

PHILIP K. MILES III

Blawger's Manifesto

What's the return on investment of a blog? How many new clients do you get? Is blogging really the most cost-effective way to market yourself? These are all common questions posed by attorneys considering starting their own blogs. As someone who has been blogging for more than two years now, I can honestly tell you that I have absolutely no idea what any of the answers are. More important, I think they're the wrong questions. I write this manifesto to explain why I blog and to help those attorneys considering a "blawg" (blog + law = blawg, get it?) understand its true value. Blawgs can provide a lot of benefits to new attorneys, but marketing is only a small part of the picture.



Personal Growth

At the risk of sounding selfish, one of the top reasons I blog is that I find blogging personally rewarding. Some people view their careers as a means to an end—they say, "I don't live to work, I work to live." Not me. I enjoy my work, especially the representation I provide in the field of employment law. Blogging allows me to explore new developments in employment law, write about cases with zany fact patterns, and check out the "fun stuff" happening in my field. I enjoy the cases I work on, but—let's face it—I will probably never work on a case in which an employee was allegedly discriminated against because her "fetus was creating a negative energy field."¹ Blogging affords me an outlet to analyze such cases.

Of course, the fun stuff often has positive externalities—namely education. Dare I say it? Yes, blogging is "funducational!" While scouring the Internet and court dockets for some fresh content, I often discover important new precedents, legislative developments on the horizon, or old stuff that I simply hadn't come across before. Think of it as your own online, independent study CLE (except you don't actually get any CLE credit for it). The educational component is particularly helpful for new attorneys who have yet to build up the breadth of knowledge acquired by some of their veteran colleagues.

And, let's not forget about the joy of writing. As attorneys, we spend a lot of time writing. However, legal writing is a very specific kind of writing that probably doesn't sound much like the way we speak in our everyday lives. Blogging affords me an opportunity to write about the law and to use my own voice when I'm doing so. Jokes, pop culture references, and

slang can liven up a blog entry, but they are obviously inappropriate for the average appellate brief. Attorneys looking for an opportunity to write in their own voice may appreciate the lax rules (or lack of them) when it comes to drafting blog entries.

Networking and Professional Opportunities

Blogging is also a great way to network with attorneys across the country who share your passion for a particular area of the law. Once I started blogging, I found myself reading other attorneys' employment law blogs and dropping comments on their posts. I also began writing my own blog entries that referenced another lawyer's blog, or sometimes I specifically responded to one of their posts. Once you start engaging other attorneys in this fashion, voilà, you've made some online contacts. My fellow employment law bloggers also comment on my posts, send me e-mails on some topics, and sometimes link back to my blog on their own blogs.

These connections can provide a host of exciting professional opportunities. For me, the most exciting project so far has been my contribution of a chapter to the new book *Think Before You Click: Strategies for Managing Social Media in the Workplace*.² The editor is a lawyer in Ohio who assembled his team of contributing authors from his blogging and social media contacts across the United States. I have also been invited to appear on podcasts, to host webinars, and to contribute articles to publications. *LawyersUSA* and *Business Insurance Magazine* have featured quotes from me in various articles dealing with employment law.

I don't bring up these opportunities to brag. I bring them up to demonstrate a point: If I were just a random profile of an associate attorney from State College, Pa., on a law firm's website, nobody would have contacted me for any of these projects. A blog can help you reach out across the Internet to find people who share your interest in the law, and that contact can lead directly to new opportunities.

Marketing

OK, OK, I know I downplayed the business development aspect of blogging at the outset, but blogs do have *some* marketing value. Calculating that value can be difficult, but experience and common sense can shed some light on the subject. For starters, a blog can provide a new attorney (or any attorney) an instant online presence.

Let's say a potential client gets the names of a few

attorneys who might be able to help her. Because we're living in the Information Age, the first thing she will probably do is a Google search for the attorneys to get more information about them. A search for Attorney 1 yields a law firm profile, an entry in an online lawyer directory, and 50 websites related to a completely different person who coincidentally has the same name. A search for Attorney 2 yields a similar profile and directory entry but also includes the attorney's blog, a publisher's page touting the attorney's new book, a link to his or her latest article in an ABA journal, and information on an upcoming webinar. Which attorney do you think this prospective client is going to contact first?

A blog can also provide some "Google Juice," which will improve your Internet ranking so that you show up better in Google search results. (Think of it as "street cred" on the Internet.) The frequently updated content will help improve your ranking and will provide more content for search engines to scour. Also, as described previously, bloggers tend to interact and link to one another. These backlinks can also help improve your site's rankings. And all of this can lead to more hits on your website and, one hopes, new clients.

Last but not least, a blog can land you some new business. I have actually heard from potential clients who told me that they saw my blog entry on a certain legal issue and that they have a case involving that issue and would like my help. I have received referrals from fellow attorneys who know me from blogging and other social media. If a blog leads to new clients and actual billable hours, then why do I downplay blogging's marketing potential? I do so because blogging is extremely time consuming, and it takes months—if not

years—to build up an online reputation. And, if you look only at hours spent blogging and compare that number to new billable work, I think potential bloggers will be disappointed—especially in the beginning. That is the main reason for writing this article: to provide a broader picture of the rewards of blogging.

Conclusion

Blogging is a lot of work, but it is also rewarding. I enjoy learning about employment law and writing about new developments and interesting cases. There are numerous benefits, including education, networking, and professional opportunities such as publication and webinars. And, yes, a blog is a great marketing tool and can lead to new business. Ultimately, however, I blog for the joy of the game. **TFL**

Philip K. Miles III is an associate attorney with McQuaide Blasko in State College, Pa., in the firm's Civil Litigation, and Labor and Employment Law Practice Groups. He also publishes his own employment law blog, Lawffice Space (available at www.lawfficespace.com), which LexisNexis recently named one of the top 25 labor and employment law blogs for 2011. © 2012 Philip K. Miles III. All rights reserved.

Endnotes

¹True Story! See, Philip Miles, *Employee's Fetus was Creating a Negative Energy Field in the Work Place*, LAWFFICE SPACE (July 1, 2010), www.lawfficespace.com/2010/07/employees-fetus-was-creating-negative.html.

²Philip K. Miles, *What is Social Media?*, in THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WORKPLACE (Jonathan Hyman, ed., Thompson 2011).

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