



Your Law Firm Blog is Terrible

By Christopher B. Hopkins

“F*%ing punks. These a^%#@*%& always get away,” were the words that began the *State vs. Zimmerman* trial in late June 2013. While the prosecution commenced with that jaw-dropping start, the defense trotted out a failed knock-knock joke. There was no dispute as to which opening received better attention.

Your law firm’s blog is a lot like that knock-knock joke: conceived with the best of intentions, perhaps, but ultimately thudding to the floor. Writing a blog is different than legal writing since it involves strategy so that your blog is more visible. Intentional use of keywords and hyperlinks are food for “bots” which digest whether you are worthy of placement on the (coveted) first page of Google search results. Perhaps above all, you must be cogent. Internet readers are curious yet distracted as easily as the dog in the movie *Up* (squirrel!). Don’t let them get away.

While your firm may send out an “email blast” or an RSS feed to (few) subscribers, reaching those people is easy – your post is pushed to them. That’s a poor metric of visibility. Your larger audiences are internet searchers who use keywords to find a case, a new law, or some legal analysis. That is the larger audience you want. In that group lies a reporter looking for an interview, another writer looking to cite you, or, better still, a client looking for someone with your expertise.

Writing a blog post requires three steps: keyword selection, writing, and hyperlinking. Again, in your motion practice or academic writing, “keywords” are not a concern. Search engines like Bing and Google, however, scour the internet for keywords and develop algorithms around them in order to generate better search results. The world of internet searching is driven by keywords. So you need to write your blog in a format which anticipates which keywords prospective readers might use.

For step one, ask yourself: if someone were to search for my topic, what keywords would they type into Google? According to Matt Kakuk of Localmanagement.us, a search engine optimization company, keywording will “organically” lead to better search placement. In fact, more than 50% of people click on the first link suggested by Google and practically no one reads the second page of Google search results. By tailoring your words, your blog will get a higher ranking on Google and more traffic.

Let’s assume your blog post is about a new case, *Smith v. Jones*. The keywords might be the name of the case and maybe “Florida,” “slip and fall,” “negligence,” and “Chapter 768.” First, use keywords in the title but do not make the whole title of keywords (Mr. Kakuk tells clients to think of titles like, “Visit Boca Raton’s premier restaurant” instead of just “Restaurant in Boca Raton”). Second, make sure you use the keywords early in the article. Third, don’t be clever with synonyms. Repeating keywords may actually help. Likewise, as your blog grows, use the keywords consistently in other posts.

Step two begins with the recognition that writing a blog differs from persuasive or graduate-level writing. Blogging is a return to a more primitive writing style since the reader’s sole interest is getting information quickly. Clarity and cogency

are the only rules of style. Turn to the basic elements of the expository paragraph: a title sentence, followed by sentences which expand upon the idea, and a concluding sentence. Unlike persuasive writing, there is limited time for you to tell a story, paint a verbal picture, or connect with the reader. They don’t care. They are not truly “readers” -- they are Googlers searching for quick legal content. According to Nielsen, internet readers spend 10-20 seconds on your site and read less than a quarter of the text per page. Ditch the long winded introduction or the academic overload of information. Get to your point.

Some basic elements of blog writing:

- Use short sentences and write 500 words or less;
- Get right to your point and use keywords;
- No long quotes from cases or statutes -- your readers are largely skimming anyhow;
- Short paragraphs. Long, dense passages will scare away internet readers;
- Avoid sounding like an advertisement or press release.

Be genuine.

The third step is editing for the internet, which generally means proper hyper-linking. If you are writing about a case, link to the case. Link to other pages on and off your site. Also link the authors’ bios or social media accounts. It is a good idea to then use Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+ to promote your blog post.

With that in mind, go to your firm’s blog and read a few posts. How quickly does the lawyer get to the point? Are keywords used effectively? Does it appear dense and unfriendly? Any hyperlinks? Do a Google search for some of the keywords to see whether your blog lands on the first page. If other firms’ blogs appear before yours, the knock-knock joke may be on you.

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When: Sunday, September 22, 2013

Time: 1:30 bus pick up from PBCBA office

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Cost: \$75 per person which includes the bus to and from the game, tailgating at the stadium and tickets in Section 106, rows 24-27. Tickets will be sold on a first come, first serve basis. We’re sorry, but no kids.

Registration and prepayment is required and can be done on the Bar’s website.

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