

It can help you make millions, anchor you a book deal or secure you international clients. The best part is that it won't take more than an hour or two of your time each day. Sound interesting? These are only a few examples of success stories from lawyers who have started web logs – often referred to as 'blawgs' in the legal community.

Given the success stories, blogging is potentially a great way for young lawyers to get their names out there, network, get clients and generally get ahead in the profession.

Lawyers who blog are not the exception: a general Google search for "blawg" receives about 2.6 million hits. Philadelphia attorney Howard Bashman, 39, has a blog called *How Appealing* (<http://legalaffairs.org/howappealing/>) that averages 10,000 readers a day. Even law firms have recently jumped on the blogging bandwagon, publishing firmwide blogs on their Web sites. The blogging phenomenon doesn't appear to be on the way out anytime soon. Lawyers and reporters have suggested that blogs could eventually replace – if they haven't in part already - law journals and resumes.

Attorney J. Craig Williams, founder of The Williams Law Firm, claims his blog, *May it Please the Court*, has "really changed my practice." Williams' firm has received \$1.5 million in revenue from blog business alone. "By some stroke of genius that I can't lay claim to, the blawg was link to my law firm's Web site," Williams said in a telephone interview. He credited this linking to directing clients to his firm and bringing him international clients. Williams believes that he has been able to attract and maintain his readership because of his "very particular voice and style." Most law firm blogs are "bland" and "sanitized," and Williams said that readers seem to prefer his blog because he freely discusses his opinion on matters that interest him.

Blog success stories similar to Williams seem to abound. Bashman also reported significant financial success as a result of his blawg. He estimated that the money generated directly from his blawg and his upcoming monthly column for law.com will comprise 1/15 of his income for the year. This fraction does not include the money brought in by clients who were directed to Bashman through his blawg. Though Bashman says that he does not record how his clients are directed to him, "I can think of a handful of clients off the top of my head [that were directed to his firm through the blawg]."

Bashman also credits his blog for making the transition from a big firm to his own practice last year such a smooth one. "The site definitely helped," said Bashman. Opening his own practice has been "great" he said, with this last year being his best financial year ever.

Attorney Denise Howell, 40, of Reed Smith, has also experienced an increase in professional success as a result of her blawg, *Bag and Baggage*. "[Blogging] puts me in touch with smart people and new clients. It has enhanced my professional reputation and credibility."

Jerry Blachman, 27, has a different kind of blawg success story. Blachman began blogging in May 2002 as a way to chronicle his experiences in Harvard Law School. He started out "not really knowing what a blog was," but thought it would be a good way to make himself write on a daily basis. In addition to

his personal blog (<http://jeremyblachman.typepad.com/>), Blachman began a fictional blog entitled *Anonymous Lawyer*. The blog, chronicling the daily frustrations and thoughts of a lawyer, is written by “a fictional hiring partner at a large law firm in a major city,” according to its byline. *Anonymous Lawyer* caught the attention of *The New York Times*, which published an article on the blog in December 2004. Immediately after the article, agents began calling Blachman, offering him a book deal. Blachman is now in the final stages of finishing up his book.

Philadelphia attorney Sarah Begley of Reed Smith, said it is “a natural evolution” for young lawyers to start blogging given their general aptness at computer communication. She emphasized, though, that blogging is out there for any lawyer who has the inclination.

The vast majority of lawyers, though, do not maintain their own blogs - they read other peoples. There is even a term to describe this practice: lurking. Philadelphia attorney Luke E. Debevec, 27, the new blog-watch columnist for *The Legal*, has been one of these lurkers for the last four years. Though blawgs make it easy to keep on top of current issues Debevec points out that “most people don’t do their legal research via Google.” He chooses to read law and political blogs primarily out of personal, rather than professional interest. In a telephone interview Debevec warned that only a small amount of the law blawgs that exist are actually reliable sources. The difficulty of knowing what is reliable and what is not “is probably the biggest drawback of blogs.” In order to avoid unreliable sources, he researches the people who write the blogs he reads and checks both their work and the blog links. “Go in with your eyes open,” Debevec advises.

Despite the fact that determining what is reliable can be tricky, lawyers still say they find blawgs to be an immense help in making important information quick and easy to access. “Blogging keeps me on top of developments it previously took me days or weeks to learn of through traditional media or other channels,” Howell said in an e-mail. Howell herself coined the word ‘blawg’ in early 2002.

“An important part of being a good appellate lawyer is keeping up with what’s going on and with new decisions,” said Bashman. His blog is designed to help serve this purpose. Many of the hits to Bashman’s blawg come from law firms across the country. *How Appealing* is “incredibly well-read coast to coast” said Bashman in a phone conversation.

What motivates lawyers to stop lurking and to start their own blawg? Many lawyers attribute the desire to a simple love of blogging. Williams explains that blogging is something he enjoys because he “loves to write.” Howell echoes this sentiment: “As far as downsides [of blogging], there’s only one I regularly encounter: there’s too much I want to blog, and not enough hours in life to do it.”

Other lawyer see blogging as part of the job: Bashman doesn’t find the work he puts into his blawg to be a “burden” because the blawg is simply a variation on the work he had already been doing as an appellate lawyer. The only difference is that his notes are now available to a global audience. Williams saw blogs as an asset to the entire legal community in the sense that blogs can serve as a grand peer review.

Spencer Overton, co-founder of blackprof.com, started blogging because he felt that the issues of race and law that the blawg focuses on are important topics that required discussion. “There is not a lot out there like it,” Overton said in a telephone conversation.

Whatever the reasons people start blogging, many find that a casual experiment with blogging quickly, to paraphrase Howell, takes on a life of its own.

The time commitment that blogs require is surprisingly small. Bashman spends several hours a day updating his blog. It is a few hours that Bashman claimed aren’t difficult to fit into his schedule. He explained that because appellate law is not as “time intensive” and more computer-oriented than other types of law, blogging isn’t an inconvenience. Howell said she probably devotes two to five hours a week to blogging, depending. Williams spends about an hour a day; Blachman only spends about 15-20 minutes a day.

Bashman’s blawg, updated at an average of one post an hour, has a large readership that includes judges, lawyers, law clerks and reporters. Though not many bloggers update with the same frequency as Bashman, most successful ones post new updates daily in order to give their readers the timeliest content possible. Updated blawgs will likely result in more hits for another reason: search engines such as Google place sites that have the most recently updated content near the top of search results.

Of course, starting and maintaining a blawg does not guarantee professional success. Though a few select blawgs boast a consistently large readership, many are struggling for any kind of readership at all.

“I was fortunate to begin [my blawg] at a time when not a lot of people were doing it,” Bashman said. He went on to explain that this is possibly why people who have created similar sites in the past few years have not experienced the same success.

Those with well-known blogs are aware of how lucky they are. “I am grateful people enjoy reading [*May It Please the Court*] and keep coming back,” said Williams. Bashman, whose readers continually e-mail him with updates and interesting decisions, said it is “really flattering to have a readership that is so faithful and energetic.”

Perhaps more pressing than the challenge of building up a readership is the concern that blogging could endanger your job. If a lawyer were to actually keep a blawg similar to *The Anonymous Lawyer*, with complaints about co-workers and potentially confidential details of their job, it would be “awfully dangerous” said Blachman.

“Lawyers need to be cautious at all times when communicating to the public,” Begley said. Lawyers also need to be aware that writing a blawg creates a permanent record. Begley emphasized that a blog policy is something all law firms should be evaluating. It is likely that firms already have in place a computer or Internet use policy and should examine it to decide if it is broad enough to cover blogging, advises Begley.

Bashman also makes a pointed effort to avoid conflict between his blawg and his practice. As a practicing lawyer, he said he takes pains to keep his site as objective as possible when it comes to

controversial decisions. “I don’t want people to develop a negative opinion of me based on the blawg.” Bashman also tries to shy away from expressing his opinion on political issues.

“This is really only the beginning of lawyers blogging,” said Begley. The future of blogging is bright in many lawyers’ opinions. “I think that blogging has a definite place in mainstream media,” said Williams. Overton expressed his hope that more people of color will come to the Internet either to read or write blogs in the future. “It has a lot of growth potential.”

Bashman expressed his hopes that more and more readers will discover blogs and help to develop blogs on new and narrower topics. “It can’t hurt to have some sort of Internet presence,” said Jerry Blachman at the end of the interview. Who knows? It may just make you rich and famous.