

Ask A Mentor: How Can Recalcitrant Attys Use Social Media?

By **Sean Marotta** (May 10, 2021)

Experts answer questions on career and workplace conundrums in this Law360 Pulse guest column series. Have a question you're afraid to ask your law firm chair, practice area leader or mentor? Submit it anonymously here.

In this installment, Hogan Lovells' Sean Marotta, who has over 14,000 followers on Twitter, offers advice on how a lawyer can successfully use social media.

Q: My firm insists I should be more active on social media, but I'm not that keen. What tips would you give a reluctant lawyer looking to network and build a following?

—Partner at BigLaw firm

Congratulations on being — however reluctantly — willing to create a professional social media account. And by professional social media, I mean social media linked to your identity as an attorney; your Facebook account where you post pictures of your dog and kids doesn't count.

Social media can be intimidating at first, but can also be richly rewarding. Here are my top 10 tips for how to do professional social media right.

1. You have to want to do it.

I hate to fight the premise of the question, but professional social media accounts where the attorney's heart isn't in it aren't worth the trouble.

Retweeting your firm's press releases won't make an impact if no one is following you, and no one will bother to follow you if all you do is retweet your firm's press releases. So don't bother with social media unless you find it worthwhile — even just a little bit.

2. Follow people you want to learn from.

You probably have a practice area you focus on. So start by following people in that area that you want to learn from. Twitter, for example, is chock-full of legal reporters tweeting their stories and insights. Or there may be a prominent practitioner whom you've always admired highlighting new cases or interesting articles.

Even if you never post anything yourself, what you learn from following others can be a huge professional benefit from social media. News often hits social media first, and I've impressed colleagues and clients by sharing something with them before they've seen it elsewhere.

3. Lurk before you speak.

Every social media platform — and every community on a social media platform — has its



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own customs, and you don't want to embarrass yourself by violating them. So try to learn those customs before jumping in.

Notice what kinds of things people post and how users relate to one another. And when you speak up, try to emulate the kindest, most polite people you've seen.

4. Start in conversation.

When you're finally ready to say something, don't just start posting when no one follows you. Consider joining an ongoing conversation, adding your expertise to something someone else has said, or using a popular hashtag — like #AppellateTwitter — to reach others in the community.

That doesn't mean picking a fight or saying "well, actually," to an expert. But if others see you have something interesting to say, they'll tend to amplify your messages or follow you — and that is how you start to build a network.

5. Stick to what you know.

A cringeworthy part of social media is that anyone can feel like an expert on everything.

Sometimes it's obvious, like nonattorneys suddenly becoming constitutional scholars. But it can be less obvious, too, like when an attorney specializing in one area of law opines on subjects they haven't seen since law school, if that. Don't be that person.

Social media is most helpful to your career when you comment on topics you know something about. Posts don't need to be a footnoted treatise, but don't feel like you need to say something about everything in the news.

6. You're always representing your firm and colleagues.

I don't care how many disclaimers your profile has — your professional social media account will always reflect on your firm and your colleagues.

Every tweet I send might be reported in Law360 with "said Sean Marotta, a partner at Hogan Lovells," following it. So don't say things that would embarrass your firm or clients.

When in doubt, delete it, or don't send it. You'll rarely regret the posts you didn't make. And if you do offend, apologize directly and sincerely; most forgive and move on.

7. Think of all of your firm's conflicts.

Before you comment on a case or issue, think about whether you might be contradicting a client or colleague's advocacy. Don't discuss your cases or deals without client approval, obviously. But also think about broader conflicts. If your firm represents banks, steer clear of commenting on financial regulation without clearance — even if you practice government contracts.

Again, when in doubt, don't post. Or check with your colleagues or communications team first. Particularly if you work at a large law firm, it's doubtful that you'll know all of your colleagues' clients and what positions they are taking.

8. Focus on quality over quantity.

Once you get into social media, it's natural to want to build a big following. After all, you have interesting things to say and others should hear them.

But the topics that get the most followers don't always align with your professional goals. If you're a mergers and acquisitions lawyer, having 50 M&A reporters following you and asking you for comment on current M&A topics as a result will do more for your professional profile than 10,000 random users following you for your uninformed views on constitutional law. Often, a smaller network is a more useful one.

9. Make friends.

One of the most rewarding aspects of social media is the very real friends you can make on it. Through Twitter, I've met and made friends with appellate lawyers from across the country.

And those friends have come in handy; I've had appeals in state courts I've never practiced in before and have called friends from social media for model briefs and tips on judges' preferences not found in the formal rules.

If you hit it off with someone on social media, keep in touch offline, whether it be by Zoom or grabbing lunch or coffee when it's safe.

10. Have fun!

The best attorneys on social media share some of their true selves. Whether it's pictures of your dog or dumb legal jokes, showing that there is a real person at the keyboard builds authentic professional connections.

But be careful: The best jokes are ones that make fun of yourself. Try especially not to mock subordinates or clients — particularly if someone reading your posts could figure out who you are talking about. Your colleagues and clients may be reading your posts or know someone who is. But a little humor can go a very long way.

Good luck with your foray into social media. And if you ever need more tips, my Twitter direct messages are open.

Sean Marotta is a partner at Hogan Lovells. He tweets about the law and his kids at @smmarotta.

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