

Stop the Scroll: Understanding the Four Elements of Every Social Media Post

One of the few silver linings from the pandemic's lockdowns and social distancing is being forced to embrace alternate ways to communicate and connect. Even the most committed of naysayers in the legal industry have increased the adoption of social media and believe in, if not its revenue-generating power, definitely its low- to no-cost worldwide reach with full editorial control.

Unfortunately, law firm management and even some legal marketers still harbor a few misconceptions associated with "doing" social media: first, that strategic social media management is a simple admin task the youngest member(s) of the team can be charged with "it'll be fun for them!" and second, that all it takes to inspire engagement is a few lines and maybe a cute picture.

Not even close.

Chronological age has absolutely nothing to do with proficiency or even interest in the social sphere. Some Boomers have embraced Twitter, some Gen Zs are puzzled by LinkedIn and vice versa. Success depends on how an individual applies their knowledge of traditional business development and marketing communication principles and how adaptable they are when faced with new data that supports an alternate best practice.

Every user of social media whether posting on behalf of the firm or for their own [networking efforts](#) should consider these four basic components. Each has its own general guidelines to follow; all must be addressed in every post to achieve optimal impact.

Imagery

Even in the relatively new world of social media, the old saying "a picture's worth a thousand words" still applies. Today, we are a society of skimmers, scrolling rapidly through social media feeds to fill gaps in our schedules but only reading a very small portion of the text on screen. The single most effective way to stop the scroll in its tracks is a great picture. And, yes, "great" is subjective. It can mean illustrations or photography, custom designed or stock purchased, and include attorney headshots or office location landmarks; the possibilities are endless. But what isn't debatable: Posts without imagery are pointless.

How to get it right:

- **Right size, best size.** If your social media images aren't sized correctly and are too



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small, they will show up as thumbnails and will not be easily visible. If too large, they will be pixelated (jagged) or might not appear at all. More importantly, if your social feed features incorrectly sized imagery, you've just put your firm squarely in the dinosaur category. [Click here](#) for HootSuite's helpful list of image specs for every platform.

- **Facial recognition.** One of the best speed bumps in the social scroll is recognizing a friend or colleague's picture. Curiosity is instantly piqued and there is a higher probability that a casual scroller will stop to get the latest info about someone they know, even if they haven't been in touch for a while. To take full advantage of this human behavior, your firm should develop templates that feature attorney headshots at the largest size and in a variety of numbers (for those team wins!). Your headshots will have to be high-res - no cutting corners here, since pixelated pics put you right in those tar pits. Besides, consistently putting your people front and center subtly supports any firm that claims their culture celebrates their greatest asset.
- **Banish the word cloud.** Please accept that [word cloud pictures](#) are the visual equivalent of the Comic Sans font and, again, mark your feed as prehistoric. The whole point of the social media graphic is to give the eye a break from text, not to feature more of it with a festive background. Eliminating text allows the picture itself to penetrate the skimmers' consciousness and encourages them to stop and engage. Consider whether you're repeating words or information that will/could appear in the link or the caption. Less text equals great impact in the visual element of the post.
- **Stock vs. custom.** At first, this seems like a question of preference or budget, but it really does come down to performance. Studies have shown that custom imagery outperforms stock imagery by 35%. And when you consider that a lot of legal stock imagery features piles of paper, law books, and gavels, that's not hard to believe. Stock imagery can be done well, with some guidelines and oversight, but if you have the chance to promote the firm's actual [brand](#) and personality, why wouldn't you? [Click here](#) for a few more statistics and studies about this question.

Links

When it comes to managing your firm's virtual universe, harmony should be the theme. News items and updates, no matter how short, should be featured on your website first, so their unique links can be included in social media posts. This cross-linking boosts engagement on both your website and social feeds, improves search engine optimization (SEO), and drives traffic from the web to your landing page. In those rare cases when a landing page isn't possible, consider including a link to the practice group page or an attorney's bio.

Another value of creating those branded links through your website is that doing so creates the opportunity to draft unique headlines restating titles of articles, reframing event participation/sponsorship or showcasing an attorney speaker. Avoid repeating the link's language in the caption. For example, if the link mentions the entire name of the article, it's probably overkill to add it again to the caption. [Click here](#) for a slightly deeper dive into the strategic value of the link between your firm's social media feed and its website.

Captions

“Look, if you had one shot or one opportunity to seize everything you ever wanted in one moment, would you capture it? Or just let it slip?”

Even rapper Eminem knew that you only have a few words with which to engage that social media scroller, so getting to the point is vital. Yes, your attorney may have written a fabulous article in the most cutting-edge legal publication – but is that what your scroller cares about? Or will the focus of that article, with a few bulleted highlights, matter more? And, yes, your firm sponsored the umpteenth charity event, but why? Is there a more personal way to talk about the firm’s or attorney champions’ support? Even those evergreen holiday and awareness posts inspire more engagement when the caption shares an authentic connection to the firm or a genuine story about its attorneys and professional staff.

To do this well, caption writers need to read entire articles, pester attorneys or their admins for presentations, dig through badly designed event websites to find agendas with even the barest of panel descriptions, search the firm’s website for historical involvement, etc. Don’t depend on that initial email or brochure to give you the whole story! **Personalization takes a little time, but success in the socialsphere absolutely hinges on, well, being social.** The more your social feed sounds like actual humans chatting at a networking function, the more likely it is to inspire genuine engagement and actual enjoyment.

Long vs. Short. Don’t get sucked into this never-ending debate. Some captions will feature two lines and do really well; others spike engagement with three paragraphs and multiple links. The key is not the quantity, but rather the quality, of content. Simply put, why choose? Do both.

Social media only works if it is *social* in nature, so including your colleagues and industry contacts in your conversation is a no-brainer. In fact, you should try to draft captions that create legitimate opportunities to tag a colleague or company. When a client team wins, name and tag everyone on the team. When your attorneys are quoted in the media, tag the attorney, author of the article and publication. If your firm sponsors a charity, name the attorney champion and/or tag the organization in the caption.

- **Individual Names.** When tagged, names will appear however those individuals have set up their profiles for that particular platform. Some include middle initial, some include Esq., some are even all lowercase. It can be annoying, but the tag gives the post more value than eliminating it.
- **External Tags.** These should be legitimate parties connected to the subject matter of the post. Tagging individuals and companies promotes the post beyond the firm’s current network and increases visibility.

Hashtags

Love them or hate them, hashtags increase the discoverability of your post and should be included only in posts you want to be seen by the largest possible audience. And that

audience includes the almighty algorithms working behind the scenes to evaluate content for additional promotion. By including a few strategic hashtags in your post, you've essentially highlighted it as relating to a certain category/topic. Users searching for that content will find your post in their search results, along with everyone else using that particular hashtag. This is why including the most popular hashtags might not always be the best, since it means your post will be seen as one of millions. It does take some research and testing to decide on the best hashtags for your specific posts.

- **Legal or Business.** Using law-specific hashtags (#practicearea #lawfirm #law) is fine, but mainstream ideas should also be included. If you need some direction, check out hashtagify.me for a few free suggestions. NOTE: This service will ask you to subscribe after a few uses, but it will reset each day.
- **Law Firm Hashtag.** The jury is still out on the value of creating a hashtag specific to your law firm. However, doing so allows you to brand each post and, in many cases, save space while incorporating the firm's name in the caption. In addition to their firm name, some law firms have gone further, committing to hashtags for recruiting (#TeamLawFirm), charitable (#LawFirmCares) or diversity (#LawFirmDEI) efforts. As long as the custom hashtags are used consistently, they could develop a following over time and eventually increase in value.
- **How Many Hashtags.** Every social media platform encourages a different number of hashtags and penalizes your post if it doesn't adhere to those guidelines. Don't get too hashtag-happy before confirming that doing so won't undermine all your hard work! [Click here](#) to learn how many hashtags are recommended for each platform.

Professionally speaking, social media is a great equalizer. Not only does it offer professionals of every age the opportunity to diversify and expand their services, but it gives law firms of every size the same chance to make meaningful connections with their clients and community. Having a clear understanding of these five basic components will help you identify the right team member to manage your firm's social presence and will immediately improve your engagement rates. Keep in mind, this is just the beginning, but that's the best place to start!

Do you need assistance with your social media? Contact me, Steph Maher, at slmaher@jaffepr.com.