

Social Media and the Challenges for Law Firms

Essam Al Tamimi - Chairman - Private Client Services / Arbitration / Litigation / Family Business
e.tamimi@tamimi.com - Dubai International Financial Centre

December 2014 – January 2015

The evolution of social media and communication has had a tremendous effect on all professions and industries, creating better performance, access to the market and better communication. Productivity, efficiency and earnings have improved across the board. For the legal profession it has allowed law firms to perform better, to build a virtual library, to communicate with clients faster and deliver agreements and advices within an exceptional timeframe. The use of the internet, electronic communication and mobile phones have made communication between lawyers and clients easier, allowing lawyers to be available 18 hours a day and facilitating the delivery of documents to clients within seconds. Communication between courts, arbitrators and clerks has reached an unprecedented stage with electronic filing becoming the standard.

Most of the changes relate to the tools used or the services provided. Law firms still operate in the same way, just with less faxes, more emails, and fewer physical libraries. All these changes seem to be the tip of the iceberg. The growth that companies such as Google, Apple, Samsung and Microsoft are experiencing keeps the momentum of change going, with more and more aspects of life become virtual and mobile handsets and tablets becoming more important than laptops and desktops. Voice recognition, dictation and video-conferencing will soon be dominating the style of doing business in the future and lawyers and law firms need to adapt to this quickly.

Simply having an account on Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Facebook and Instagram is not good enough and will not provide the presence in social media that law firms are seeking. Ask the new generation and you will realise that these tools need to be the vehicle for communicating with clients, the industry and public. These tools need to be the everyday lifestyle of the new generation lawyers in providing services, communicating with the clients and marketing. To crystallize the idea just look around and see who were the big players in e-commerce, media and the internet ten years ago. Who are the players today? If they are the same it is because they have invested in technology, innovation, media and fast communication through mobile phones and technology. The same is likely to apply to the entire business community whether you are delivering packages, a retailer or providing legal services. If you don't have the technology at least be part of it and adapt to it.

Quality legal advice will always be needed, and the expertise of the professional will always count. However there are a number of good lawyers and what will matter in the future is how the expert reaches out to his clients and the style in which he will communicate with them. This not only matters for better service and faster communication, but because future generations will want to use more modern methods of communication. It could be in the style of holding a conference meeting, accepting payments via mobile or arranging for notarization of documents electronically. The biggest challenge that lawyers and other professionals will face is not only adapting but in keeping up. Those who will succeed and become leaders are those who will embrace and change and totally integrate into the system. It is therefore important to make technology, e-commerce, media and mobile communication part of your culture and daily activity blended with a lot of innovation to become one of the players, rather than someone who would like to be trained to play.

Law firms need to change, adjust and to benchmark their practice to other industries and the culture and habits of the younger generation. Today mobile and social media may be considered to be the fun game of the young generation but in the very near future it will be the habit of the future generation and the culture of the business environment. It is not surprising that major IT companies are investing billions of dollars in acquiring other IT companies who may not be the core of their business, as they are realising that it is the future to be able to not only provide IT service, but also to penetrate social media and mobile services. Law firms and lawyers need to be able to engage themselves with social media and communications at an early stage and be prepared to be part of this future. If they do not they risk losing clients. Services need to be provided at the push of a button without compromising on the quality, as one cannot be traded for the other.