

## The Bottom Line - Official Publication of The State Bar of California Law Practice Management and Technology Section

# You Want Us to Do What? One Firm's Successful Brand Development Story through Social Media Success



By Gary L. Barr

### **In the Beginning...**

At our partner retreat in 2012, we made the determination that it was time to make some marketing changes. We wanted to clearly distinguish Alpert Barr & Grant from other firms and use this distinction in raising our overall visibility, while incorporating a strong yet professional business development component. This marketing strategy is not an undertaking for the faint of heart, especially for a small law firm with seven attorneys, but we knew it had to be done in order to stay competitive, relevant, and to grow our firm.

With the advice of a marketing consultant, we quickly discovered that we needed to participate in a formal brand development process. This branding would become the umbrella under which all of our marketing messages would fall. Then, and only then, would we be ready to develop a new Web 3.0 website, which meant the site would be automatically optimized for both computers and all mobile devices.

Step by step we were led through the process of developing a clear and meaningful brand positioning line, "*Where leaders look for solutions.*" We were delighted with this outcome as it really does reflect the true essence of our firm:

**Alpert, Barr & Grant is a leading provider of legal counsel – well respected, well connected and recognized in the legal and business communities for its professional excellence and integrity. As a leader we establish strong, caring relationships and deliver skillful, time-tested advice. The result: we attract leading businesses seeking the most proactive and advantageous solutions for all their business matters.**

### **Website Development and Social Media Go Hand-in-Hand**

Next came the website development, which was much more arduous than we imagined. It was

fascinating to watch the website come alive with our branded message woven throughout the site. After all the hard work, we are now quite pleased with the end result.

Little did we know that with the new website in place, we were now going to be expected to participate in social media. Let's just say that the thought of dealing with this relatively unknown social media concept did not create pictures of "sugar plums dancing in our heads"! If truth be told, we had feelings of trepidation, resistance, and of being overwhelmed.

None of us are social media butterflies – yet. But in just a little over 18 months, we have made it, at least, into the light of this thing called social media.

We began with LinkedIn, something most of the attorneys in the firm were familiar with. Slowly we completed and "optimized" our LinkedIn profiles. We never realized that having all of the sections thoroughly filled out and incorporating key words into our profiles would make a substantial difference, but it does. Most of us already had at least 500 contacts, but what we did not know is that 500 contacts is a magic LinkedIn number. We learned that once a LinkedIn subscriber reaches that magic number of 500, they achieve the equivalent of being a real player.

Relentlessly, we were encouraged and cajoled to join and then post in relevant industry groups. We started to post updates on our status bars, but knowing what to post took some time. We posted updates about the law, short sentences about industry changes, sometimes adding a link to a relevant article or to conferences, or even a link to someone's recent blog post. Then we read through our contacts' status updates, commenting on them and "liking" them as appropriate. Mundane as it may seem, making these efforts helped us engage more of our contacts.

To be realistic, this took time and persistence. It did not come easily for most of us, at least at first, but we committed to this process. Being held accountable was the key; we knew we all had to take part in order to succeed.

Currently we are beginning to hit our stride on LinkedIn. We know it takes time to see results, but we now understand the process and see the importance of it all. We have found, for example, that if you connect with a number of people within a company, you may also be able send a message to connect with the decision makers of that company. After all, if an executive sees that you are connected with a number of people in his/her company, they may see the relevance of connecting with you too. A recently published article opined that by the end of 2014, more potential clients will choose to view your LinkedIn profile than visit your company website or bio when considering your services. Relationship building takes time and so with LinkedIn, we are simply building for the future.

LinkedIn was not going to be our only social media connection. While building our new website we added a blog. At the time, we knew little and perhaps close to nothing about blogs or blogging, but we were schooled in the importance of striving to demonstrate our leadership skills and our brand in our various practice areas on the firm's website.

We then slowly learned to connect our theme of leaders looking for solutions to a page on our website called "Leadership," where we would regularly feature community and business leaders and highlight, in

short vignettes, stories of their leadership success. Once we enabled this part our website, we were encouraged to blog about leaders and to post a link to our website on our LinkedIn status updates when a new Leadership story is posted. We then use Constant Contact to send out occasional email blasts for key stories and updates. We are pleased to be able share these unique and interesting stories about various leaders we have come to know in the community and engage our audience in the different manifestations of leadership.

We have an Updates page on our website as well in which we post newsworthy information about articles we've written, guest blog posts, conferences we've attended, and of course news about our firm, attorneys, and staff. We also post a highlight of each news story on our LinkedIn pages to keep our contacts updated on the latest developments at the firm. We now better understand how to connect all of the parts and pieces together. We have an amazing in-house marketer who helps us stay on track and get the job done. We understand that it takes an educated small village to make marketing, business development and social media all work together for the growth of our firm.

### **How our Brand of Leadership and Connections Apply to our Name Partners**

Each of our name partners has a specific practice focus. Lee Alpert is primarily focused on strategic advocacy and lobbying, and his practice of law is now primarily geared towards negotiating and consulting on substantial business and real estate transactions. Lee has become the go-to guy for strategic planning and advocacy support for government and private industry infrastructure projects throughout California. With extensive connections in government and community from his years of active leadership involvement in a myriad of public and private California based organizations, Lee is uniquely positioned to take on this role. Much of Lee's social media efforts are placed around the needs of this growing community of clients who require an individual with Lee's experience and connections to lead them successfully through the governmental project procurement process.

As Managing Shareholder of our firm, my litigation and corporate practice continues to grow with a major focus on assisting small to mid-size companies acting as their outside general counsel. With many years practicing in the Los Angeles Region, we are fortunate to be able to capitalize on many satisfied clients and an expanding number of new clients. I have reached an understanding, and even an enjoyment, from the use of social media so that I can tap on those I wish to expand my relationships with, as well as targeted prospective clients, by inviting them to guest blog for our website or to write a blog post with them about an issue of importance to them.

Adam Grant, our third Shareholder, continues his litigation excellence and has become a recognized data security and online privacy practice expert. Over the past two years, Adam has used this expertise to tap into a very niche specific area of privacy in the field of Mobile App law. Adam has extensively used social media to laser focus on becoming a force to reckon with in the Mobile App area. He has spoken at numerous national conferences and has become the Chief Legal Contributor of App Developer magazine. Since Adam is in a very high tech field, he also incorporates the use of Twitter into his social media program and business development efforts. He was an earlier adaptor to all things social media and it has already paid off for him.

**And the Conclusion is...**

Let me leave you with this: None of us are social media butterflies – yet. But in just a little over 18 months, we have made it, at least, into the light of this thing called social media. We are increasing the number of blog subscribers we have for our Leading Solutions blog. Website traffic has increased. We are reaching and making new contacts and we have hired new associates, paralegals, and other staff, in significant part directly because of our understanding and use of Social Media. So far so good. We believe the next steps will be easier, and look forward to our continued "relevance" to keep on growing for the long haul.

***About the Author***

*Gary L. Barr, principal with Alpert, Barr & Grant , APLC ([www.alpertbarr.com](http://www.alpertbarr.com)), has over 33 years of legal experience, focusing on all forms of civil litigation including banking, business, real estate, construction, commercial, manufactured housing, creditors' rights in bankruptcy, landlord-tenant and foreclosures.*