

**Lawyers and law firms:
Broadcast journalism evolves in the Internet age**

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Not so long ago, the term “broadcast journalism” was limited to traditional radio and television news on local and national stations. If a reporter or editor liked your press release or recognized you as an expert on a particular legal area, you might get interviewed for a story. If you (or a potential client) missed the one-time broadcast – you missed it. The airwaves were limited.

Today, broadcast journalism includes not only these traditional media, but also their interactive Web sites and online research capabilities. A broadcast reporter might interview a lawyer as the result of a Google search using certain keywords. The audio or video clip will be available 24/7 on the station’s Web site – coded with an RSS feed that automatically delivers it to searchers around the world. The Internet is unlimited.

In fact, thanks to the Internet, the line between print, radio and television news has become increasingly blurred. Print publications like *The Denver Post* host audio and video on their Web sites – some of it generated by professionals and some of it by “citizen journalists.” Radio and television station Web sites include not only audio and video podcasts, but also text and photographs.

All of these sites host blogs by their reporters, which can include links to audio and video. All of them offer versions for mobile devices. All of them offer subscriptions via LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, RSS, email or text message. All of them accept user contributions.

Because of these changes, journalism is no longer the exclusive province of traditional “gatekeeper” publishers and producers. Anyone can get into the game, publishing original content on their own Web sites – including law firm sites and blogs -- or on a wide variety of user-populated “content” sites. YouTube, for example, is popular for video. All of this content enhances your search-engine results.

How lawyers and law firms can work with all kinds of broadcast media was discussed by a panel of media experts at the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Legal Marketing

Association (www.legalmarketing.org/rockymountain) monthly educational meeting, held Jan. 12 at the Curtis Hotel in Denver.

Panelists included Jessica Roe, program moderator and director of marketing and communications at law firm Kamlet Reichert (www.kamletlaw.com); Don Knox, founding editor of *Law Week Colorado* (www.lawweekonline.com) and former business editor at both the *Rocky Mountain News* and *The Denver Post*; Larry Nelson of *Talk Radio w3w3* (www.w3w3.com) and author of a recently published book, *Mastering Change*; and Kristine Strain, assistant news director at News4 (www.cbs4denver.com).

Tips from the broadcasters

“Lawyers have always been much more comfortable with print than with broadcast,” said Roe, who is also a coach at www.tvappearances.com. She has served as multi-media manager and executive producer at *The Denver Post*, *9News*, and various other stations. “As broadcast becomes more accessible, lawyers will need the skills for this medium.

“Also, be aware that television and video sites are interested in content that is not only newsworthy, but also lends itself to the camera and resonates with a wide audience,” said Roe. “They are not interested in ‘talking heads’. When you contact the broadcast media with a story idea, have an interesting visual in mind and some real people, who have been affected by the story, who are ready and willing to speak to reporters.”

It is also important to honor deadlines. “Print deadlines are tight, but broadcast news deadlines are even tighter,” said Strain. “With an unrelenting schedule of early morning, midday, evening and late-night news shows, reporters must research and write their stories in just a few hours.

The lawyer who follows breaking news, is knowledgeable in a legal subject area, can tie the two together in a good sound-bite, and makes him- or herself available to a reporter on short notice will always be popular with the local broadcast media.

“The 10 p.m. news broadcast has the most viewers but is the most difficult to prepare for,” said Strain. “Reporters on this shift get their assignments at 1:30 or 2 p.m. If you leave the office at 5 or 6 p.m., that leaves a very narrow window for reporters to reach you at your work number or location. Make sure that reporters have your cell and home phone numbers. Be willing to do the interview on your front porch.”

Do not expect payment for your time and expertise. “Commenting on radio or TV is not something a lawyer or other expert does to make money,” said Strain, “especially in the current economic climate. You do it for marketing purposes – to establish yourself as an expert in a particular field.”

Jump into the pool

Panel participants expressed a common interest in deepening their pool of legal experts – especially for stories with a criminal, business or political angle. “Let us know what you are good at and would be willing to discuss,” said Knox. “That said, we are pretty good at finding a legal angle to almost any story.”

When news is breaking, it helps to be on-site. “When Najibullah Zazi was in the federal courthouse, there were many, many reporters waiting outside for hours in the frigid weather,” said Knox. “Local lawyer and broadcast media commentator Craig Silverman braved the weather to join them and, as a result, ended up doing a lot of interviews.

“Another tip is to participate in the federal Criminal Justice Act panel,” said Knox. “You don’t get paid much for the assigned cases, but they tend to be quite newsworthy.”

Law Week Colorado is a good example of how print media are expanding into broadcast. The weekly print version is complemented by a daily online version, which includes video reports as well as text articles. “We’ve just hired our first full-time broadcast journalist to create content for *Law Week* as well as our broadcast arm, *State Bill Colorado* (www.statebill.com),” said Knox.

News media of all types also rely heavily on social media for story ideas and research purposes. “For example, we have set up Twitter searches for every state senator, representative and staff member,” said Knox. “If they tweet about breaking news or someone tweets about them, we find out immediately and follow up on the story.

“We often use social networks to find sources for our print and video content,” said Knox. “If you do not have a robust social media presence, we won’t find you.”

Another broadcast alternative is w3w3 Talk Radio, “Colorado’s Voice of the Technology Community,” which offers online interviews and speeches organized into 15 different topic channels – including a law channel featuring local lawyers.

“Our model is completely different from those presented by others on this panel,” said Nelson. “We focus on in-depth treatment of business trends rather than ‘breaking news’ – so our work is not driven by deadlines. We archive these interviews as a valuable resource. If you come to us with a good story idea that will benefit our listeners, long or short, we will record the interview and run it.”

Panelists agreed on the importance of trust between lawyers (and their media relations specialists) and reporters. If necessary, test the relationship with smaller, less-important confidences before proceeding with more-sensitive stories. “We are not out to get you,” said Strain. “Almost always, we are able to respect confidentiality. It is not in our best interest to disrespect a trusted, long-term source just for the sake of a one-time story.”