

Bloggging Barristers

Why Detroit lawyers keep blogs and how they're changing the profession

First in an occasional series on technology and the law

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Legal News

In a technological age when the devices we use seem to change daily, hundreds, if not thousands, of new Web logs ("blogs") are popping up online every day.

"There are a lot of smart people out there. It's a low-cost mechanism to provide anyone who wants one with a voice," Philadelphia attorney Adam Bonin, a frequent contributor to the politically themed Daily Kos blog (<http://www.dailykos.com/>) on issues surrounding the Constitution, campaign finance and elections, said of the blogosphere.

"What makes blogging a particularly useful medium for lawyers is we're interested in obtaining information and commenting on it and arguing about it," making blogs a comfortable place for attorneys to debate issues relative to the law, Bonin said.

The legal world itself is so flush with "blawgs" that Elie Mystal, editor of the popular New York City-based "Above the Law" blog (<http://abovethelaw.com/>), said it's difficult for even a large site like his to keep accurate tabs on every legal blog and what it's saying on a daily basis.

"Any information about a particular community is going to have relevance for that community," Mystal said of why legal blogs are gaining traction with attorneys across the country.

And while Metro Detroit may not be a legal or political hotbed like New York or DC, a number of local attorneys maintain their own blogs and most say it's only a matter of time before blogging becomes a standard part of

practicing law. And their reasons are as diverse as the topics they cover.

Southfield personal injury attorney Michael Butler started his blog AttorneyButler (<http://www.attorneybutler.net/>) as a for-fun venture originally intended to be slightly tongue-in-cheek and feature law-related humor combined with some serious legal analysis. But in a "bad time for justice in this state," Butler said the blog has instead taken on a much more analytical tone and evolved into something bigger.

"I believe it will become more important as time goes on," Butler said of blogging, hypothesizing that lawyer-created blogs will become more common sooner rather than later. He cited blogging as a way for attorneys and firms to communicate with clients in a manner slightly different from a traditional Web site and a tool that will put more legal information in the hands of everyday citizens.

The ability of blogs to promote accessibility of legal information to the masses is a common belief among many other bloggers in Detroit and beyond.

"I do think it's good for the profession in general, because one of the issues facing the legal profession is that it's a closed community," Mystal said of how the blogosphere is transforming the legal landscape.

Steven Gursten, who maintains the Michigan Auto Law Blog (<http://www.michiganautolaw.com/auto-lawyers-blog/>) for the firm Gursten, Koltonow, Gursten, Christensen & Raitt, said the Internet and blogs are changing the way younger generations who have grown up with technology find attorneys. For a large

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BLOG:

Blogs can be a cost-effective marketing tool

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population of potential clients, Google is the first place they'll look for a local lawyer, Gursten said.

"We're just on the cusp of where things are going to be," Gursten said, adding that as people increasingly use their cell phones like home computers, they'll be able to log on and see who they should call the minute they're in an auto accident.

After an initial run at blogging five or six years ago, Gursten said he took it up again last year and now tries to blog at least twice a week. He said his firm's Web site, including the blog, attracted more than 40,000 unique visitors last year, although he didn't have any specific data on blog-only visitors.

And a blog's audience isn't limited to new or existing clients and fellow attorneys who share a blogger's views.

Gursten said he often blogs about insurance companies and their treatment of clients, and knows these companies have been reading his posts because he recently received a case referred to him by an adjuster at an agency he's been hard on in the past.

For a firm that doesn't do any television or yellow pages advertising and relies mainly on referrals, "it's been a very, very positive, rewarding experience," Gursten said of the blog.

Other attorneys are discovering blogs to be a cost-effective way of marketing themselves outside of the traditional model of attracting clients through expensive yellow

pages ads and television spots.

Inspired by their low cost, Southfield attorney John Hilla launched his blog, Michigan Bankruptcy Lawyer (<http://michigan-bankruptcyblog.com/>) solely for the purpose of marketing his solo practice, which he started Dec. 1.

"I really do think that the purpose of a legal or any other business-related blog is to drive search engines to you," Hilla said.

Writing came easy to the former journalist, who found reading blogs and maintaining his own a great way to keep abreast of what's happening in the legal field.

And some lawyer-kept blogs aren't meant to discuss legal issues at all, but rather a forum for them to share aspects of their personal lives.

For Birmingham attorney Lex Kuhne, the encouragement to blog came from the solo practitioner, former Metro Times columnist and radio host's wife and has given him some joy in a job that doesn't always offer a lot of satisfaction, he said.

"It's just a question of doing something that's fun," Kuhne said.

While not necessarily designed as a marketing tool to attract new clients, Kuhne said his 60-Second Blog (<http://lexkuhne.blogspot.com/>) is more a vehicle to let people know who he is and what he's about. He's recently remarked on Google's choice of fonts and titled a recent post, "Vampires are really popular right now, so Ann Coulter rises from the dead to profit."

Neil Rockind, an attorney in Southfield, also keeps his blog, Rockweiler ([\[press.com/about/\]\(http://press.com/about/\)\), for more personal reasons. Like Kuhne, Rockind also hosted a radio show on AM 1310, and blogging has allowed him to continue sharing his thoughts and experiences with the public.](http://neilrockind.word-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

"When you blog you're either trying to share your views with other people or you're trying to connect," Rockind, who likens blogging to a "reincarnation of talking over the white picket fence of the past," said.

Some of Rockind's favorite recent posts have covered the elections of Barack Obama and new Oakland County Prosecutor Jessica Cooper, taking his daughter to her first concert-Coldplay at the Palace of Auburn Hills in November-and the passing of his grandfather Norbert Reinstein.

"What really, I think, makes a good lawyer is your ability to feel," Rockind said. Emotions like courage, sadness, empathy, and fear are qualities that set some lawyers apart from others who simply connect the dots in cases.

"The blog is my way to get in touch with my feelings," he said, adding that while he gets to touch creativity while arguing cases at trial, the courtroom doesn't afford him the opportunity to discuss his feelings the way he does on the blog.

"Whether anybody responds or not is not important," Rockind said of blogging's therapeutic effects. "You can't write it for the people reading it, because there might not be anybody reading it. If your personal thoughts aren't worth writing about, they're not worth reading."