

Survey Says Small Law Firms Embrace Social Media for New Business, Outpacing Large Law

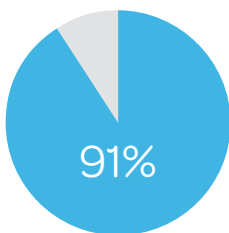
Study Reveals the Increasing Impact of Social Media on Marketing Small Law Firms

In a recent survey, the percentage of respondents from small law firms who say they measure social media success by the amount of new business it drives is nearly twice that of respondents from large law firms participating in the same survey.

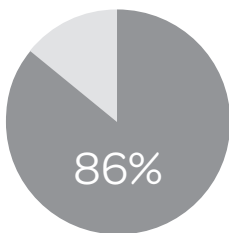
That is according to “Use of Social Media in Legal Marketing,” a recent survey of U.S. attorneys and law firm marketing decision-makers, performed by Vizibility® and LexisNexis®. Survey respondents represent firms of all sizes, from solo practitioners up to 500-plus attorney firm members listed on *The American Lawyer’s Am Law 100*.

From determining how respondents measure the impact of social media on their business, to which channels they use more frequently than others, the survey provides interesting insights into social media trends within the legal industry.

When do you plan to implement social media as part of your marketing programs?



Respondents from small law firms (five or fewer attorneys) that already use social media



Respondents from large law firms (100+ attorneys) that already use social media

Robust Adoption in Legal Industry, Slightly Higher for Small Firms

When asked, “When do you plan to implement social media as part of your marketing programs?” 91 percent of respondents from law firms with five or fewer attorneys indicated they already use some form of social media. That rate is higher than the still-impressive 86 percent reported by respondents from law firms with more than 100 attorneys.

Such robust adoption rates across the board indicate attorneys from firms of all sizes recognize the business potential of social media. Likely the lower costs of getting started with social media participation (when compared with more expensive forms of direct marketing and paid advertising) and the growth of tools and platforms have helped spur adoption across all firm types, regardless of size.

However, the survey results indicate that respondents from small law firms have higher lead-generation expectations than survey participants from large firms. According to the survey, when asked, “How do you measure the success of your social media programs?” the top response from survey participants from firms of five or fewer attorneys is lead generation, or 76 percent of respondents, compared to just 47 percent of respondents from large law firms.

Small Law Firms Eye New Business

Small law respondents place much more emphasis on new business generation than their large law counterparts when determining the effectiveness of social media, the survey showed.

Specifically, nearly 71 percent of respondents in practices with five or fewer attorneys reported that generating new business is a key measure of success required for participation in social media.

In contrast, among respondents from firms with 100 or more attorneys, 37 percent measure social media success this way, likely due to the fact that larger firms have substantial marketing budgets to fund other, more expensive business-generation activities. As compared to other advertising and lead-generation services, social media can be seen as less expensive and more attractive for smaller firms.

These findings are also compatible with comparable legal industry studies of social media, including the American Bar Association's *2011 Legal Technology Survey Report*. The ABA report found that 60 percent of respondents from small law firms of two to nine attorneys who maintain a legal topic blog for professional purposes reported landing new clients as a result of their blogs.

LinkedIn, Blogging Lead Social Media Pack for Small Law

As LinkedIn® is the leading social media channel for business professionals—161 million business owners, managers, executives and others, including lawyers, have profiles¹—it is no surprise that more respondents favored this channel. According to the Vizibility®/LexisNexis® survey, over 90 percent of law firms with five or fewer attorneys plan to use a professional social network such as LinkedIn.

Meanwhile, it makes sense that blogging came in a close second, as a firm's blog can serve as the central hub for social media activity—various tools can easily and automatically publish blog content to social media profiles once the content is posted. Moreover, a blog can be a successful platform to demonstrate knowledge and facilitate networking while also enriching the overall content of the firm's website.

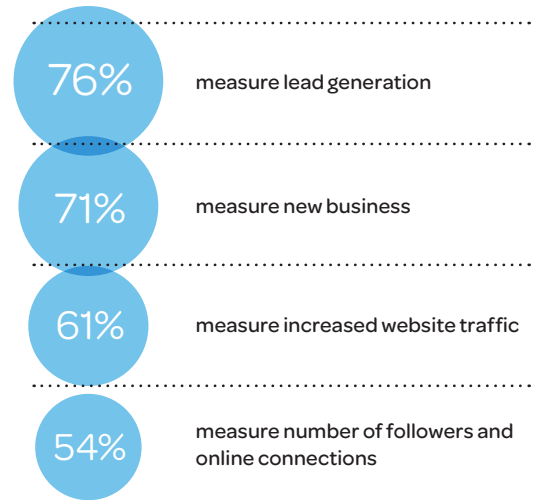
Research conducted by BTI Consulting examining use of legal directories and online lawyer profiles found that among all in-house counsel, from general counsel to staff attorneys, 98 percent were familiar with LinkedIn.²

Likewise, respondents to the Vizibility/LexisNexis survey reported that they plan to leverage LinkedIn or other social networks in their

¹ LinkedIn website.

² BTI Consulting Group, *How Clients Hire: The Role of Legal Directories and Online Lawyer Profiles*, 2011.

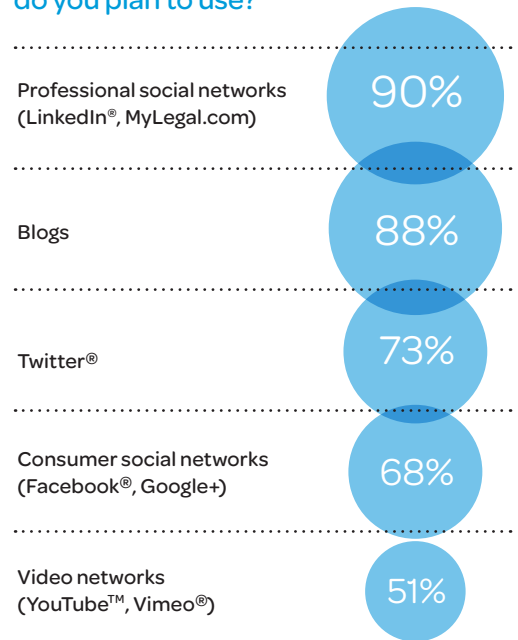
How do you measure the success of your social media programs?*



* Respondents from firms with five or fewer attorneys

While generating new leads and business are the higher priorities for gauging success, a substantial number of small law respondents also reported social media's effectiveness in strengthening existing relationships.

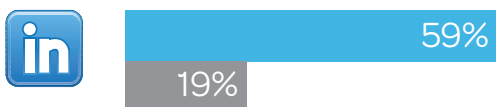
What social media services do you plan to use?*



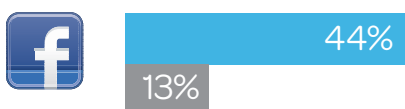
* Respondents from firms with five or fewer attorneys

What percent of your attorneys are active or have complete and up-to-date profiles on the following sites?

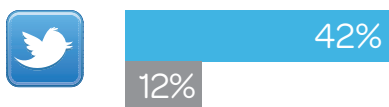
LinkedIn®





Facebook®



Twitter®



LEGEND

-  Respondents from firms with five or fewer attorneys
-  All firms

How Lawyers Leverage Social Media



LinkedIn® allows lawyers to create professional connections, join groups, and build relationships to generate more referral business and grow their practice areas.



Posts on Twitter® and Facebook® give potential clients a feel for what it's like to work with a given attorney or firm, while practice opinions and insights on a blog shared on these services build credibility.



A prominent and regularly updated blog influences hiring of law firms, allowing the firm to highlight its knowledge of key legal topics. Law firm blogs with rich, well-written content can also help with search engine optimization, as search engines reward fresh, relevant content with higher rankings.

marketing in nearly equal percentages, regardless of firm size (ranging from about 90 to 96 percent). However, with less than 20 percent of all survey respondents reporting their LinkedIn® profiles were completely up-to-date, time may play a role in effective usage of this important social media tool.³

Social Media Useful for Nurturing Client Relations

While generating new leads and business were the leading measures for social media success for small law respondents to the survey, a substantial number of respondents cited "improved client satisfaction." In fact, nearly a quarter of the small firm respondents (24.4 percent) said improving client relations was a determining factor for success.

Most potential clients are likely reluctant to begin a dialog on a sensitive legal issue with a lawyer online, and numerous state bar rules restrict establishing a client relationship this way.

However, once the relationship is established, lawyers can use platforms like Twitter® and Facebook® to get feedback from current clients and nurture relationships, making their marketing more effective. For instance, when a law firm tweets or posts information on a change in the law affecting its clients on a particular legal topic, clients connected to the firm through that social media channel are reminded of the firm's prowess in that practice area. Should those clients comment or even "Like" the post, the firm now has awareness of interest to prompt an offline conversation that could lead to a new legal matter.

More Lawyers Maintaining Current Profiles on Multiple Channels

Considering the number of respondents frequently updating their social media profiles, there seems to be a healthy appreciation for active participation. Yet the responses demonstrate there are large percentages of attorneys that are not active or do not have complete and up-to-date profiles. For LinkedIn, 59 percent of respondents from law firms with five or fewer attorneys report that all of their firm's attorneys actively participate/have current profiles; 44 percent report the same for Facebook; and 42 percent for Twitter.

This data on participation likely indicates social media is an evolving marketing practice, where attorneys are experimenting to strike the right balance between marketing their firms and practicing law.

³ Vizibility/LexisNexis Survey, "Use of Social Media in Legal Marketing," 2011.



Methodology

- The Vizibility®/LexisNexis® survey responses were released in December 2011.
 - The companies sent invitations by email to the members of the Legal Marketing Association, surveyed more than two dozen LinkedIn® message boards, shared invitations with Twitter® and Facebook® followers of both companies and made posts on LexisNexis blogs—all to secure a broad range of respondents. There were 258 respondents to this survey.
 - Make-up of survey respondents:
 - 56 percent of respondents were from firms with fewer than 100 lawyers.
 - 24 percent of respondents came from firms ranked on the Am Law 100 or Am Law 200.
 - 20 percent of respondents were from small firms with five or fewer lawyers.
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Conclusion

The responses to this survey indicate robust appreciation in the legal industry of social media's ability to generate real business results—from lead generation to client nurturing.

Consider that based on a March 2012 survey of Internet users conducted by The Research Intelligence Group (TRiG), three out of four responding consumers seeking an attorney over the last year reported using online resources at some point in the process.⁴ As more consumers turn to online sources to research their legal issues, increased adoption and more sophisticated use of social media in the legal industry will follow. Meanwhile, professional peer groups on social media channels such as LinkedIn will continue to yield more referral business to attorneys and firms that become better at networking this way.

Moreover, consider how participation complements other forms of marketing. With most law firm blogs residing within the firm's general website, a steady drumbeat of fresh blog content increases the visibility of those sites, enhancing a site's ability to generate traffic and leads. Remember, search engines reward relevant, well-written content with higher rankings on search results pages. Such content also demonstrates legal expertise, increasing the likelihood site visitors will request consultations. And social media's future growth is further assured, especially among small firms, as it represents an inexpensive—when compared to other forms of marketing, such as paid print, television and radio advertising—reliable driver of leads and business.

Ultimately, as consumers and referring attorneys rely on social media to help influence purchasing decisions, and law firms become more adept at harnessing social media to connect with these audiences, the trends in this survey will likely increase.

Get Started With a Free Social Media/Website Evaluation

How will your law firm focus its social media and online marketing strategy to drive more business? Is your blog or website optimized to promote the areas that matter most to your clients and prospects? Having created and/or hosted more than 40,000 websites for lawyers over the last 10 years, and with a growing line of successful social media solutions designed for small law firms, LexisNexis knows how to develop online marketing solutions that drive more quality leads to your firm.

Request a free evaluation, including a consultation with a Law Firm Marketing Specialist, to:

- Discuss social media options
- Compare your website with competitors'
- Evaluate whether your website uses the latest best practices
- Learn how to measure website ROI
- Review SEO strategy

To schedule your free evaluation today,
please call us at **877-440-5783**.

⁴ Based on a survey of 4,000 adult Internet users conducted by The Research Intelligence Group (TRiG), March 2012.