

ZEN AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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Imitation (in Content Marketing) is the Sincerest Form of Flattery

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON JULY 26, 2016



Whether you're a law firm marketer or a lawyer who is writing, tweeting, posting to LinkedIn, or sharing content in another way, your primary goal is to remain relevant and valuable to your audience.

To do that, you're constantly checking to ensure that what you're authoring and sharing resonates with them – you review, you refine, you revise.

During that process, it is also extremely useful to look to what others are doing, both inside and outside the industry, to get inspiration for your own content marketing. It can be easy to discard what those outside of legal are doing as not “relevant” because you think the legal industry is too specialized. And while it IS special in its own way (as are all professions, by the way), it’s up to us to take what others are doing and translate that into useful lessons for our own use.

One of my favorite content marketing authors, Neil Patel, authored [an excellent look](#) at what eight of the world’s best brands are doing in their content marketing, and we’ll spend the next few weeks looking at some of them, and the lessons we can take for the legal industry. Your first impression may be to dismiss this as soon as you heard the word “brands,” but we’ll be looking at high-end companies like Rolex, and professional services firms like Farmers Insurance, so I think we can all agree that there are translatable lessons to be gained from them.

Case Study One: Rolex

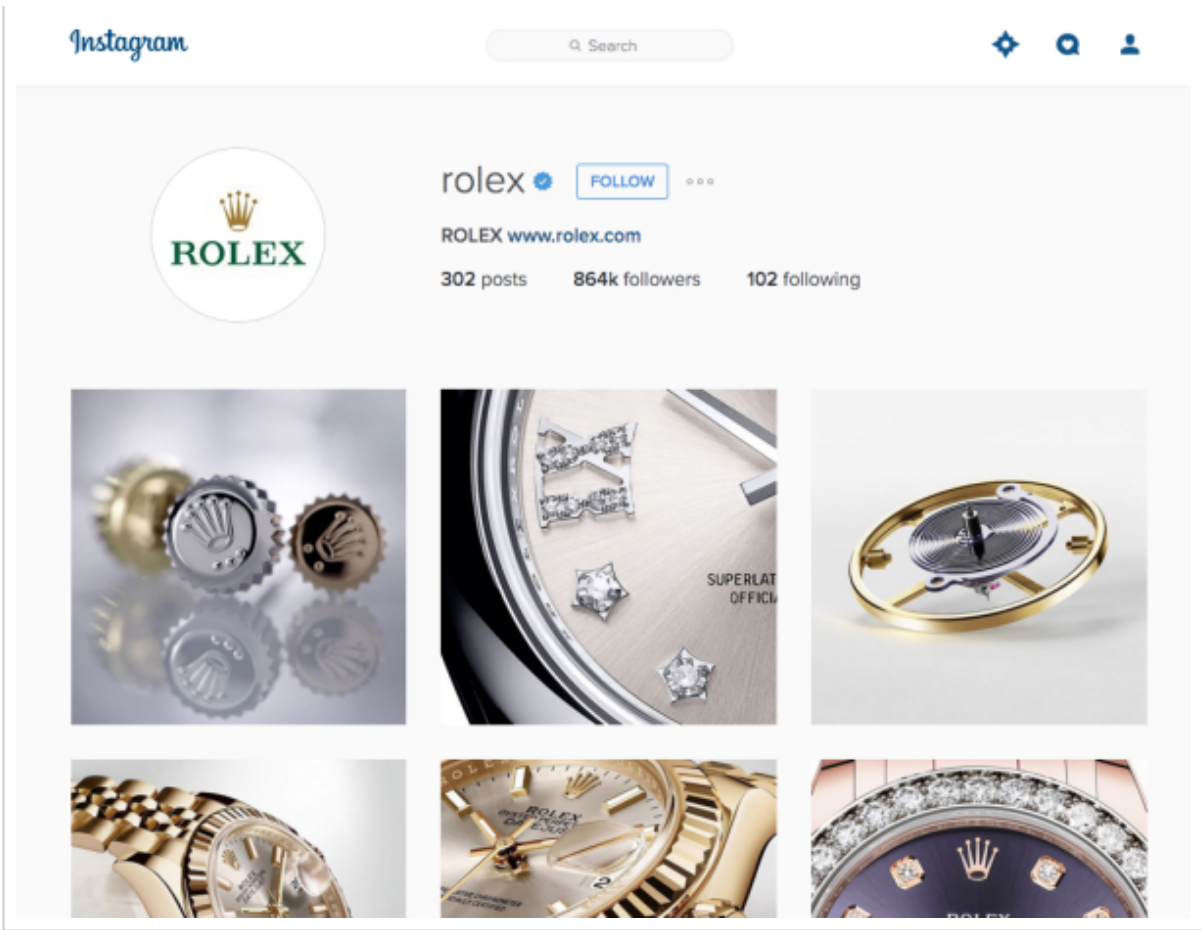
Rolex is one of those brands that we’d all like to be – think about some of the words that come to mind when you think about a Rolex: classic, elegant, upscale, professional, timeless.

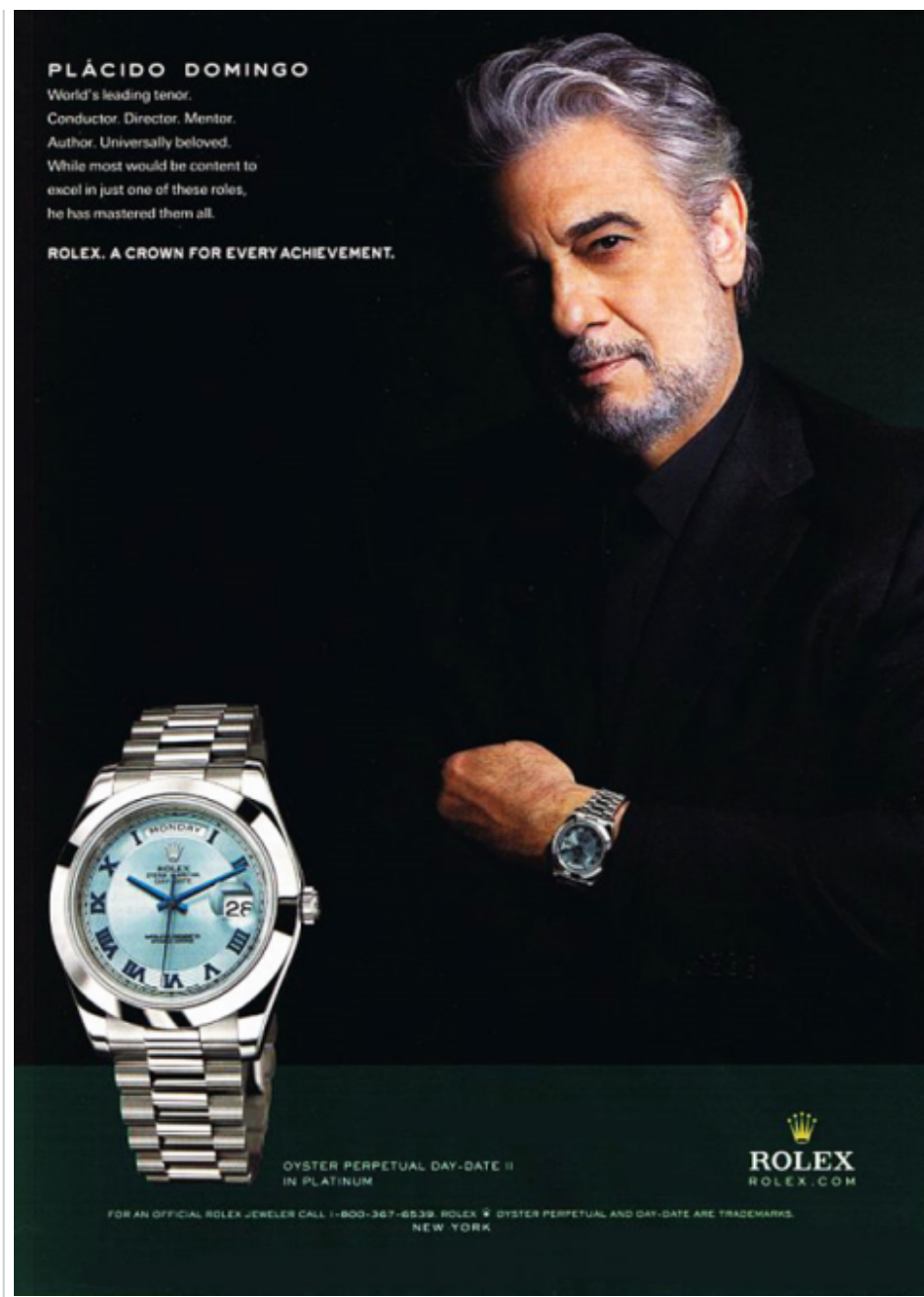
Patel points out that this poses a rather unique challenge then:

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How can you have a fresh, innovative content marketing strategy for an old-fashioned brand? One way in which Rolex reconciles its classic image with modern marketing strategies is by producing beautiful product images for social media. The content that it posts has a highly curated feel. The photography, videos, and editorial work are always sleek and minimalist, and they appeal to a certain sophisticated lifestyle that wouldn’t relate if Rolex used the slapstick-style voice that Denny’s [a previously spotlighted brand] has. That would be too far from the image customers have of the Rolex brand. Rolex treats its content with the same attention to and appreciation for quality that customers expect from its watches.”

Patel shares some of their content images with us that reflect this commitment to sophistication and modernization:





Then, Patel offers some advice that you can use, taken right from Rolex's playbook:

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One of the lessons that Rolex has clearly taken to heart is quality over quantity, which can be hard to do in a social media realm where you have to produce a steady stream of content to stay on people's radar. Focus on quality.”

The lesson for lawyers and legal marketers? It's the same, but we can also take it a step further. Let's start with Patel's advice of "quality over quantity." This is what JD Supra's Adrian Lurssen likes to refer to as being

the “signal in the noise.” When social media and content marketing first started, people would read anything that you put out, because you were the only one speaking. So it was easy to find an audience, and it was easy to find an interested audience.

But as the numbers grew, and as the audience grew, so did those using social media platforms to deliver their content. There’s still a lot of valuable content out there, but it’s more difficult to find it. As a result, there’s also a lot of “noise,” which is basically the other junk that’s out there, the people who talk for the sake of talking.

Because of this, it can be tempting to put out MORE and MORE content in the hopes that something, anything you write or say will be read. But that’s not the best strategy – sometimes, less is more. And particularly in the legal industry – we’ve all seen it happen in person too, right? There’s the person at the conference who loves to hear him or herself speak, and will go on and on with little of substance to say. And after a while, most of the group tunes this person out. And then, there’s the quieter person, who is mostly taking things in, who when he or she opens his or her mouth, everyone will stop what they’re doing to listen, because they know what’s coming next is valuable.

That’s the same with content. If you put your energy into ensuring that your end product is valuable, relevant, and directed at your audience, then you don’t need to produce a blog post every day, or a video every other day. Because when you DO share something, people will stop what they’re doing to read or watch what you’ve put out.

The other thing to take from what Rolex has done here is the idea of really knowing who you are as a brand, and understanding that social media and content marketing can work for all types of brands – not just the funny or “clever” ones. Patel started his list by talking about Denny’s and their brilliant use of humor in their content marketing. I am the first to admit that I love humor in social media, and a human/personal interaction with a “brand.” But that’s not right for every firm. If that works for you and/or your firm, great – embrace it. Don’t be afraid not to be serious all the time.

But if your firm is serious, or you consider yourself to be more serious, that’s fine too – it doesn’t mean that content marketing and social media isn’t for you (I’m saying this with the caveat that social media and content marketing ISN’T for everyone, but depending on your goals and strategy, they can be extremely effective tools, whatever your personality).

Rolex has almost a million followers on Instagram, using a “voice” that is classic, professional, slick, and modern. They’re not trying to be funny or droll. The right people are drawn to their brand. The same will be true for you, if you’re producing content that is authentic to who you are as a lawyer or law firm. So it’s okay to be funny and relaxed, if you’re funny and relaxed, and it’s okay to be serious and sophisticated if you’re serious and sophisticated, and regardless of your personality or your firm’s personality, that can all still mean high quality, smart, talented lawyers.

Case Study Two: Farmers Insurance

Here's another brand I think lawyers will really embrace – Farmers Insurance. While their ads endeavor to be funny (and if they're effective, I'm sure you can immediately call to mind their catchy jingle “We are Farmers, da dada da da da.”), their brand is serious about educating their customers, and that's something that lawyers know a little something about already.

Patel says of Farmers:

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The Farmers Insurance Inner Circle is a super customer-friendly resource that it created to empower the audience to become better educated about topics that, for a lot of us, go right over our heads. Farmers Insurance provides people with useful, practical information. It offers a huge variety of articles about things like taking care of your house and your car, how to prevent identity theft, what you need to know if you're going through a divorce – basically how to deal with anything life throws at you.”

The screenshot shows the Farmers Insurance Inner Circle website. At the top left is the Farmers Insurance logo. To its right are navigation links: "Get a quote", "Browse insurance", "Find an agent", "Claim services", "Resources", and "Login". Below the logo is a sidebar menu with the following items: "Farmers Inner Circle", "Auto Smarts", "Home Tool Kit", "Life Events", "Know the Gaps", "Farmers Perks", and "Hall of Claims". The main content area is titled "FARMERS INNER CIRCLE" and features a large image of a family (a woman, a man, and a baby). To the right of the image is a featured article titled "Life Insurance Protects Your Loved Ones" with a sub-image of a couple. Below that is another article titled "Helping to Protect Your Business with Life Insurance and Annuities" with a sub-image of a woman in a shop. There are also social media share icons (Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Email) and a "SHARE" button.

That seems pretty useful, right? Farmers took something that's a need for their audience, and met it. It doesn't bring them any immediate returns, because they're not charging for it, but it shows that Farmers is a brand that cares about their target audience, it provides a useful resource that customers will remember when they DO need insurance, and it simplifies a lot of the difficult things about the insurance process. People are often frustrated with insurance, so if Farmers can take away some of that frustration, and do it for free, customers are going to remember that with some goodwill and return to them when they need insurance.

Patel crystallizes this in his advice for what we can take away from this:

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This content hub is a brilliant move because Farmers Insurance establishes itself as an expert to its customers in a totally approachable way. If the content doesn't answer something, Farmers makes it easy for customers to get in touch. Use your content to help your audience's pain points on their own and establish your company as the go-to resource.”

His last sentence is the key here for lawyers and law firms – “Use your content to help your audience's pain points on their own and establish your [firm] as the go-to resource.” This may be with a content hub, like Farmers has created, if that's what would work best for your audience. Or it may be some other solution. Either way, it involves getting to know your audience, what their needs are, and what their pain points are (which should be fairly easy for you to pick out, because as their lawyers, you're dealing with these on a regular basis), and how you can use content to get them to solve some of the low-hanging fruit on their own before they come to you for the more individualized needs.

For example, you may find that creating an app for answering a checklist set of questions will be of huge help to HR clients that you have, and rather than limiting the business that you get from them by answering the questions in the app, they will come to you because you've created value for them, and because they know you can help their business. Other firms have done this – don't be afraid to think outside of the box when it comes to delivering valuable content to your clients that allows them to help themselves and then come to you for the important issues.

Next week, we'll take a look at some of the other brands that Patel mentions in his piece. In the meantime, let me know what else you like about Rolex and Farmers, and the way that they engage with their audiences through content marketing!