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## The Media Revolution is 'Iterative' and Social: Experts Share How Not to Get Left Behind

By Marilyn Cavicchia

"You're all living in a media revolution," said Thom Fladung, vice president of Hennes Communications. "And you don't even know it."

Offering a window onto one aspect of that revolution, Bruce Hennes, president of the same crisis communications firm, said, "I don't think there's a reporter in the country who's not using Twitter to crowdsource what people are thinking about."

Speaking at this year's Midyear Meeting of the National Association of Bar Executives, National Conference of Bar Presidents, and National Conference of Bar Foundations, Hennes and Fladung helped attendees understand how they should navigate in a world where, as Fladung put it, "The media has changed more in 10 years than in the past 100."

### What's New? Iterative Reporting

It used to be that a news article was a single item, published once, Fladung said, and reporters were expected to get every important source into the story, even if it meant trying to reach them six different ways before giving up.

Because articles can, and are, updated easily online, the typical news story is now given out "piece by piece, over time," Fladung said, noting that this is called "iterative reporting."

As a source, Fladung added, this means you are no longer indispensable—so you can't make yourself difficult to reach, or you'll miss the chance to put your association in its best light (whether the story is good news for you, or bad news).

"If you don't pick up the phone, you're not in the story," he said, noting that Google's analytics give priority to whichever news outlet broke a story first—which has put pressure on reporters to work faster than ever, and not to spend too much time chasing down sources.

While you could still make it into an update to the story, Fladung added, that's not really where you want to be. "When is the last time you went back on your phone to see if there's been an update to something you read?" he asked, noting that 60 percent of all news content is now consumed via smart phone.

What if you really can't make the reporter's deadline, or you find out after the fact about a story your bar should have been part of? See if the reporter will do a whole new story with a new headline, Fladung suggested—again, so you can avoid being hidden away in an update.

Both Fladung and Hennes confirmed to skeptical audience members that reporters really are receptive to this idea, as long as you honestly do have a lot of new facts to offer. Hennes noted that quite often, reporters are rewarded—including in pay—for the number of separate articles they publish.

### Just How Important is Social Media?

So important, Hennes said, that maintaining some kind of presence there is no longer optional; if you really don't want to manage an account yourself, then he advised that you hire someone to do it for you.

Why? Your members are there, and so are reporters—and if you or your bar association are being discussed, whether positively or negatively, you need to know about it so you can respond.

Sometimes, Fladung added, reporters will use comments on Facebook and Twitter as akin to interviews—and will quote them. That's all the more reason, he said, to be present on social media: so you'll know what's being said about you there, before you see it in a news article.

The lines between social media and traditional media have blurred significantly in recent years, Fladung noted. Particularly if the account is "verified" (meaning the person has taken extra steps to authenticate that they are who they say they are), others will trust the information and cause it to go viral or to be picked up by a news wire service.

Twitter also functions independently as a news outlet, Fladung added, often being the first place where people see what turns out to be very important information. For example, he said, the first anyone outside of the Pulse nightclub in Orlando heard about the mass shooting there last year was when someone tweeted about it from the club's restroom. When the Orlando police apprehended the shooter, they didn't write a press release or call a reporter; instead, Fladung said, "The biggest news in its history was shared on Twitter."

The traditional news outlets that have survived have learned how to use social media to their advantage, Fladung said, noting that "Facebook now drives about 30 percent of the traffic that comes into newspapers." In other words, a person sees a post on Facebook and clicks on the article, rather than going directly to the newspaper's website and accessing the article from there.

Years ago, Fladung said, a study found that one of the top three drivers of whether a person finds a piece of information noteworthy and worth acting on is whether a friend tells the person about it. "Facebook has taken that concept and supersized it," he added.

## Tips for Doing 'Social' Well

Though there are other social media platforms, ranging from LinkedIn to Snapchat, Fladung gave the most focus to Facebook and Twitter. The two tend to be mentioned as a pair, but there is a difference: "Facebook is where people share," he said. "Twitter is where people find." That is, Facebook relies a bit more on interpersonal relationships and friendliness, whereas Twitter is a bit less personal and more about the information being conveyed.

In deciding which one, two, or more platforms to focus on, Fladung said it's important to know where your audience already "lives."

Once you establish an account, make sure to secure it with a two-step verification process, Fladung advised, and set up some guidelines and terms of use. Having some rules that people can clearly see when they visit you on Twitter or Facebook can be very helpful in case you have to remove or block someone, he said.

Build your following by interacting with others and by posting a variety of content, Fladung said, noting that video can be especially powerful. Be professional, but also make sure your tone is "conversational and casual," he advised, "not corporate."

Make sure to respond to comments as soon as possible—especially if they're critical (and don't delete negative comments, lest it look like you're censoring), Fladung recommended. A phenomenon known as confirmation bias means that once a person has a particular opinion of someone or something, their brain will react as if to a pain stimulus when they are presented with facts that conflict with that belief. The longer you let a negative comment sit, the more likely it is that people will see it and perhaps be influenced by it before you intervene.

But "don't arm wrestle with trolls," Fladung continued; if a comment is factually wrong, simply state your case—once. If someone persists and it's especially important to change their mind, try to move the conversation out of the public forum, he recommended. "People are often louder and more abrasive online," he said; also, they tend to think of organizations as "faceless and soulless" and are pleasantly surprised when an actual person contacts them directly. You might even find that the person goes back to the comments to mention this positive interaction and apologize for their initial tone.

## For More Information on Working with Reporters

The information that Hennes and Fladung presented on the importance of social media was new at this year's Midyear Meeting. This new guidance relates to Hennes' longstanding advice that association leaders and others not hide from the media, even when something bad happens. Hennes often shares the following rules from his "damage control playbook":

- Tell the truth. (It will always come out eventually.)
- Tell it first (before someone else has a chance to, so that people will be more likely to accept your account rather than another, perhaps more negative one.)
- Tell it all (so you don't look like you're hiding something, which will encourage people to dig).
- Tell it fast (before stories start floating around that don't put you in the best light).
- Realize the media filters everything (i.e. it necessarily picks and chooses the facts and how to "frame" them).
- Realize that the fundamental role of reporters is not to inform or educate, but to tell a story.

Social media now offers a powerful way to get around the traditional media "filter" and reach your audience directly and quickly. However, reporters do still exist and will still contact you for an interview or for information.

