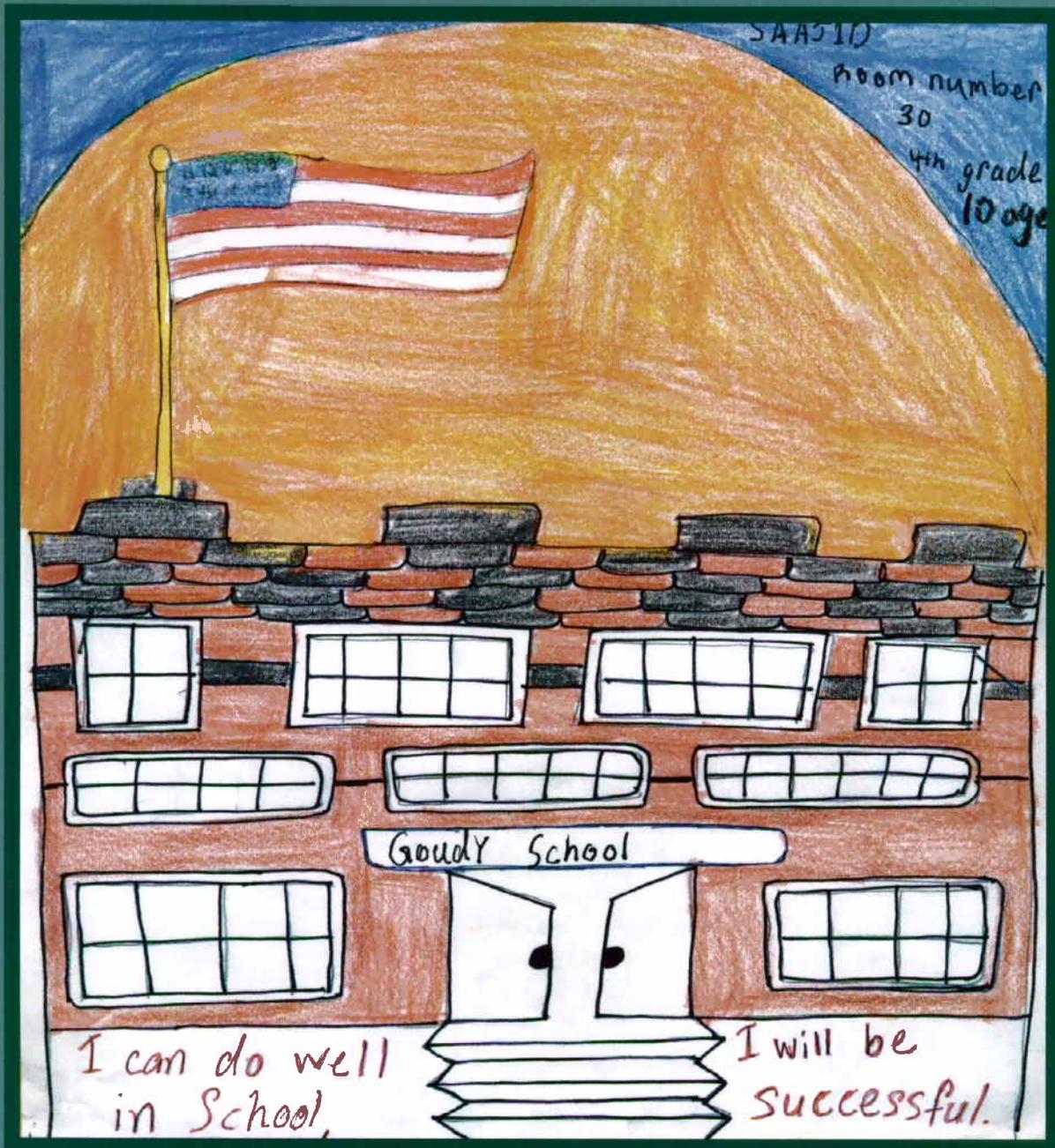


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## R E C O R D



# RIDING CIRCUITS

BY LAWRENCE M. FRIEDMAN

## Knee Deep in the Blawg Bog

Legal marketing publications are buzzing about the supposed power of blogs, or more specifically, blawgs. A blawg is a web site dedicated to the postings of someone who may or may not have something to say. The word blog is a contraction of "web log." A blawg is a blog dedicated to law-related topics.

If you want a sense of where blawging is today, go to [www.blawg.org](http://www.blawg.org). This site is a kind of clearinghouse for blawgs. Blawg.org lists more than 850 blawgs in 164 categories. According to Bill Gratsch, the publisher of [blawg.org](http://blawg.org), in 2003, his site attracted 115,000 page views. Currently, it is attracting over 50,000 each month. Clearly, there is growing interest in blawgs. Another way to get a sense of blawging is to visit Ernie the Attorney's site. He has lots of great links related to blawging. Just do a Google search for the address.

One of the most popular blawgs listed on [blawg.org](http://blawg.org) can be found at [www.mayit-pleasethecourt.com](http://www.mayit-pleasethecourt.com). This blawg belongs to J. Craig Williams of the Williams Law Firm in Newport Beach, California. MIPTC is chock full of observations on topics ranging from legal education to business law. According to Williams, he started MIPTC because he loves to write and wanted to provide content that might drive traffic to his law firm's main web site. Williams tells me that the result has exceeded his expectations, and he now gets 10,000 hits a day at his blawg.

### Market Impact

You and I are busy. We are always under pressure from courts, clients, our partners, and professional associations to do more. You are probably not looking for something else to suck time out of your day and may be hesitant to set up a blawg unless it will be useful for your business. That is rational enough.

Law marketing guru Larry Bodine posted a breathless article in which he describes blawgs as the next great thing in legal marketing. According to Bodine (whom I have met and respect), "A well-done blawg is very impres-

sive to clients and is a great business-getter." Further, he quotes a Microsoft exec as saying that a blawg is "the best relationship generator you've ever seen."



A lot of this excitement comes from the fact that Bodine believes that blogs jump high in Google search results. If true, that is very valuable. His stated example is to Google the word "blog" and his name. True enough, his blawg is in the number one slot on Google. That is very impressive, but it is not a realistic test because the people you want to attract generally do not know your name.

### Getting Set Up

To do a realistic test, I set up my own little blawg space. You can do the same in 15 minutes by going to [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), which is a unit of the ever-growing Google. Blogger is free. Another service called TypePad offers blog hosting starting at \$5 per month for a single author with a single blog.

On Blogger, once you create an account, you select a template for your blog. There are many nice enough designs. After that, you have to start actually writing. There is a fairly basic text editor that allows you to save posts as drafts, spell check them, and generally be comfortable before they are available for the world to see. Once live, posts can still be edited. You are given a reasonable number of ways to highlight text including bold, italics, and font colors. If you want to add images, you need to download a plug-in from Google's Picasa service or be comfortable with HTML codes.

Once the blog is up, you need to figure out what you are going to do with it. The first issue is whether you want to be anonymous, which would not be a good choice if your goal is marketing. Next you need to decide on the tone of your content. Is it intended to be a deadly serious analysis of recent Supreme Court decisions? Or is it the folksy musings of a country lawyer? Either is perfectly valid, but the choice will affect the audience you attract.

Another thing to keep in mind is that you absolutely do not want to end up creating the

impression that you are giving legal advice to anyone in particular. Your objective is to generate contacts, not create an attorney-client relationship about which you are unaware. In a similar vein, watch the personal attacks on your partners, associates, staff, or judges. Finally, be cognizant of all your obligations regarding client confidences, pre-trial publicity, and communications in general. The perception of anonymity may be greater than the reality.

### Test Results

My own shingle in cyberspace, [www.customslaw.blogspot.com](http://www.customslaw.blogspot.com), has been up for only two weeks. I added a free traffic counter to the site via [www.sitemeter.com](http://www.sitemeter.com). This, by the way, works fine but took a bit of fidgeting in the HTML code in the blog template. I also set the counter up to ignore my own visits. Consequently, I have a pretty good idea of real traffic to my site. And that is 47 visitors. None of those visitors has used the link to my law firm's site.

I have done very little to publicize the blawg other than to list it at [blawg.org](http://blawg.org). That listing has generated exactly two hits. I did get a spike in traffic when my wife mentioned a particularly off-topic post in an online group. But my blawg is still new and its main topic is pretty obscure. Important, but obscure none the less.

So far, I have been completely incapable of formulating a search on Google, MSN, or Teoma that results in a link to my blawg on the first two pages of results. Yahoo, on the other hand, pops me right up to the number one slot for the search "customs law blog." In fact, my blawg is number seven on the first page of Yahoo results for the search "customs law." That is better than the position for my law firm and shows the theoretical power of a blawg that drives traffic to your main business site. I am stunned by that result.

So, blogging is easy to set up but a commitment to writing content is also required. I am dubious of its ability to generate much in the way of business, but the Yahoo results are very encouraging. I would not go into the whole blogging experience with great expectations, but it does have promise and it is cheap.

How's that for a non-committal conclusion? I'll keep my blawg up for a while and let you know if it turns into a valuable addition to my personal business development activities. ■

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