



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
*Relationship Building
within the International
Lawyers Network*

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Instagram: How Lawyers Can Use it & Get Noticed

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON FEBRUARY 9, 2016



With Instagram finally announcing yesterday that they're [offering multi-account support](#) (yay!) from within the app, it's an appropriate time to talk about some marketing strategies for how to get noticed for using Instagram professionally.

Instagram is my favorite social media platform, and if you're not yet familiar with it, or using it, [Wikipedia](#) tells us that it is:

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an online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, and share them either publicly or privately on the app, as well as through a variety of other social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr. Originally, a distinctive feature was that it confined photos to a square shape, similar to Kodak Instamatic and Polaroid images, in contrast to the 4:3 aspect ratio typically used by mobile device cameras. In August 2015, version 7.5 was released, allowing users to post photos captured in any aspect ratio. Users can also apply digital filters to their images. The maximum duration for Instagram videos is 15 seconds.”

Many of you may be thinking “so what? It sounds like something for kids to use, and not that big of a deal.” So let’s look at the usage statistics:

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By December 2010, Instagram had 1 million registered users.^[65] In June 2011, Instagram announced it had 5 million users,^[66] and it passed 10 million in September of the same year.^[67] In April 2012, it was announced that over 30 million accounts were set up on Instagram.^[68] In December 2014, Instagram co-founder Kevin Systrom announced that Instagram has 300 million users accessing the site per month.^[69]

Instagram announced that 100 million photographs had been uploaded to its service as of July 2011. This total reached 150 million in August 2011.^{[70][71]} By May 2012,^[72] 58 photographs were being uploaded and a new user was being gained each second. The total number of photographs uploaded had exceeded one billion.”

300 million users having posted over one billion photographs is nothing to sneeze at. And even better, Instagram is not just a US-centric application – 70% of Instagram users come from outside the US.

While it’s true that Instagram does skew towards the younger generation, businesses aren’t ignoring it. According to Hootsuite:

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With 85 percent of top brands throwing their weight into Instagram, you know the social network has cemented its spot as a pillar of social networking. After the users come the brands, and, as we'll see below, businesses of all sizes and types are seeing great success on Instagram.

Top brands on Instagram are seeing a per-follower engagement rate of 4.21 percent

All of the usage stats are only as valuable as the engagements that they bring to brands. Which is what makes this stat, from a study conducted by Forrester, so significant. The 4.21 percent engagement rate caused Forrester to dub Instagram 'the King of social engagement.' The title is deserved, as Instagram is in a league of its own. If you're not sure how that stacks up, consider that...

Instagram's per-follower engagement rate for top brands is 58 times higher than on Facebook and 120 times higher than on Twitter

Thankfully the Forrester study very clearly put this engagement rate in context for us. Imagine, 120 times higher than on Twitter! That isn't just impressive, it's enough to shift your entire perspective on social media for business. Of course, it these are top brands and your own engagements will vary. But usually the top brands are an indicator of where the trends are heading.”

Engagement, as we know, is key, because that's how relationships are built. And for professional services, such as the legal industry, it's all about building relationships. Am I saying that I think you're going to post a photo on Instagram and get a client? Of course not, that's ridiculous. But I AM saying that using Instagram in a smart way can help to build a robust, complete picture of who you are as a lawyer and law firm, which will help to cement the reasons that clients are already hiring you. Instagram gives people a peek behind the curtain and personalizes, in a visual way, the business of law for people in a way that makes it accessible.

Thanks to the Content Marketing Institute, we have two great posts to draw on for today's Two for Tuesdays – in the first, we'll look at some tips on how to use Instagram for Content Marketing, and in the second, how to get noticed using Instagram (they're different, I promise!).

How to Use Instagram for Content Marketing

One of the best ways to get inspiration for how to use a social media tool for your own purposes is to look at what others are doing and figure out how to adapt that for your own purposes. In this case, there are already many brands (85% of the top brands, as we mentioned!) using Instagram for professional purposes, and we can easily translate their ideas into what works for lawyers and law firms:

- Grab the accompanying image for your latest blog post or article with a link to the piece (the link has to be in your bio to be active) and post that on Instagram to drive traffic. You can put the link in your comments, but it won't be an active link, so just realize that you're making people have to work to get to your posts.
- Hook into the "events" that Instagram runs like "#flashbackfriday" or "#throwbackthursday" – find old photos from when you first started practicing law, the very early days of the city that you're headquartered in, or old courthouse photos and post those along with the hashtag. As CMI says, it's a "channel for marketing archived content though to a fresh audience."
- Share behind-the-scenes content – you don't have to give away firm or client secrets, but why not share some photos of parts of the firm that clients and friends usually don't get to see? Make people feel like they're a part of your office by giving them a view from your window, or a peek at the lunch room, or highlighting your long-suffering secretary. This content "not only gives your audience a good reason to want to follow you there, but also helps you solidify a personal relationship and build loyalty with your [clients] new and old."
- Use Instagram to market your new "products" – this may seem strange for a law firm, but how often are you launching a new practice group, opening a new office, announcing a new partnership, bringing in a new lateral or associate, etc.? Any time something "new" happens at the firm, use your Instagram account to announce it with an image or short video.
- Crowd-source content – It can be easy for a brand like Starbucks to get their fans to share photos of their coffee and short stories along with the "#itsfallwhen" hashtag. It's more challenging for law firms. But that doesn't mean it's impossible. Why not develop a hashtag in conjunction with a practice area that hits a chord? Or identify one that can be used in connection with a community event, but is driven by the firm? Entrench the firm in the local community by aligning yourself with a certain festival, season or location, and having fun with it – get your own lawyers to post pictures taking part in the event, and ask those in the community to do the same.
- Post content on the periphery of your brand: As CMI says, "Much like Twitter and Facebook, providing a wide range of content that your users actually *want* is imperative to connecting with your audience on a personal level." While this can regularly be content that is related to the law, and legal updates, it can also be things that are only tangentially related.

How to Get Noticed Using Instagram

Now that you've got some ideas for how to use Instagram, you'll want to get noticed. It's not just enough to

be posting there and hoping that someone comes along and notices you, or even for you to be sharing those posts to your Twitter and Facebook feeds and crossing your fingers for more followers. There are ways to develop more followers within Instagram itself. While CMI's post looks at three ideas, I only want to focus on the first two, which I think will best serve lawyers and law firms.

Incorporate General Hashtags

Above, we talked about the idea of using hashtags, and this is an important one for Instagram use in general. Whereas on other social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, it is a bit rude to use a lot of hashtags, it's considered to be almost required by most Instagram users to hashtag away. The reason for this is that most Instagram users categorize their images this way, and are subsequently found by other users because of it. Users won't necessarily follow each other back because they've found an image that they like, but the use of hashtags will widen your exposure tremendously. CMI offers some important guidelines to keep in mind when hashtagging:

- Make the caption and the hashtags related:

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If you see success with certain hashtags, it's going to be tempting to include them in every post. But you'll have more success in the long run if you think ahead and create photos for those specific successful hashtags. While you're at it, make sure you know you understand the hashtags that you're using or you may end up on the wrong end of a scandal.”

It's advisable to check out a hashtag before using it, which you can easily do using the search feature on Instagram and seeing what other images and posts come up as a result. This can also be helpful identifying the other hashtags you may want to be using in your own posts – for example, you may want to use the hashtag #lawyers in your post, and searching that lets you know that people are also posting hashtags like #lawyerslife and #lawyersofinstagram (albeit, a fairly limited number of people), and those may be other hashtags you'd like to include in your posts as well. If you are going to use those hashtags though, make sure that your image is related to that – don't post a shot of something entirely unrelated, and then hashtag it with #lawyersofinstagram, because that will reduce your credibility for future posts.

- Don't spam hashtags:

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Instagram users love hashtags and while it appears that there isn't a saturation point, if you're filling your posts up with multiple hashtags, then you're casting your net too wide, plus it just looks like spam to viewers."

As I mentioned, Instagram is more forgiving of hashtags than other social platforms, but there is a balance to be had. Think "professional hashtagging" not "teen hashtagging."

- Don't make the caption too short:



Brief captions can be great, just recognize that a short caption followed by a wave of hashtags can again possibly hurt your image."

That follows the second point, and while all of these "rules" can make you paranoid about posting at all, a good rule of thumb is to follow a few brands and people on Instagram, if you're not already, to get a feel for what successful Instagrammers are doing, and you'll learn quickly what works and what doesn't. CMI uses GNC as an example in their post, and they're a great example of a brand doing Instagram right.

Turn Into a Two-Way Communication Portal

I like this advice because for me, social media is about engagement and creating relationships, which is important for lawyers. Here, the only advice that CMI offers is advice which I'd echo across all social media platforms – "your comments are your personality."



Make sure to pay close attention to what you're saying, down to the last word - all your followers could read what you write, so your writing must have mass appeal to be perceived overall as positive. When you relate to your target audience members through words, they will be more likely to trust you and buy from you."

While being funny helps, of course, you don't have to be glib and charming to be effective on social media. There are a couple of things that help – don't write in the third person (yes, even on your LinkedIn profile) because it comes off as elitist and inaccessible, and just relax! Social media has blurred the lines between the professional and the personal, which means that you don't want to lean too much in either direction. While being too formal can end up feeling stiff and push people away, being too open and personal can turn people off too. It's about walking a tightrope of casual professionalism that we've all developed for situations like cocktail receptions and social functions where we're networking with professional peers.

While you're walking that tightrope of casual professionalism though, the important thing is to engage with others – follow people back and comment on their photos, reply to the comments that you receive on your photos. As a note, if someone comments on a photo of yours in Instagram, in order to reply to them, you'll have to tag their name in the comment, or they won't be alerted to it – to do that, you simply put the "@" symbol, and their username, which will start to pre-populate as soon as you type the @ and the first few letters.

For a great example (and just a funny read) of how one brand engaged with their audience and used personality in their commenting, check out the story that CMI shares about [Groupon's Banana Bunker](#). I was familiar with it before this post, and it never ceases to make me chuckle.

Conclusion

In summary, while I doubt that Instagram is going to bring lawyers new business, it's another tool to have in your arsenal, and one you should know how to use, especially with the staggering usage statistics that we see, and the new account-switching feature that will make it immensely easier for brands to use. For lawyers, especially, it's something you can easily use while standing in a coffee shop waiting on your latte, or sitting on the train in the morning, and as a very visual person myself, I find that no social media platform gives me more joy than Instagram does, with its beautiful images (you can follow some of the world's best photographers on there, which is just a treat).

Are you using Instagram yet for your firm? What creative ways have you found to use the tool? You can follow the [ILN](#) on Instagram, where we'll be able to update more regularly with the new account-switching capability, or you can follow [me](#) directly!