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The New Media Engagement Survey: Important Emerging Trends for Law Firms

In April of 2010 Zeughauser Group collaborated with Greentarget and with ALM Legal Intelligence to conduct The New Media Engagement Survey. (The full report is available at www.consultzg.com or by clicking [here](#).) The 164 in-house counsel who responded to the survey, which asked in-house counsel about their use of blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and other new media to stay informed about the legal industry and to make decisions about outside counsel, confirmed that new media quickly are becoming important tools for information-sharing among legal industry entities. As importantly, the survey clearly suggests that when law firms, which as a rule have been slow to adopt new media tools and use them proactively in their external communication programs, enhance the content they place on Facebook or reference in their tweets, for example, in-house counsel will respond and make even greater professional use of new media. And because law students and the press have been earlier adopters of new media technologies, we also believe that law firm focus on new media tools as mechanisms for sharing information and assessing audience attitudes and priorities has tremendous potential for recruiting as well as for business development and brand-building in general.

Highlights from the Survey

The survey underscores the extent to which electronic delivery is reshaping the way that in-house counsel receive information, a trend that clearly has paved the way for the adoption and evolution of new media tools. For example, we found widespread adoption and acceptance of blogs by the in-house lawyers who responded to the survey. Even though many of them expressed concern about the credibility of information that is made available through many new media tools, we learned that several of the tools have been adopted widely for personal use, that they are being used increasingly to obtain professionally relevant content, and that some tools are starting to have an impact on in-house lawyers' choice of outside counsel.

▶ Accessing content electronically is now the preferred mode for obtaining business and industry news. Sixty-two percent of those responding to the survey prefer to access such content online, compared with 42 percent who still prefer to obtain the information through print vehicles.

- ▶ Making content accessible and readable on a PDA is increasingly important. Seventy-four percent of respondents aged 30-39 prefer or somewhat prefer to use their smart phone or PDA over other means of accessing news, compared to 47 percent of counsel aged 40-49, 37 percent of counsel aged 50-59, and 26 percent of counsel over the age of 60.
- ▶ Blogs have become mainstream. Of the respondents, 43 percent of in-house counsel said blogs are among their top "go-to" sources for business-related news and information. In-house counsel ranked blogs as the fourth most important source for helping them to research outside counsel for potential hire, although well behind "recommendations from sources you trust" at 73 percent, but only slightly behind speeches and articles at 38 percent and bios on a firm's website at 30 percent.
- ▶ LinkedIn and Facebook are used widely, while Twitter, a relatively new tool for professional content delivery, lags behind. Fifty-one percent of those surveyed used LinkedIn

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in the previous week for professional reasons. Facebook is used more for personal purposes, with 50 percent of the respondents having used Facebook in the past week for personal reasons and only 23 percent for professional reasons. Less than 13 percent used Twitter in the last week for professional reasons and 14 percent for personal purposes, but we expect the professional use of Twitter to increase as law firms and the media adopt Twitter as a tool for digesting and pointing to important content in addition to as a way of staying in touch with friends.

- ▶ In general, new media channels will find more traction as law firms use them to provide relevant content. Fifty-one percent of respondents said that they would engage these channels to receive relevant information from law firms. This revelation suggests that when law firms start disseminating content-rich e-communications via new media channels, in-house lawyers will receive them more willingly, but their interest will be piqued by the substantive information rather than by the delivery mechanism.

A Call to Action for Law Firms

We believe there is no question that new media have penetrated the legal industry for good, be it today's blogs and Twitter, or tomorrow's rising innovation. Likewise, it is clear that law firms have opportunities to use these tools to deliver content as long as the tools and the content are aligned closely with the needs and wants of their clients. Because these tools still haven't been adopted widely, the firms that do it quickly and effectively may reap a competitive advantage. To that end, we urge law firms to:

- ▶ seek to understand the role that new media tools are playing or could play in their clients' and prospective clients' decision-making about outside counsel and research the patterns and purpose of recruits' and the press' use of these tools. Pay attention to what key competitors are doing with the tools as well. As appropriate, incorporate these tools into your firm's branding and credentialing activities;
- ▶ develop policies to ensure that the firm's lawyers who use new media tools do so in a way that helps to build the firm's institutional brand as well as their individual visibility

and networks by showcasing knowledge and experience that is consistent with the firm's brand and with the goal of institutionalizing client relationships; and

- ▶ pay careful attention to how the firm is portrayed on vehicles such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, and manage those tools proactively where possible. For example, Facebook recently has begun creating "Community Pages" for a variety of entities, including individual law firms. These pages, created by the site without the firm's participation, feature content related to the firm that is obtained from sources such as Wikipedia and from unfiltered searches. Some law firms have expressed discontent about what they perceive as "inaccurately" negative portrayals on these pages.¹
- ▶ Just as you would with other communications tools, only disseminate content to clients that is relevant to their business needs.

Firms Are Diving In, Albeit Slowly

In our consulting practice, we have seen that many law firms are addressing the new media phenomenon head-on, and their management and marketing leaders are grappling with how to employ these tools to enhance their institutional brands as well as how to create policies "to govern" the use of social media by individual lawyers. But the adoption of new media tools in the legal space continues to lag behind other industries. Take for example, blogs, which our survey indicated are used widely by in-house lawyers. According to LexBlog, as of March 2010, only 96 of the AmLaw 200 were blogging, with 297 blogs among them. This is up from 39 firms blogging as of August, 2007², but still cannot be considered widespread adoption.

Likewise, only 31 of the Am Law 100 law firms have "Fan Pages" related to their firm on Facebook, and a survey by TheByrneBlog found that most do not have much content yet.³ And, according to research conducted through December 2009 by myCorporateResource.com, only 29 of the Am Law 100 actively use Twitter.⁴

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Conclusion

New media pose a series of opportunities and possibilities for law firms, although many law firm leaders have focused more to date on the threats and possible pitfalls these tools represent. However, if forward-thinking law firm leaders develop policies and strategies to promote their brand using the new tools at their disposal and to educate individual lawyers about how new media tools can support both per-

sonal and institutional marketing strategies, they have the opportunity to take a first-mover or leadership position that will be unavailable to followers. Clearly, the trend suggests that clients, prospects, and recruits potentially will look to law firms that use new media for meaningful content as credible and credentialed sources on the topics with which they most want to be associated in the marketplace.

1. Jenna Greene, "Firms No Fans of Facebook Community Pages," *The National Law Journal*, June 1, 2010, available at <http://www.law.com/jsp/lawtechnologynews/PubArticleLTN.jsp?id=1202458976792#>.
2. Kevin O'Keefe, "State of the AmLaw 200 Blogosphere: March, 2010," March 11, 2010, available at <http://kevin.lexblog.com/2010/03/articles/large-law/state-of-the-amlaw-200-blogosphere-march-2010/>.
3. TheByrneBlog, "AmLaw 100 Firms on Facebook," March 12, 2010, available at <http://thebyrneblog.com/2010/03/12/amlaw-100-firms-on-facebook/>.
4. "Twittering Classes: Lessons For and From the AmLaw 100," mycorporateresource.com, available at <http://mycorporateresource.com/content/view/35128/548/>.



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