

# THE RECORDER

## Law firm blogs come of age

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With Big Law challenged, some attorneys are drawing from the playbook of an even harder-pressed industry — journalism — to boost their practices.

Consider the trade secrets lawyers at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, who recently formed a group that looks a lot like a news outlet. Silicon Valley-based IP partner Michael Spillner and San Francisco-based employment partner Michael Weil recruited more than 50 lawyers across 13 offices and six practice groups to contribute to their blog, Trade Secrets Watch, which has garnered more than 25,000 views since it debuted in May.

The blog is overseen by an editorial board of Orrick lawyers — including a former White House correspondent for the Associated Press.

By the time Spillner, the blog's editor-in-chief, has finished editing a post, it scarcely reads like the work of a lawyer. He ensures that each post has a point of view — a frightening prospect for conflicts-wary attorneys — and strikes the right tone.

"I take out all the legalese," he said.

Lawyers have been blogging in large numbers for about a decade, but firms have made a more concerted effort to get their lawyers on the blogosphere in recent years, law firm consultant Kent Zimmermann said. To land the high-value work they crave, firms need to be seen as thought leaders in the field — and blogging can help, he explained. Spillner said he and his colleagues launched the blog to raise Orrick's profile in trade secrets.

But the field of law firm bloggers is crowded, and outside counsel's inboxes are already cluttered with client advisories. Distribution seems to be an afterthought for many firms. Yet, lawyers cannot depend on readers to stumble upon their blog posts — they must push them out on social media, Zimmermann said.

"The ones that do get more bang for their buck," he said.

Unless lawyers are committed to promoting their work, Zimmermann said blogging doesn't make much sense. "It takes time to get good content," he said, "time that could be spent billing hours."

Social media can also push lawyers to meet another journalistic imperative: being first. Some law firm bloggers forget that clients have little interest in reading news that is two weeks old, Zimmermann said. Spillner maintains a Twitter feed for the blog to chronicle breaking news throughout the day.

Star legal bloggers can be hot commodities in the lateral marketplace, said Kevin O'Keefe, CEO and publisher of LexBlog, a group that coaches firms on social media.

San Francisco-based partner Eric Sinrod credits his blog with helping him land his job at Duane Morris. The firm approached him after discovering his columns on the intersection of technology in the law in early 2000 — before the term "blog" was coined, Sinrod said. He embraced blogging to comment on quickly evolving issues in real time.

"Trying to write a treatise in my view is like trying to board a moving bus," said Sinrod, whose weekly columns appear on FindLaw.com (link: ).

Other lawyers say they blog to engage the right sides of their brains. Inspired by Khan Academy's witty educational videos, Shearman & Sterling partner Richard Hsu started posting 100-second clips on technology transactions last year. The videos star Hsu and his 13-year-old daughter, who helps him illustrate the concepts with sketches, a hallmark of Khan Academy's content.

"I can't draw, so that's when I looked to my daughter," said Hsu, who is based in Silicon Valley.

Allen Matkins partner Keith Bishop has become an accidental Internet sensation with his blog on California corporate and securities law. His blog is viewed about 5,000 times per week, accounting for about 20 percent of all traffic to the website of Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis. He says the blog has brought him new clients.

Bishop does little to promote his content — he's too busy writing. Since he began blogging two years ago, he has posted new content each weekday without fail, even on vacation. Reached by phone boarding a plane to Italy, Bishop noted that the flight would afford him the time to stockpile posts.

"I'd thought I'd run out of things to write about," he said. "But I haven't yet — and I've got over 800 posts."

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