



The Laws of Social Media

Two local firms use social media in different ways, but both have their clients in mind. **BY BURT SCHNEIDER**

Millions of people now use social media to connect with each other on a daily basis. Businesses, both large and small, are learning how to harness the power of this vast network. Legal firms are no exception.

Hupy and Abraham

Jason Abraham is managing partner of Hupy and Abraham, a personal injury litigation firm with 11 offices across three states and more than 120 employees. He's directly involved with the firm's marketing efforts.

"We sit down, strategize and plan out the message we want and who we want to target," Abraham says. "To just tweet something or make a post on Facebook is meaningless unless you have a sophisticated campaign behind it as to why you're doing what

you're doing."

Abraham draws the comparison to the litigation world: A lawyer wouldn't go to court and try a case without a well-prepared closing argument.

This approach translates to using the right platforms in the most effective ways – YouTube to target male clients, Pinterest for women. And while the firm's Twitter account focuses more on links directing traffic to the website, Facebook posts tend to have more pictures, videos and banners promoting community engagement.

Often, one message will be disseminated several different ways across a bevy of platforms: LinkedIn, Google Plus, QR codes, iPhone and Android apps. "We have to make sure we're constantly on the cutting edge and

maintain that big practice by making sure that we get exposure to all different types of mediums," Abraham says.

Part of being effective, Abraham believes, is a willingness to try things that might not work and learning that it's OK to fail. "It's like anything else, you may try things, and 50 percent of the time you might be successful," he says. "But that doesn't mean you give up."

Being directly involved with the community is also important to the firm. This often leads to posts about fundraisers it's hosting or public events where it will have a presence. Recently, that meant getting involved with Harley-Davidson's worldwide celebration. To commemorate its 110th anniversary, Harley-Davidson has hosted a year-long celebration across 11 countries and six continents. The party returns to Milwaukee Aug. 29-Sept. 1 with a slew of concerts, rides and parades.

As a personal injury firm, Hupy and Abraham has always been heavily involved with the motorcycle community. Many of its litigations involve motorcycle claims.

In years past, Hupy and Abraham has used old media platforms to promote motorcycle awareness. Its "Watch for Motorcycles" billboard campaign "had millions of views," Abraham says. "We wanted to make sure at first that we got as many people as we could to see the signs." From there, the firm expanded the exposure to newer mediums: Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, QR codes.

Most recently for the 110th anniversary, the firm put out a contest for free tickets via social media and has received an overwhelming response. Part of that success, Abraham believes, is because of such a commitment to engagement in previous years.

Throughout all mediums, Hupy and Abraham tries to deliver a precise and widespread message. The idea is to provide the audience with as much information about the firm as possible, as evidenced by a YouTube video in which Abraham walks the audience through the parking garage, lobby and into the offices. "The more they can get to know you and the more they can see your track record, what you've done for the community, the better chance you have of being hired," he says.

In this vein, Abraham publishes brief blog posts on the firm's website ranging from the simple (treatment of dog bites) to the more complex (the right time to pursue compensation for faulty pharmaceuticals).

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Publicizing such information could potentially give someone enough information to learn they have a lawsuit but choose a different firm. But Abraham doesn't believe in withholding such information.

"If people see you're willing to educate through social media or through websites," he says, "they're going to go to the law firm that was willing to put that information out there at the risk of not being hired."

Groth Law Firm

At 38, Jon Groth has always used social media as much for marketing as to sharpen and improve his abilities as a lawyer. "At one point, I was actually a much younger attorney," Groth jokes. "I had to differentiate and prove myself to my clients that I was somebody who knew what they were talking about."

Groth would take current topics and write posts online about how they applied to personal injury law. The hope was that potential clients, if given the chance to see his capability, would hire him for what he knows. "That certainly helped me as a marketing tool, but also as a practice area as a way to hone my skills as a personal injury attorney," he says.

The notion of people who practice law, he says, is just that – people actively training and refining their skills. That remains largely true for Groth today.

Now in its fourth year, Groth Law Firm has two attorneys and two paralegals plus some support staff. The team makes regular use of social media platforms while going about their day-to-day business. Combing through information on social networking sites is an everyday part of client interaction.

To get to know clients in the past, an attorney would often have to go the client's home, talk to friends and family, and interview witnesses. The hope was to get a sense of the client, who they were and how an accident had affected their life.

There are inherent problems with that. Some people don't readily open up. And if years have passed since an accident, it's easy to forget what was once important. What's more, all of those interviews cost time and money.

With social media, Groth can now obtain a more detailed image of the individual with much less effort. Quick searches on Facebook, Twitter, even LinkedIn, can lead to revealing information, such as liking a particular fitness activity. That bit of detail can jar memories or images, much like a photograph at a person's

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house once would. "If it's out there on social media, I'd do my clients a disservice by not knowing what's happening," Groth says.

That information can be good or bad – a sword and shield, as Groth says. That sword can mean getting a clearer image of the at-fault party. In a car accident, for example, if the person at-fault tweeted something damaging – say, something about drinking hours before a crash – that could be used to prove fault and help his client secure a victory. That sort of self-incrimination is not uncommon. "It's shocking to see how many stupid things are said online," Groth says.

However, that same level of scrutiny will be used toward his clients. At-fault insurance companies seek out information on various platforms in the same way as Groth to wield information to their benefit.

For example, some people will go on social media and downplay an injury from an accident, and that can weaken their case.

"Guys with broken bones say that they're doing great on their Facebook pages, and that they're going to go ride their bike," Groth says. "That's not smart because the at-fault insurance company is going to see that and try to say that the person is not injured."

All of this sifting and gathering plays to Groth's larger approach of using social media to share information. Part of that is done through common channels – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn – but Groth is also active on a question and answer forum, *avvo.com*, for those seeking free legal advice.

On it, he's answered questions about a range of topics, including dog bites and potential medical malpractice. Most claims regard car accidents. Some cases are more tangled than others, but Groth doesn't hold back in advocating for people to get an attorney – regardless of the firm they choose.

Groth feels a responsibility in providing the public with such knowledge. Also, just as when he was starting out, it helps hone his skills. Various cases present new challenges to get acquainted with the law.

Sharing his message extends to traditional media outlets, too. Groth frequents radio shows and speaks about many different topics, such as the time when he discussed the perils of texting and driving for more than an hour.

It's all part of his efforts to increase the firm's visibility while playing a helpful role in the community. ■

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