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Blogging for Enhancing Conferences & Events

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Next week, I have the pleasure of joining my fellow co-leaders for the Social Media Special Interest Group for the Legal Marketing Association in presenting a webinar on using social media to ramp up conferences and events. My part of the session will focus on blogging, so I thought I'd offer you a preview of my remarks here! LMA members can attend the webinar by registering underline here.

You may be surprised to hear that blogging can be a valuable tool for ramping up your conferences and events, but it's actually quite a valuable one, and one I use often (if you are a regular Zen reader, you'll be familiar with my recaps). There are two sides to this, the attendee side, and the organizer side, and I'll cover both.

Why Blogging?

Why use blogging? For attendees, it's quite simple. Blogging before and after events helps to position you as a thought leader and can help to engage you with conference speakers as well as other attendees.

For organizers, blogging either by someone in your organization, or an outside blogger writing about your event, can help you to grow your audience, expand the reach of your event, help you connect with those who can't be there in person, and also leverage any high profile speakers that you have.

When to Blog – Pre-Conference

There are really two opportunities for conference-related blogging, and that is before and after the event. You can, of course, blog during a conference, but that will generally fall into the "recap" type of post, which we'll look at in a moment.

Before the conference, veteran conference attendees can write about tips for newbies:

- Must-see sessions
- Networking ideas to implement
- How to connect with others online and off.

Blogs can also be used to build buzz:

- Presenters can offer teasers for their sessions (like this one!)
- Organizers can offer a look at the "can't miss" presentations
- Attendees can share what they'll be going to and later reviewing

Speaker interviews are another excellent way to leverage a conference beforehand – as an attendee blogger, choose one or two of the speakers that you're most looking forward to seeing, and ask the organizers to put you in touch for an interview about their sessions. If you're hosting the conference or event, provide a complimentary pass to a well-known industry blogger and offer to set up interviews with whichever of your speakers they'd be interested to connect with.

When to Blog – Post-Conference

Following a conference or event is another time for bloggers to shine. For each of the sessions that you attend, put together a detailed recap of the presentation. You can do this by either taking notes during the presentation, sometimes right in your blogging platform, or by using a Twitter archive to review the tweetstream later.

You may even want to consider creating a general "what I've learned" post, full of lessons or takeaways from the conference in general – this can serve as a type of recap post without having to be too detailed, and will also allow you to add your personal perspective on the conference.

Roundups are another useful tool post-conference. Use the hashtag on Twitter to follow along with what others are writing about the conference, and then curate the best blog posts with a post of your own, making sure to add your own thoughts on why each of the posts you're referencing is valuable.

Organizers should strongly consider doing this themselves – it's an excellent way to house the great content that came out of the conference, showcase the attendees and make them feel valued, and offer a reason for attendees and those who weren't able to attend to return to the blog or website.

Conference Blogging Best Practices

There are some best practices to consider when conference blogging.

Attribution

Attribution, as always, is key. Whenever you blog about a conference, use as much attribution as possible – link to the:

- Conference website
- Organizer's website
- Presenter's website
- Presenter's social media profiles
- Any links referenced during the presenter's session

It adds depth to your blog, which makes you even more of a thought leader, because you're giving readers plenty of strong resources to reference. It's also a great starting point for engagement with presenters and organizations when you later share the posts directly with them – and that's important too.

Blogging should not be done in a vacuum,. While we'll look at this more in a moment, with respect to attribution, always use attribution in a blog as an opportunity to engage. Let's say that you really enjoyed a speaker's presentation and you reference them, along with their twitter handle, in a recap post for their session. When sharing it, send them a message on twitter to let them know how much you enjoyed it, with a link to your post. It opens up a dialogue with them, and they may even share your post with their followers. Same with the conference organizers.

Takes Notes / Use the Tweet Stream

Good recap blogging is hard – it's something that I have a great deal of experience with, and I've developed a bit of a formula with it. I tweet heavily during sessions that I plan to recap, so that I can review the tweetstream later and use that to craft my posts.

But each author who wants to recap a presentation will develop their own style – some draw out only the most salient points and focus on those, or just one highlight that they add their own spin on. It's entirely up to you. I do recommend using the tweetstream or your own notes system to keep it fresh in your mind, and

also writing the recap as quickly as possible so that the message of the presentation is as fresh in your mind as possible.

Be a Generous Host

The third best practice is aimed at conference and events hosts, and it's an invaluable one – bloggers are some of the most important press that events can get these days, and online commentary can go viral quickly. An easy way to engage some of the top minds in the industry who write about the topics covered at your event or conference is to offer them a complimentary pass to your event, and make it easy for them to blog:

- Give them plenty of notice for the event
- Provide a free pass
- Offer access to the speakers in advance and after the event
- Have readily accessible wifi and electrical outlets

Let the know that these are passes for bloggers, so that the understanding is that they'll blog in exchange for attending, but it's an excellent way to get exposure with some of the top influencers in the field. Of course, it's not guaranteed to be all positive press, because they are free to write what they'd like, but if you have confidence in your event, it's an excellent practice.

Share, Share, Share

As I mentioned earlier, blogging can't happen in a vacuum – you've got to share what you've written. I suggested reaching out to those you've referenced in your posts, but you also want to share the posts socially where relevant. Use the twitter hashtag for the organization and event to share your posts, making sure to identify why it's relevant to those following along. If there are Facebook or LinkedIn groups that are relevant to the event, share the post there, preferably with a point pulled from it that will invite people in those groups to engage further with you.

Organizers, keep an eye on those social networks and share the posts that you see come through from your event. But don't just retweet or hit "share" – create a new post that is unique. It is more meaningful to the blogger on the other end, and will create a sense of loyalty.

Have you used blogging as part of conferences or events? What are some of your best practices and suggestions? And make sure to tune in to Wednesday's webinar if you're an LMA member – my fellow leaders have some excellent tips to share!