Introduction

In part one of the 2014 Managing Partner Social Media Survey, we collected responses from law firm managing partners regarding their attitudes toward and behaviors on social media. To make our results as useful as possible to our audience, we broke down our numbers by age group and compared them to similar statistics gathered from their in-house counterparts. For part two, we are applying a macro view to social media in the legal industry to benchmark where law firms as a whole stand in terms of social media policies, practices, training, procedures and uses.

When social media got its start about 10 years ago, it was predominantly an informal, consumer-centric technology. Users would log on to post comments to friends’ walls and feeds or upload pictures from their summer vacations. But over time, as the technology became more widely accepted and more integrated into our day-to-day lives, a commercial use began to take shape. Consumer brands began to see the benefits of being able to connect and interact directly with their customers in real-time, and it would revolutionize the world of marketing.

Over time, the social networks themselves evolved to facilitate this commercial use, with both Facebook and LinkedIn rolling out, and subsequently redesigning, their company pages. Meanwhile, Twitter has incorporated sponsored tweets, Facebook has sponsored posts and LinkedIn has sponsored updates, all of which help brands tap directly into key demographics.

Yet, while consumer brands might have cracked the code to unlock social media’s numerous benefits, B2B organizations, including those in the legal industry, have historically found the technology a bit more perplexing to leverage. That has begun to change, as organizations work to understand social media’s application as a powerful business development, content marketing and public relations tool.

This paper is part two of the 2014 Managing Partner Social Media Survey and reflects firmwide social media policies and practices. What we found was that all firms, regardless of size, are falling behind in some key areas, but smaller and midsize firms are even farther behind than their larger counterparts. That said, the data paints a hopeful picture, one that points to an industry embracing change, albeit slowly.
Our Methodology

Our data-gathering methodology was rather simple. We devised a brief online survey for managing partners that asked questions regarding firmwide social media policies and then deployed the online survey through The Managing Partner Forum email list. Recipients provided responses based on their knowledge and opinions of their firms’ social media use. After leaving the survey open for several weeks, we closed it off and began crunching the numbers.

In total, we had 128 responses, all of whom are managing partners at their firms. Participants self-identified their firm sizes, defined by attorney headcount. This breakdown skewed more toward firms of smaller sizes, which is why we chose to cluster firms with 100 or more attorneys into one demographic. [See Chart 1 – Breakdown of respondents by firm size]

We also gathered data from other sources to draw comparisons to our findings. One resource that provided good benchmarking data was the 2011 Social Media in the Legal Sector study, co-published by Vizibility and LexisNexis. Because the study is a few years old, it provided comparable statistics that helped us draw conclusions regarding law firm social media trends over the last several years.
Does your law firm have a social media strategy?

When it comes to marketing, if you don’t have a plan in place, you’re probably not going to get a stellar return on your investment. Furthermore, **without a strategy to guide your efforts, you’re more likely to operate on an ad hoc basis**, which creates inefficiencies that further drive down any potential return. Social media is no different in this regard. As an outgrowth of a firm’s overall marketing strategy, social media must be strategically integrated into a firm’s marketing program to be effective. However, law firms face a challenge in that they are an amalgamation of brands, with each attorney, each practice group and the firm as a whole carving out its own unique, though typically overlapping, identity.

The data reflects that law firms are struggling with this challenge, as **24.4 percent of all respondents leave social media strategy to individual attorneys and staff members**. Only **18.9 percent of firms overall are investing heavily in their social media presence**. Furthermore, **38.6 percent of respondents lack a strategy of any kind but acknowledge its importance**. [See Chart 2 – Law firm social media strategy.]

When breaking the data down by firm size, we see that whether a firm is larger or smaller generally has a slight impact on whether it has a social media strategy in place, with larger firms typically more prone to investment (though this was not the case for the largest of our respondents, which could be due to the smaller sample size). Smaller firms were more likely to see social media as a distraction, but even these naysayers were in the minority. **All sizes of firms overwhelmingly recognized that social media was something worth investing in**, but many just don’t see it as a priority. [See Chart 3 – Law firm social media strategy by firm size.]
Does your law firm have a social media policy in place?

As we have been reminded time and again by news reports of companies and employees behaving badly on social media, having a comprehensive social media policy in place is a must for organizations looking to protect their reputations. While you would think that law firms would be ahead of the curve on policy implementation, this is not so, according to our data, which shows that 41.7 percent of respondents do not have a social media policy in place. In fact, only 37.8 percent of overall respondents did have a policy, and 24.4 percent of these enacted their guidelines within the last three years. [See Chart 4 – Law firm social media policy.]

When breaking down law firms by size, we see that larger firms are more likely to have enacted policies regarding social media use, with 59.1 percent of firms with 50 to 99 attorneys reporting that they have a policy in place, while 60 percent of firms with more than 100 attorneys report having a policy. Meanwhile, only 38.1 percent of firms with 20 to 49 attorneys have a policy while 20.9 percent of firms with fewer than 20 attorneys have a policy. This trend of larger firms having policies in place versus their smaller counterparts rang true three years ago, according to the Vizibility/LexisNexis survey, with 73.4 percent of the largest firms reporting they have a policy in place versus 37.5 percent of firms with 6 to 20 attorneys. However, we also noticed some discrepancies, as the 2011 study showed that 69.2 percent of firms in the range of 21 to 50 attorneys had policies, which could reflect differences in our pool of participants. [See Chart 5 – Law firm social media policy by firm size.]
Does your firm provide social media training?

Just as young drivers must first pass a test before being allowed on the open road, a best practice for social media is to provide training before staff and attorneys gain free rein on the Internet. Not only can training prevent an egregious social media mistake, it can also help maximize effective use of the technology. Yet, most law firms in our study still do not provide training to their attorneys, with 53.2 percent responding they do not provide any training at all. Meanwhile, 26.2 percent offer optional training, and only 15.8 percent provide mandatory training, of which fewer than half made training mandatory for both attorneys and staff. [See Chart 6 – Law firm social media training.]

When breaking the numbers down by firm size, we see once again that larger firms are more likely to offer training than their smaller counterparts. Slightly more than half of respondents from firms with 50 or more attorneys offer optional training, while 13.6 percent of firms with 50 to 99 attorneys require training for attorneys and staff, a number only topped by firms with 100 or more attorneys. Conversely, 75 percent of firms with fewer than 20 attorneys offer no training at all, while more than half of firms with 20 to 49 attorneys lack a social media training program. [See Chart 7 – Law firm social media training by firm size.]
Does your firm maintain a LinkedIn page?

As the first part of our report stated, LinkedIn has become a popular social network among law firm managing partners, with more than 90 percent of those surveyed claiming a presence on the site. However, this popularity does not seem to apply to law firms as a whole, as our data shows. More than a third of respondents stated their firms do not maintain a LinkedIn page. In fact, according to our data, only 59.2 percent have such a presence. [See Chart 8 – Law firm LinkedIn pages.] This stands in stark contrast to the 2011 survey, in which 93.1 percent of those polled anticipated incorporating professional social networking sites like LinkedIn into their social media strategies.

Interestingly, when we break this number down by firm size, we get a clear view of whom the laggards are. Larger firms, those with 50 or more attorneys, are much more likely to have a LinkedIn page, with implementation rates at 80 percent and higher. However, only 60 percent of firms with 20 to 49 attorneys reported having a LinkedIn page, while less than 40 percent of firms with fewer than 20 attorneys have a page. [See Chart 9 – Law Firm LinkedIn pages by firm size.] Note that in the 2011 survey, the vast majority of firms, regardless of size, reported that they aspired to use LinkedIn, with 90.2 percent of the smallest demographic – law firms with 1 to 5 attorneys – seeking to leverage the site.

Larger firms are much more likely to have a LinkedIn page.
Does your firm maintain a Facebook page?

In contrast to LinkedIn, Facebook is the primary social network for informal engagement. That is why it has been leveraged repeatedly as a tool for consumer-oriented companies but has yet to find much usefulness in the B2B and professional services space. Therefore, it was somewhat surprising to see 45.6 percent of respondents state that their firm has a Facebook page. [See Chart 10 – Law Firm Facebook pages.] This number does somewhat parallel the overall statistics from the 2011 survey, which noted that 57.1 percent of all respondents anticipated incorporating Facebook into their social media strategies.

When breaking the numbers down by firm size, we see a predictable pattern in which all firms, regardless of size, lack a Facebook page. [See Chart 11 – Law firm Facebook pages by firm size.] The largest firms, those with 100 or more attorneys, reported the highest number of Facebook implementation, with 66.7 percent managing law firm Facebook pages. Meanwhile, the lowest percentage of adopters was the firms with fewer than 20 attorneys, which reported a percentage of 33.3, a number about half that of the 2011 survey.
Does your law firm maintain a Twitter account?

Twitter occupies a unique space among social media sites. Its lack of closed circles makes it incredibly public, and its restrictions on character count make it incredibly concise. The site has emerged as a critical tool for information sharing, particularly among brands that invest heavily into content marketing, a tactic that is slowly but surely catching on in the legal marketplace. Despite its benefits as a PR and content marketing tool, most respondents reported that their firms lacked a Twitter presence, with 65.4 percent stating they did not maintain a Twitter account. [See Chart 12 – Law firm Twitter accounts.] This is well below the aspirations of the 2011 study, which reported that nearly 75 percent of all firms planned to incorporate Twitter into their marketing programs.

When reviewing the data by firm size, we see that smaller firms lag far behind their larger counterparts, with only a mere 18.8 percent of firms with fewer than 20 attorneys reporting that they maintain a Twitter account. This number doesn’t jump significantly until you reach firms with at least 50 attorneys. [See Chart 13 – Law firm Twitter accounts by firm size.] When compared to the 2011 survey, small firms are significantly behind where they said they aspired to be, as more than 60 percent of small firms anticipated incorporating Twitter into their marketing activities. This lag could be due to the time investment required to make Twitter successful, as the site tends to provide the most benefit with regular monitoring and activity.
What are the most important benefits of social media to your firm?

Finally, we assessed managing partners’ views on the greatest benefits social media has to offer their firms by asking them to rank a comprehensive selection of uses, including “getting found by prospective clients and referral sources” and “recruiting lawyers and staff.” The most popular benefit was deemed to be “enhancing relationships with current clients and referral sources,” which averaged a placement of 2.1 out of 6. The least popular was “maintaining relationships with firm alumni,” which received an average ranking of 5.09 out of 6. [See Chart 14 – Law firm social media benefits.]

### LAW FIRM SOCIAL MEDIA BENEFITS

Chart 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION RANKINGS</th>
<th>MORE IMPORTANT</th>
<th>LESS IMPORTANT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancing relationships with current clients and referral sources</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting found by prospective clients and referral sources</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with other lawyers, in general</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying and researching prospective clients</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining relationships with firm alumni</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruiting lawyers and staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
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Law firms view social media as a client relations tool. Managing partners largely indicated that social media was best for enhancing relationships with current clients and referral sources. Business development was also a top benefit.
We also broke the results down by firm size, specifically identifying the options ranked as the top benefit and the lowest benefit per demographic. When it came to the top-ranked benefits, firms of all sizes below 100 attorneys were in line with our overall results, stating that “enhancing relationships with current clients and referral sources” was the prime benefit. However, for firms with 100 or more attorneys, the top benefit among 46.7 percent of respondents was “getting found by prospective clients and referral sources,” which is surprising, considering larger firms tend to have greater visibility. As for the lowest-ranked benefits, we once again saw similarities among firms with fewer than 100 attorneys, which ranked both “maintaining relationships with firm alumni” and “recruiting lawyers and staff” on the lower end of the spectrum. Firms with 100 or more attorneys also ranked “maintaining relationships with firm alumni” as the least important benefit but added “connecting with other lawyers in general” as a relatively low priority as well. [See Chart 15 – Law firm social media benefits by firm size.]
Conclusion:

So what does the data ultimately tell us? The following are the key takeaways we can extrapolate from the second part of the 2014 Managing Partner Social Media Survey.

• **Most firms realize the importance of social media but don’t prioritize it.** Whether because of small marketing departments or administrators being stretched too thin, many firms neglect investment in social media, despite the fact that they understand its importance.

• **Many firms simply leave social media in the hands of their attorneys.** Despite the fact that attorneys are not trained marketers, law firms of all sizes are tasking their attorneys with conducting their own social media efforts without a clear firm strategy in place.

• **An incredible number of law firms lack a social media policy.** There’s no excuse for a law firm to operate without a social media policy in this day and age. Yet more than half of firms with fewer than 20 attorneys lack such a policy, while about 40 percent of firms with 20 to 49 attorneys lack such a policy. Even a quarter of firms with more than 100 attorneys lack a policy, which shows that firms of all sizes have room for improvement.

• **Smaller law firms tend to neglect providing social media training.** Along with policy implementation, another area in which smaller law firms altogether are failing is social media training. Larger firms fared somewhat better with more than half providing optional training.

• **Larger firms have more of a social media presence than smaller firms.** While smaller firms could see value in investing in low-cost social media strategies, many small firms lack a significant social media presence.

• **LinkedIn is the go-to social network for law firms.** With over half of all respondents claiming a LinkedIn company page, LinkedIn is definitely the go-to social network for law firms. Conversely, Twitter’s value may be overlooked, as firms are largely staying off that site.

• **Smaller law firms do not view social media as a top recruitment tool.** Despite the wealth of information available on sites like LinkedIn, law firms with fewer than 100 attorneys do not view recruitment as a top benefit of social media.

If you are interested in finding out more about managing partners’ attitudes toward and behaviors on social media, check out part one of the 2014 Managing Partner Social Media Survey.
ABOUT THE MANAGING PARTNER FORUM

The Managing Partner Forum is the nation’s richest source of information and the most highly acclaimed conference series for leaders of today’s most successful law firms. In addition to our robust website, we publish a weekly e-newsletter and podcast series on issues important to leading your law firm in today’s competitive marketplace. Each spring, we present The MPF Leadership Conference. Since 2002, more than 900 law firm leaders from 725 law firms have participated in this incredibly valuable and highly interactive conference designed especially for managing partners. Our mission is clear: to help law firm managing partners be the most effective leaders they can be.

To learn more, go to ManagingPartnerForum.org.

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