials only, the number jumps to 72 percent! What’s important to note is that these consumers aren’t talking about finding a lawyer through social media. They are talking about an in-between step, a consideration step, where they know who you are, but they don’t know if they like you yet. They are trying to decide if they trust you, and they don’t want to do that by hearing what you say about yourself (on your website) but by seeing what you say when speaking to people like them (in social interactions).

You’ll “Like” the whole story.

Download your free copy of the FindLaw white paper at LawyerMarketing.com/SocialPaper
conversation with potential clients and referral sources, and demonstrating expertise by providing value. Both require consistent participation. That participation is often rewarded with likes, comments, and shares from your audience that translates to extended reach of your content to others outside of your immediate circle of friends and followers.

By demonstrating your expertise through posts, group discussions, and comments, you let potential clients and referral sources get to know more about you, your style, and philosophy before they ever contact you. As an added bonus, the media uses blogs and social media to identify experts and find sources or information for stories, further enhancing your visibility and reputation.

As social media tools have matured, participation has changed and interaction has become increasingly important. When your Facebook posts do not receive interaction (likes, comments, clicks, and shares), they begin to fall off of your friends’ and followers’ news feeds. Both LinkedIn and Facebook have changed the default view on users’ home pages to “Top,” rather than “Recent” posts, which means users see posts with the most interaction first by default unless they manually change their own settings. The rise of advertising and promoted posts on these sites means that posts on free tools, used by most lawyers, will reach even fewer users.

To improve engagement, you must interact, provide and share content, link to others’ posts and content, and like and comment on social media sites and blogs. All of this interaction will not only bring you to the attention of those with whom you interact directly (and may increase the likelihood that they will interact with your posts), but it will improve your visibility as well. Posting or linking to content created or generated by others also reduces the need for you to constantly create your own content.

Take Advantage of Smaller Groups

The rise in the quantity of social networks, the number of users, and the volume of posts has resulted in many users seeking smaller, more intimate groups and conversations on social media where users can feel safer that they know who they are communicating with. LinkedIn has now made all groups private so that only members of those groups can see discussions that have been posted. Facebook groups are also becoming a popular means of interaction outside of the news feed. As users focus on these smaller groups, the reach of the typical Facebook post or LinkedIn Update may be reduced. This makes participation in smaller groups even more important. Posts to groups are more likely to be seen, since many users get notifications of new posts to their groups, but only see general posts to their feeds when they are actively using the platform. But effective use of groups may require lawyers to make multiple posts to different groups on a single platform to get noticed.

As always, compare this online networking activity to real-life networking: participation in a bar association, large networking group, or other organization has its benefits, and attendance at the large group is important, but most lawyers will see more results from joining smaller groups, committees, boards, or task forces within the larger organization, which provide opportunities to get to know members on a more intimate basis and establish relationships that have more impact. The same is true online. You can’t establish relationships by joining and then always sitting on the sidelines.

Use Social Media’s Multi-Media Capabilities

Social media has become more and more elaborate and sophisticated over the past several years. While in some ways these changes make social media use more complicated, they also provide additional opportunities.
Trends have been moving toward more visual, and now live or broadcast, content to keep audiences engaged—including audiences attorneys are seeking to reach. Even Facebook has added a live stream video component, taking users beyond images and recorded video to live presentations. Google hangouts on the Google Plus platform and new, dedicated broadcast platforms such as Periscope have captured attention. LinkedIn has added multimedia items including presentations, video, and images to LinkedIn profiles, and the Publisher platform allows for long form posts. To capture and keep attention, attorneys need to learn to use at least some of these tools.

**Develop a Strategy and Monitor Progress**

All of these developments mean lawyers have to be more strategic and spend more resources to be effective with these online tools. They need to take the time to determine their purpose for blogging or participating in social media. If that purpose is networking and client development, participation will be crucial, and to be most effective, should focus on the attorney’s ideal clients and referral sources. The message, content, and even platforms should be chosen specifically to resonate with that audience and provide value rather than simply promoting the attorney or firm, and participation should be consistent.

Attorneys should also monitor their online activity to see what posts and content gain the most attention, what issues their audience is interested in, and develop or share further content, including images, video, and other multi-media content around those themes. Share content created by others, initiate and participate in discussions, like and comment on posts, and develop relationships online, and, wherever possible, move those relationships offline into the real world.

As the world of blogging and social media matures, so must lawyers’ use of these tools in order to gain the most value from them.

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**About the Author**

**Allison Shields** is a former practicing lawyer and law firm manager, currently the president of Legal Ease Consulting, Inc., providing practice management and business development coaching to lawyers and law firms. She is the co-author of several books published by the ABA’s Law Practice Division and also contributes to various blogs, including her own: [Legal Ease Blog](#). Additionally, she provides many resources for lawyers to improve their practices on her [website](#).