For years, immigration lawyers have been on the vanguard of modern law practice management. For examples, we abandoned the billable hour decades ago. Members of our ranks used case management technology before most lawyers knew such software existed. And the first highly successful law firm websites were launched by immigration lawyers.

So it shouldn’t surprise anyone that the first law firms to venture into social media were run by immigration lawyers. They started with blogs (short for “web logs”) in the 1990s. Most people know by now that blogs are online journals that are collections of short posts. Now, there are more than 100 million of them. “Blog” is also a verb and when someone is “blogging,” they are writing entries on their blog. Blogs range from simple webpages with brief posts on a particular topic and links to other websites, to more elaborate pages that incorporate multimedia and are themselves often integrated into other web pages.

More recently, other forms of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+, have been added to the social media marketing toolbox.
Lawyer Blogs

In May 1998, I set up an “online diary” on my website to keep readers apprised of legislative developments surrounding the H-1B nonimmigrant visa debate. I wasn’t familiar with the term “blog” because it wasn’t coined until six months later, but the page was the first legal blog on the Internet and I happily claim to be the first lawyer blogger. The H-1B legislation diary was extremely popular and, in one day alone, received more than 50,000 hits as people were scouring the web looking for any information on that subject. If you’re interested in seeing that page, go to the Wayback Machine and see our site as it looked in December 1998.

My firm, Siskind Susser, P.C., now has several blogs that cover a variety of subjects. I write for Greg Siskind on Immigration Law and Policy. I also write blogs on several narrow immigration subjects, such as health care immigration, EB-5 visas, I-9s, and E-Verify.

Today, there are dozens of immigration law blogs. A few of my favorites include:

- Angelo Paparelli on Dysfunctional Government
- AILA Leadership Blog
- ImmigrationProf Blog
- America’s Voice Blog
- Joel Stewart’s Labor Certification Blog
- Bender’s Immigration Bulletin
- Reid F. Trautz, Director of AILA’s Practice and Professionalism Center, has an excellent blog called “Reid My Blog.”

Why Blog?

If you’re considering blogging, there are several good reasons to invest the time and effort. Among the advantages:

- It is an extremely effective way to market a niche practice;
- Blogs are an easy way to promote firm developments;
- Blog tools are typically located on third-party websites and new software is usually not required;
- Content for a blog can be generated quickly, so if you don’t have the time to write long articles, a blog can be a nice alternative;
- Search engines love blogs, and posts on a blog are frequently picked up by search engines within hours;
- Blogs are great for recycling content, such as articles, PowerPoint presentations, video and audio files, etc.;
- Blogs are a nice way to interact with clients and potential clients since you can allow comments to your posts; and
- It is easy to collaborate with others so that multiple people can contribute content to the blog rather than everything going through one person.

Why Not Blog?

While I typically evangelize on the benefits of blogging, other marketing tools might fare better. Here are some of the minuses:

- A blog can easily become stale without regular attention. There is no accepted frequency for posting, but at least a couple of posts per month should be the goal;
- A blog is not a substitute for other marketing endeavors, such as writing books and articles;
- It can be tough to monitor your firm’s content on a blog since it is so easy and quick to post. Be sure you and your colleagues know how to use the software properly;
- The informal nature of a blog might not complement your firm’s image fit; and

For more social media tips, see the Technology page from AILA’s Practice and Professionalism Center.
Why Wait?

Blogging is wonderful because you don’t need knowledge about web programming and a website of your own (though, if you have a webpage, you can incorporate the blog into the site). Just set up a blog by completing an online form.

Like blog readers, there are many companies that provide blogging software, but I’ll mention a few of the big ones. If you are looking to create a blog hosted by someone else rather than you, three popular choices are Google’s Blogger, TypePad, and Blogsmith. In my experience, Blogger and Typepad are incredibly easy to use.

You might also choose to buy standalone software and host the blog yourself. Three of the market leaders for this type of software are Movable Type, Word Press, and Text Pattern.

Follow the software’s prompts, and, within minutes, you will have designed a professional-looking blog. And posting is as simple as using e-mail or word-processing software.

What to Post?

So you’ve set up your blog. Now what? First, analyze your target audience to determine what type of content makes sense. Consider these audiences:

- **Potential Clients**—These are the most obvious readers to target, but remember not to make the posts self-promotional. The best form of Internet marketing is providing helpful information and demonstrating your expertise on a subject.
- **Clients**—These folks are often forgotten in your marketing and that’s a big mistake. Blogs are a great way to communicate with your clientele and keep them satisfied. A large portion of new business results from gaining work from existing clients and from referrals by current and past clients.
- **Outside Lawyers**—Lawyers who don’t practice immigration law search the Web like anyone else to find a lawyer to whom a client can be referred. Blog posts showing expertise on a subject or simply a geographic focus are sometimes enough to generate the attorney’s referral.
- **Lawyers in Your Own Firm**—Immigration lawyers at medium- and large-size multispecialty firms often have trouble getting noticed by attorneys in their own firms who potentially have work to refer. A well-written blog is one way to educate your firm’s lawyers regarding what the immigration lawyer does and why the nonimmigration lawyer’s clients need to connect with the specialist.
- **Reporters**—Journalists frequently use the web as a key source in their story research and lawyers who quickly post useful information on a topic get calls from reporters.
- **Government and Court Officials**—I’m often surprised when I hear officials from U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)
and the Department of State tell me they have read my blog posts. While I am often very critical of the agencies, I try to be fair. This has had the unintended side benefit of helping me build goodwill with agency officials, which has sometimes helped my clients.

- **Law Students and Potential Hires**—Some law firms report that the majority of their web traffic comes from law schools and that's almost certainly coming from law students researching potential employers. Also, lateral hire job candidates search online for information on a prospective employer. In either case, a well-written blog can definitely help make a good impression.

### Getting People to Read

Once you’ve decided who you’re aiming to reach, here are some tips on how to produce a blog that people want to read:

1. **Keep It Short.** Blog posts longer than a couple of paragraphs likely turn off readers who are pressed for time. Better to make a short post and then link to a longer version.

2. **Update Frequently.** A blog that is rarely updated can make a worse impression than not having a blog at all. If anything, it shows the writer lacks follow-through potential, something that is not a great impression for an immigration lawyer to project. There are exceptions to this rule, such as a blog on a particular subject no longer in the news. How frequently a blog needs to be updated may depend on how hot the subject is, but certainly don’t go several months without an update.

3. **Link to Other Blogs and Websites.** One of the most important functions of a blog is not just to produce original content, but also to tell readers where they can go to find helpful information. To that end, don’t be afraid to link to writings by other lawyers. You’ll build goodwill with your readers and fellow lawyers.

4. **Embed Content in Your Blog.** For immigration lawyers, there is a ton of content in the public domain that you can upload to a site like Docstoc and then get an embed code that can easily be incorporated into a blog post so that the document is visible in your blog post. Readers can see the document and flip from page to page while staying on your blog. What to post? New cases, government memos, pending bills, and other non-copyrighted materials are common examples. PowerPoint presentations can be uploaded to Docstoc or to SlideShare, and readers can view a presentation right from within your blog. You can also embed YouTube videos, podcasts, and other types of content.

5. **Add Graphics.** Blogs that contain strictly text can be a bit boring, so consider adding graphics periodically with your writing. Avoid cheesy graphics and violations of intellectual property laws.

6. **Mobile Blogging.** Most of the blogging services allow you to post to a blog by e-mail, so if you have a phone with e-mail capabilities, you’re in business.
7. **FIND YOUR ANGLE.** While you can have a successful blog that focuses broadly on immigration, you might find that a blog focusing on a much narrower specialty will better highlight your expertise. For example, are you one of the top immigration lawyers representing universities? Focus your blog on that topic. Or are you the world’s foremost authority on children’s immigration issues? Write about that. Immigration blogs focusing on a particular geographic market are a natural. You can focus on immigration enforcement in your area, talk about the goings-on at your local USCIS, CBP, and ICE offices, etc.

8. **TURN OFF COMMENTS?** This is a question that is not easy to answer. Comments are certainly a way to engage your audience and keep people coming back to your blog. But they also create headaches when people post inappropriate remarks or spam your comments section with ads. You can remove comments easily, but it’s important to stay on top of them. Of course, it is also hard to decide when to permit a free flowing discussion with different points of view and when to remove posts that your community will find offensive.

9. **MONETIZE YOUR CONTENT?** In exchange for compensation, some blog software programs allow you to have ads appear on the blog. You usually don’t control the content, so it’s possible, for example, for an anti-immigration group’s ad to show up on your site because of the content. I know a few immigration lawyers who accept ad money so this is not far-fetched. But you’ll need to weigh a number of downsides, such as whether ads alienate readers and detract from the overall image you are seeking to project.

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**Syndication**

Until early 2006, I had bookmarked a couple of blogs that I would check periodically, but I only browsed them occasionally. And then I learned about something called “content syndication,” and blogs quickly became a more important part of my Internet experience.

Content syndication generally refers to a common way of formatting a blog that allows for the content of the blog to easily be picked up as a “feed” by blog reading software, as well as other blogs. There are two common formats for bloggers to create a feed: RSS (short for “really simple syndication”) and Atom. Blogs that are created in one or both of these formats will usually have a button or buttons that say RSS, Atom, XML, Subscribe, or something similar.

You’ll need a blog reader to then read these “feeds.” Blog readers can be found on the web or you can download standalone software that pulls down the content. Google Reader was one of the most popular feed readers, but it will be retired on [July 1, 2013](https://www.google.com/readers/). There are a number of alternatives, however, including Feedly, one I happen to have used for awhile. With Feedly, as well as similar readers, you organize the blogs you read and configure your feeds by category. Also, Feedly has apps for mobile devices that allow you to keep up with your blog feed on the go.

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"**SOCIAL MEDIA CAN RETURN SUBSTANTIAL DIVIDENDS, BUT YOU NEED TO GO IN WITH YOUR EYES WIDE OPEN. WRITE COMPPELLING CONTENT REGULARLY AND FORESEE WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO READ AND SEE.**"
Twitter

Twitter just turned 7 years old, but it has changed the world in such a short time. Whether it is because of its role in the Arab Spring, the announcement of the resignation of a pope, or the disgrace of a congressperson, the simple little software program is now part of the culture of communication in this country.

Within the immigration field, a number of lawyers are making names for themselves on Twitter. David Leopold, current general counsel and past president of AILA, for example, is well known for his use of Twitter. ABC News and Univision recently listed 20 people to follow on Twitter to stay informed on the immigration reform debate. David and I were the two immigration lawyers on that list.

Immigration lawyers commonly use Twitter for advocacy and news. In my case, I post short comments on Twitter about immigration and use my Twitter feed to link to my blog posts.

Success on Twitter depends on attracting followers and getting them to comment on and retweet your tweets. You can start building followers with your own clientele. You can also market your Twitter account in your e-mail signature block, on your website, and on your business cards. If you post useful content, you will get noticed.

Facebook and LinkedIn

If you don’t know about Facebook, you’ve been living on another planet for the last several years. Some lawyers use Facebook as a communication tool. I choose not to post promotional or other work-related information on Facebook because I don’t want to annoy my friends and family with too much chatter about my work. On the other hand, my law firm has a Facebook page where we can post content similar to what we would place on our blogs and Twitter. If you are going to use Facebook, I would suggest you be discreet and not overwhelm your network with too many posts about your practice.

LinkedIn, on the other hand, is designed precisely for networking. Lawyers use it more than Facebook. LinkedIn is not being used for conversations nearly as much as Twitter, but there are a number of groups on LinkedIn that allow for conversations. In fact, there are thousands of discussion groups on every topic imaginable.

Conclusion

Social media can return substantial dividends. But you need to go in with your eyes wide open. Write compelling content regularly and foresee what people want to read and see. Fortunately, unlike websites, where it is difficult to get noticed, there is still plenty of room in social media for immigration lawyers interested in delving into this area.

Mid-South Chapter member Greg Siskind is a founding partner of Siskind Susser, P.C. He has written several books, including LexisNexis’s J-1 Visa Guidebook, the ABA's Lawyers Guide to Marketing on the Internet, and Society for Human Resource Management’s Employer’s Immigration Compliance Desk Reference. This article will be republished this summer in the upcoming edition of Immigration Practice Pointers.