

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

To blog or not to blog: How to build a blog and website.

The free speech fanatic I am, I fully support everyone's access to the Internet, no matter the content or quality of the communications being bandied about. Consequently, I share the following practical tips and tricks to lawyers and non-lawyers alike for launching and running a quality website and blog, with reference to the development of our own website and blog. Having a quality presence on the Internet helps diminish the pre-Internet dominance of media and information giants. We launched our in-depth website in 1999. In 2003, YNOT News published my basic webmastering article. Much has rapidly changed since then with the Internet, including changes in my recommended sitehost and reasonably-priced quality webdesigner (I recommend Daytona Networks); I also add that geocities.com is a less expensive all-in-one website option (but also less visually-pleasing and advertising-infested). One of the most important developments is the explosion in the number, breadth and depth of blogs, including our Underdog Blog (or Underdawg Blawg, as my law partner Jay Marks has called it). Launching a blog seemed a natural follow-up to our website. In order to maintain a focus on inserting an interesting and useful blog entry each day, I zeroed in on legal issues -- mostly involving criminal defense and persuasion -- that I would have written about no matter what, whether to my legal research file, to a lawyers' listserv, or to our website. Our blog started with the same web publishing software that we use for our website. The upside of this was maintaining the same domain name for our website and blog, which makes for easier google searches to our website (using "site:markskatz.com [phrase or word]" and keeping our site statistics software attached to one domain name. It soon became clear, though, that blog software would be a simpler, more powerful, and more user-friendly approach. Our sitehost Daytona Networks set up test versions of BBlog and Serendipity, and I settled on the Serendipity blog package. Here is a good article to help select downloadable blog software beyond the self-contained blogspot and typepad variety. Our blog software took more effort to launch and run than blogspot, but my previous experience using html language and doing webpublishing made the transition smoother. Other ideas for blog software can be obtained by visiting the blogs listed in our blogroll. Some features that I like about our blog software include that the software does not present the visitor with cookies, uses our Internet domain name, prevents changes to the blog software program without our approval, and enables each blogger to have an individual account. Serendipity also has a good bulletin board for users to share ideas and to troubleshoot. Any good blog software will give the blog a dynamic look and feel that goes beyond the static nature of a non-blog informational website. Once your blog is launched, several approaches are available for making the blog known to the public. Technorati.com is a common approach, as well as announcing the blog to an appropriate blog category on dmoz.org (which eventually, sometimes months down the line, links into the google category directory), to google.com, and to google's blog directory. Legal blogs can also be listed on blawg.org. Eventually, blogs will link to other quality blogs. A good way to get your blog noticed by other bloggers is to list good blogs on your blogroll. We use blogrolling.com software to add to our blogroll, rather than using a brute force method to add such links. Our blogroll lists blogs that I review frequently or occasionally. I am less discriminating about listing blogs of prosecutors and police, because there are few of them, and it is important to know the opposition. Judges' blogs also are limited in number. If a blog does not regularly upload entries, I am less likely to link to it. To make ours a daily blog, sometimes I will delay automatically the posting date of a less time-sensitive blog entry. That way, I do not need to attend to our blog on a daily basis, but daily blog entries still appear. Even though Crimlaw has switched from the side of the angels (criminal defense) to the darkside, he has some good legal blogging ideas here. Numerous other bloggers also have posted tips and tricks for blogging. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:30