Are blogging and social media use leveling off among lawyers? The 2014 Legal Technology Survey Report seems to indicate that this may be the case—at least for some lawyers. The Survey included 850 lawyers from across the United States ranging from solo practitioners to lawyers in firms of 500+ lawyers, across a wide range of practice areas and levels of experience. As in previous years, one of the topics covered was the use of “Web 2.0” tools and social media, covering three main areas: blogging, Twitter, and social media.

**Blogging**

Blogs can be extremely effective tools for law firms and can serve multiple purposes, including attracting traffic to the firm’s site, providing resources and information to existing clients, and more. According to this year’s data, 23.9% of law firms maintain a legal blog, while 70.6% still do not. This represents a slight drop from last year, when 26.9% of respondents reported that their firms maintained legal blogs.

The largest firms are still the most likely to have a legal blog: 62% of respondents from firms of 500 or more lawyers and 47.1% of respondents from firms with 100-499 lawyers reported their firm having a legal blog. The largest growth in blogging is in the largest firms; in 2013, 47% of the 500+ lawyer firms had blogs—a 15% jump in blogs for firms of that size.

In 2014, lawyers who reported having individual (as opposed to firm) blogs for professional purposes remained small; 91.9% of respondents do not have their own blog that they use for professional purposes, remaining steady from the 2013 Survey. Solos and lawyers in firms of 100-499 lawyers (9.9% and 10.2%, respectively) were the most likely to have a personal blog for professional purposes, while less than 7% of respondents from firms in each of the other categories reported maintaining a personal blog for professional purposes.

For those who do maintain a personal blog for
professional purposes, an average of 2.1 hours per week is spent on the blog. Firms with between 50-99 and 100-499 lawyers spent the most time per week on their blogs, reporting 5.5 hours and 3.8 hours respectively, but in all categories, those who blog spend at least 1.7 hours weekly on blogging activities.

It is difficult to measure return on investment of blogging activities since blogs can serve many purposes, including increasing exposure for the lawyer, practice group or firm; enhancing the reputation of the firm or the lawyers writing; staying in touch with existing clients; and providing valuable information for clients, the public and the media, but many of these are difficult to measure. One metric that is measured in the survey is retention of the firm either directly or as a result of referrals from blogging.

Ignorance about whether the firm’s blogging activities bring results in the form of new clients continues to rise. Over 25% of 2013 Survey respondents indicated that they did not know whether they had received clients either directly or through referrals as a result of blogging. That number rose to 29.5% in 2014. This may be the result of many factors: if the largest firms are the ones who are blogging the most, it makes sense that individual lawyers from those firms might not know whether that activity brings results, and firms may not always ask clients how they heard about the firm. If they do, some clients may not recall or may not realize that what they saw or read was a “blog.”

Across all firms, 39.4% say blogging has resulted in clients or referrals. This number has continued to remain steady since 2012 but represents a slight drop from 2011 when the overall reported success rate for blogging was 41.7%. Solos continue to report the most success from blogging (60% report receiving clients directly or from referrals as a result of blogging), and firms from 50-500 lawyers now report a 50% success rate. In the 2013 Survey, small firms also reported a high success rate, but this year, both smaller firms (between 10 and 40 lawyers) and the largest firms (more than 500 lawyers) did not report receiving any clients as a result of blogging.

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It is difficult to determine why the results of blogging seem to be so inconsistent, but blogging is a complicated activity, and many factors could play into the results. A long-standing, established blog is likely to bring more results, both because such blogs may contain more content and because they may have gained more traction or visibility over time, including with the search engines. Since the results indicate a big jump in the number of 500+ lawyer firms with blogs, those blogs may not be established enough yet to attract referrals or clients.

Blogs that are well-targeted to the potential client’s needs and that provide valuable information are more likely to gain attention than blogs that are simply promotional. Solos may be more successful with their blogging
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activities because if one person is writing the blog, they may be more consistent and have an established voice. Successful bloggers will also use blogging as a relationship building activity, fostering conversations with other bloggers which can bring added visibility and interest. The largest firms may have increased their blogging activity, but if those blogs are not consistent, are written or maintained by non-lawyers or multiple individuals and are simply pushing content rather than engaging others, they may be less successful.

**Law Firm Social Media Use**

In 2014, 56% of law firms overall report using LinkedIn for the firm, remaining steady from 2013. Facebook use by law firms for professional purposes also remains relatively steady at approximately 34%. Nearly 26% of individual lawyers use Facebook for professional purposes.

The largest firms are those who are most likely to use LinkedIn for professional purposes: 66.3% of firms with 100-499 lawyers, 63.3% of firms with 500+ lawyers, and 62.9% of firms with 50-99 lawyers maintain a firm presence on LinkedIn. Facebook use is more even; Facebook use across all firm sizes is between 27 and 38%.

**Individual Social Media Use for Professional Purposes**

In addition to law firm presence on social media, many lawyers maintain their own personal social media presence. Less than 23% of respondents reported that they did not use any social media platform for professional purposes, up slightly from 19.4% in 2013. But in 2011, almost 35% of lawyers did not. After a large jump between 2011 and 2013, this year's results may signal a leveling out after a period of growth, or the drop may be due to a lack of results or an unwillingness to expend resources (including time) on social media.

Among those lawyers who do continue to use social media for professional purposes, LinkedIn continues to be the most popular at almost 75% overall, with Facebook a distant second at slightly less than 26%. There is more adoption of LinkedIn among larger firms, but this may be the result of large firm marketing departments or dedicated social media staff setting up profiles and accounts for all lawyers at the firm, rather than an indication that the lawyers themselves are active on the platform.

Not surprisingly, solo lawyers use Facebook the most (31.7%), followed closely by lawyers in firms of 2-9 lawyers at 28% and lawyers in firms with 50-99 lawyers at 24.5%. Lawyers in the largest firms were the least likely to use Facebook for professional purposes; only 14.5% reported doing so. Facebook use is higher among family law, personal injury, litigation and civil general practitioners than for those whose main practice areas were more commercial or corporate in nature.

Although use of Google Plus seems to be gaining
for law firms, individual lawyers are not adopting the platform themselves for professional purposes; only .5% maintain an individual Google Plus profile. By contrast, although use of LawLink by firms was minimal, 7.4% of lawyers are using LawLink personally for professional purposes.

Among those who use social media platforms, only 32.4% of respondents reported that they subscribe to their firm’s social media profiles, and the majority of lawyers (59%) spend less than one hour per week on social media for professional purposes, but a large percentage (37.1%) devote between 1 and 5 hours per week to social media. Only 3.7% spend between 6 and 10 hours per week on social media for professional purposes.

What are those lawyers doing with their time on social media? According to the Survey, regular participation in social media is still relatively limited. Most lawyers are using social media tools and platforms to consume information more than to participate actively. The data revealed that 42.3% of those using social media only use it to consume information, while 44.1% consume information regularly but participate seldom. Only 13.6% consume information and participate regularly. These statistics are spread equally regardless of firm size.

In 2014, overwhelming majority still access social media sites on a desktop or laptop computer (90.9%); and 72.9% (63% 2013) on a smartphone; 51.3% (same 2013) on a tablet. Less than 1% reported that they do not access these sites at all.

Why Lawyers Use Social Media

In 2014, almost 75% of lawyers are using social media mostly for career development and networking, which has continued to be the leading use for social media since 2011, but lawyers also use these platforms for education and awareness: in 2014, almost 50% of respondents reported using social media for this purpose, up from 43% in 2013. A significant percentage (almost 44%) also use it for client development in 2014. This measure has fluctuated over the last several years. In 2011, 52.5% of respondents reported using social media for this purpose, while in 2012 41.9% reported doing so, and in 2013, 48.5% said they use social media for client development.

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Case investigation also continues to be a reason lawyers participate in social media, although it seems that they do so a bit less than a few years ago; in 2014, 22.2% of respondents reported using social media for this reason, while 43.7% did so in 2012. Perhaps this type of investigation is being performed less by the lawyers themselves and more by outside companies or non-lawyers on their behalf, or perhaps the ethical rules and opinions about how social media can be used in case investigation may have curbed its use.

As noted above, one of the reasons lawyers use social media is to attract new clients. In 2014, 23% of respondents reported that their social media use resulted in getting new clients, up slightly from 19% in 2013. Fifty-five percent of respondents said they did not receive any clients through social media, and 22% do not know. Solos are the most likely to report that they have been retained by new clients as a result of social media use: 34.8% said they had, while small (2-9 lawyer) and very large (500+ lawyer) firms were the most likely to report that they did not know (29.9% and 28.8%, respectively).
Twitter

As in years past, the 2014 Survey asked questions about Twitter separately from other social media platforms. Only 18.7% of firms are now Twitter for professional purposes, which remains relatively steady from the 2013 Survey, although Twitter use in 2011 was at 7.1%. Almost 12% of 2014 respondents did not know whether their firms were using Twitter for professional purposes.

Even fewer individual lawyers are using Twitter personally for professional purposes; 89.9% of respondents reported that they did not use Twitter personally for professional purposes, and only 10.1% do use it for professional purposes, down from 14% in 2013. Of these, 69.9% spend less than one hour per week on Twitter, and 27.4% spend between 1 and 5 hours per week. Large firms spend the least time on Twitter for professional purposes – 100% of respondents in this category spend less than one hour, while those in firms of 50-99 lawyers spend the most time: 20% of them reported spending between 6 and 10 hours weekly on Twitter for professional purposes.

Career development and networking continue to be the most popular reasons for using Twitter: 70.8% of respondents said they used Twitter for these reasons, up from 56.1% in 2013. Again, education and current awareness was another popular use, with 62.5% of lawyers responding that this was a purpose for using Twitter. The 2014 Survey showed a drop in the number of respondents who use Twitter for client development; while 63.3% of respondents indicated that they used Twitter for this purpose in 2013, only 52.8% did so in 2014. Perhaps this is because lawyers do not feel that Twitter is the best source to attract new clients; in 2014, 73.4% of respondents said they did not get any clients as a result of Twitter use, and only 5.3% overall said that they did. Lawyers in firms with between 2 and 9 or between 100-499 lawyers reported the most success in obtaining new clients from Twitter: 13% and 11% respectively.

Non-professional Use of Social Media

Regardless of whether they use social media for business reasons, lawyers are using social media for personal reasons. Facebook is the most popular social media platform used for personal reasons, and 85% of respondents use it. LinkedIn is not as popular for personal, non-professional use (which makes sense, since LinkedIn is the “professional network,” designed specifically for business to business communication); 39% of respondents use LinkedIn for personal reasons, perhaps to keep up with former colleagues or classmates. Twenty seven percent of respondents use Twitter for personal reasons, and almost 18% use Google Plus. A much smaller percentage (5.1%) of respondents maintain a blog for personal reasons.

Women are more likely to use Facebook personally than men (93% as compared to 80%), but the result is the opposite for LinkedIn: 45% of men use LinkedIn for personal reasons, as compared to 27% of women. Results are more evenly split among the genders for Twitter and Google Plus use.

Policies on Social Media Use

Lawyers seem slightly more informed about whether their firms have policies on social media use within the firm than they were in 2011, but the number is still close to half: 48.4% of 2013 respondents and 53.8% of 2014 respondents still have no idea whether any such policies exist in their firm. Almost half of
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the respondents (47.5% in 2013 and 43.3% in 2014) indicated that their firms do have policies that cover social networks and online communities, but only 1/3 (27.5% in 2014) have policies covering blogging and even fewer (23%) have policies covering Twitter.

More firms seem to be instituting social media policies as use of social media and blogging increases – in 2011, only 41% of respondents had policies covering social media and online communities.

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**Conclusion**

Blogs and social media platforms can be excellent tools for consuming content, creating awareness about an industry or client, establishing expertise in a practice area or industry, or for creating or nurturing relationships with clients, referral sources, colleagues and others. The results of the 2014 Survey seem to indicate that blogging and social media use may be leveling off as firms integrate these tools into their marketing, networking and business development arsenal and as they begin to assess whether these tools are worthwhile to pursue.

Although lawyers seem to be comfortable generally with social media (as evidenced by the high percentage of use for personal reasons), their participation in blogging and social media remains largely passive, and time expended on these tools remains relatively modest, which may explain why lawyers do not report clients or referrals in large numbers as a result of using these tools.

While the largest firms have marketing departments or dedicated social media specialists, leaving lawyers to concentrate on legal work, this may not be the ideal method of using these web 2.0 platforms due to the decrease in engagement and relationship building, but they do present advantages in terms of awareness and consistency over solos or smaller firms who have less resources to allocate. By contrast, solos report the most success in retaining clients as a result of their blogging and social media activity, possibly because they are more personally engaged in the endeavor.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

A former practicing lawyer and law firm manager, Allison is 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.