



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 SEPTEMBER 6, 2017



With Instagram 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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a mobile, desktop, and Internet-based photo-sharing application and service that allows users to share pictures and videos either publicly or privately...Instagram lets registered users upload photos or videos to the service.

Users can apply various digital filters to their images, and add locations through geotags. They can add hashtags to their posts, linking the photos up to other content on Instagram featuring the same subject or overall topic. Users can connect their Instagram account to other social media profiles, enabling them to share photos to those profiles as well. Originally, a distinctive feature of Instagram was its confining of photos to a square; this was changed in August 2015, when an update started allowing users to upload media at full size. In June 2012, an “Explore” tab was introduced, showing users a variety of media, including popular photos and photos taken at nearby locations, trending tags and places, channels for recommended videos, and curated content. Support for videos was originally launched in June 2013, and had a 15-second maximum duration and limited quality, with Instagram later adding support for widescreen and longer videos. Private messaging, called Instagram Direct, was launched with basic photo-sharing functionality in December 2013, and has gradually received major updates incorporating more features, most notably text support and “disappearing” photos. In August 2016, Instagram introduced a “Stories” feature, letting users add photos to a story, with the content disappearing after 24 hours. Instagram added live-video functionality to Stories in November 2016, augmented reality stickers in April 2017, and face filters in May 2017.”

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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After its launch in 2010, Instagram rapidly gained popularity, with one million registered users in two months, 10 million in a year, and ultimately 700 million as of April 2017. Its users have uploaded over 40 billion photos to the service as of October 2015. As of April 2017, Instagram Direct has 375 million active users, while, as of June 2017, the Instagram Stories functionality has over 250 million active users. Instagram was acquired by Facebook in April 2012 for approximately US\$1 billion in cash and stock. The popularity of Instagram has sparked an engaging community, including dedicated ‘trends’, in which users post specific types of photos on specific days of the week with a hashtag representing a common theme. Instagram has received positive reviews for its iOS app, and it has been named ‘one of the most influential social networks in the world’”

When I first wrote this post in February of 2016, Instagram had 300 million users, posting over one billion photographs. Now as of April of 2017, we’re talking about 700 million users and 40 billion photos. And even

better, Instagram is not just a US-centric application – 80% 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, there are some interesting facts you should be keeping an eye on:

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Marketers are rapidly increasing their adoption of Instagram to promote everything from clothing to concerts. According to a forecast by eMarketer, 48.8 percent of U.S. brands will use Instagram for social media marketing in 2016.

By 2017, 70.7 percent of U.S. companies will use Instagram for marketing, edging out Twitter for the first time. All aboard the Instagram train, the smart brands are leaving the station.”

Your practice IS your brand, so adding Instagram into the mix can be a valuable way to extend your reach, if it makes sense for your clients. However, one thing I will advise you to do is whether you plan to use Instagram for your business or not, your clients are likely using it. So I do suggest understanding how it works and having a profile on there, so that you can follow your clients and be able to advise them accordingly.

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Top brands post 4.9 times per week on Instagram, an increase of more than 50% over 2015

A social media study conducted by Forrester in 2016 reviewed how the top 50 global brands market on social networks. Forrester evaluated 11.8 million user interactions on 2,489 posts made by 249 branded profiles, and collected data on how many top brands use each social network, how many fans they've collected, how often they post, and how often users interact with their posts. They found that the average number of Instagram followers for a top brand is now over 1 million—almost five times higher than in 2015.

Top brands now post 4.9 times per week on Instagram, an increase of more than 50 percent over 2015. Have you wondered how frequently you should be posting on Instagram? If you want to become a top brand, about five times per week is your answer.”

We'll get into the "how" and "what" you should be posting in a moment, but here Hootsuite helps with the frequency. Especially because of the nature of Instagram's algorithms, unless you're top of mind and an account that people are regularly engaging with, you won't be appearing in your followers' timelines that frequently. So in order to stay relevant and top of mind, you want to be posting fairly regularly.

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B2C marketers are significantly more likely (6%) to increase Instagram activities than B2B marketers (48%)

Businesses probably won't turn to an image-based social app to learn about another business's services or products. Though B2B businesses shouldn't neglect Instagram (we don't!), B2B interactions usually require more research, more detail, more insight. Instagram is more of a step along their path to purchasing.”

This just makes sense, right? It's going to be a bit more exciting for someone to see that there's a sale on their favorite pair of jeans and be able to link through from that IG post to purchase them, than to see what their lawyer is up to, even if that lawyer is a cool person doing interesting things. But as Hootsuite says, it's a step along the path. 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.

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75% of Instagram users take action, such as visiting a website, after looking at an Instagram advertising post

Does engagement on Instagram mean consumers are becoming more aware of your brand? According to [Instagram Advertiser statistics](#), 50 percent of Instagram users follow at least one business, 60 percent say that they learn about a product or service on the platform, and [75 percent of Instagram users take action](#), such as visiting a website, after looking at an Instagram advertising post.

If you're hoping to spread the word about your business, Instagram is a statistically sound place to invest your time and energy.”

So there are things you can and should be doing in developing your Instagram account to engage followers in a strategic and nuanced way that will further develop your brand. And, at the minimum, it's yet another tool in your arsenal for research on clients and potential clients, and something you should be aware of to properly advise your clients for their own use.

Thanks to the Content Marketing Institute, we have two great posts to draw on – 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 using Instagram for professional purposes, and we can easily translate their ideas into what works for lawyers and law firms:

- Grab the image in your latest blog post or article and 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. For some users, you can also post links in your Instagram stories, allowing followers to "swipe up" to go directly to your posts. Keep in mind that viewers of your stories will generally make up about 2% of your total audience, so you may want to try both tactics to increase awareness.
- 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.” I will caution you too that Instagram has been accused of “shadow-banning” in an effort to reduce the abuse of hashtags – some users will include popular hashtags in every post, whether they're related to the content or not. Instagram has taken notice of this, and “shadow-bans” the users, which means that they hide accounts from being found in search results and the “explore” section of the app. Instagram claims they're not doing this, but a number of users claim to be victims of it, so be judicious in your use of hashtags.

- Don't make the caption too short:

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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.”

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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 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!

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