



OMG: Law firms, banks join push to social media

Typically conservative companies find value

By [MICHELLE PARK](#)

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Though many of their rivals remain absent from the electronic marketing frontier, a handful of banks and law firms are jumping on the social media bandwagon.

Cleveland's KeyBank, for one, started tweeting on Twitter in late January and launched its Facebook page in late February. Likewise, Fifth Third Bank started tweeting last November, a few months after the Cincinnati-based bank hired a social media strategist to implement social media programs.

Among local law firms, only a few are active in social media, including McDonald Hopkins LLC, Squire, Sanders & Dempsey and Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff LLP. Some other firms, though, are eyeing their options.

A competitive assessment by KeyBank revealed there are many in the financial services sector that don't have a social media presence, said Karen Haefling, KeyBank's chief marketing and communications officer.

"I would have liked to have been out there a little sooner, but we took the time to make sure we are prepared," she said.

Ms. Haefling noted proudly March 1 that KeyBank's Facebook page had been "liked" more than 620 times. (Less than a week later, that number topped 700.) That's important, she said, because the more people engage and interact with a company, the more likely they are to do business with it.

"We're helping clients in a channel that they care about," Ms. Haefling said. "People are going there to learn about companies. To be absent from that conversation did not seem like a wise strategy."

By contrast, other banks in Northeast Ohio, among them Dollar Bank and FirstMerit, are inactive on Twitter and Facebook.

Dollar Bank's Twitter page exclaimed in July 2009 that the bank "will be coming soon," but that has been

its only tweet to date. Akron-based FirstMerit wrote on its Twitter page that it's holding its name for now.

Neither bank appears to have created a Facebook page. However, Dollar Bank vice president Lawrence F. Slenczka wrote in an e-mail that the bank is in the process of researching the feasibility of incorporating Twitter and Facebook into its marketing and communications.

Caution rules

Bryan Huber works with companies to identify and define their online strategies and thus has a front seat to the trends. He's noticed the banking sector's increased involvement and law firms' anxiety.

Many companies that deal in the business-to-business realm instead of business-to-consumer have been resistant to the use of social media because the benefits aren't as obvious to them, said Mr. Huber, chief interactive officer for Paul Werth Associates, a Columbus communications consulting firm that serves companies throughout the Midwest.

Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP is not active in social media, though it has secured a Twitter page in its name. Thomas D. Smanik, its chief marketing officer, notes that law firms in particular "by our nature are more cautious about any new technology."

One reason, Mr. Smanik said, is that law firms are subject to restrictions on marketing and advertising imposed by state bar associations. Another is that they must be careful not to establish attorney-client privilege inadvertently through venues such as Twitter and Facebook. The disclaimers many attorneys include in their e-mails, he noted, are hard to include in 140-character tweets.

Banks, too, are cautious, emphasizing that clients should not provide account information via social media.

Nonetheless, many in law and banking predict more of their brethren over the next year will make themselves known in social media.

Although she wasn't hired exclusively to build a social media presence for Canton law firm Day Ketterer Ltd., Kirsten Conley spent time in March during her first four days with the firm weighing the pros and cons of doing so. Day Ketterer does not have a Facebook or Twitter page.

"My initial challenge with social media for a law firm is you don't necessarily just want to speak to the largest number of people possible," said Ms. Conley, director of client development. "I see value to it, but it needs to be approached very carefully."

Hahn Loeser doesn't have a timeline for building a social media presence, Mr. Smanik said.

"We'll eventually have something out there," he said.

"I think it's going to be huge," he added. "But I think it's going to take time before we figure out how it's going to become huge."

It's "not going to go away'

Those banks and law firms that have dipped their toes in the social media waters seem pleased with the experience so far.

Visible on KeyBank's Twitter page, for example, are various communications between customer service representatives and customers, happy and disgruntled. During its shorter tenure on Facebook, Key has posted links to news about itself and photographs of one event it hosted.

"We do still think that face-to-face interactions with our clients are very important," Ms. Haeffling said. "But we're very excited about this engagement in this new way."

As for McDonald Hopkins, the Cleveland law firm has been posting regularly to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube for probably the last 18 months, said president Carl J. Grassi. It shares news releases and roundtable invitations, among other items.

Mr. Grassi said the firm has seen the value of its efforts in an increased number of unique page views on its web site and a growing number of requests for its content, such as the alerts and special reports it prepares on various legal and legislative topics.

"Social media is not going to go away," Mr. Grassi said. "It's clearly the way that people are communicating. Therefore, we need to be active."

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