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# Me and my Blog: The Story of One Lawyer's Blog From Creation To Client Development

By Dean T. Kirby, Jr.

## INTRODUCTION

In February 2007, my blog [Bankruptcy Beach](#) was born. In this article I explain why I became a blogger, how I got started with Bankruptcy Beach, and how I'm trying to use it to enhance my firm's Web presence and gain new clients.

## SHOULD I ENTER AN ALREADY CROWDED FIELD?

[Technorati](#) reported in April 2007 that it indexes 70 million blogs, to which 1,500,000 posts are added per day. According to Technorati, blogs are created at the rate of more than 120,000 per day.

A blog specifically devoted to a lawyer, the practice of law, or a specific area of law is often called a "blawg." [Blawg.com](#) ("Your Source for Legal Blogs, Podcasts and Newsfeeds") currently tracks 1,684 blawgs, of which 1,123 are listed as "active."

In considering whether to dedicate the time and energy necessary to enter this already crowded field, I came to some conclusions about what I could reasonably expect to accomplish with a blawg.

In my opinion, a blawg has the same two primary functions as a law firm's Web site: to serve as a brochure and as a billboard. A brochure is material handed to a prospective client who has already found you. A billboard is an ad that you want discovered on the information superhighway by someone who hasn't yet found you.

How relatively important each function is depends on the law firm. My firm is a boutique practice that represents lenders, landlords, creditors and fiduciaries in bankruptcy, collection, foreclosure, and receivership matters. We do not represent consumer debtors in bankruptcy. A Google search for "san diego bankruptcy lawyer" will not find me (or any of

the other lawyers who do the same type of work in our town for the same type of clients) in the first ten pages of results — despite the fact that many of my peers work in large law firms that have elaborate Web sites. The reason is that the billboards in this corner of cyberspace consist mostly of those erected by consumer debt relief agencies that must obtain a high volume of one time clients.

As far as marketing is concerned, Google has so far been more of a nuisance than a boon to me. I get at least one call a week, sometimes many more, from an individual who has determined via the Internet that I am a certified bankruptcy specialist, and wants to inquire about his or her own personal bankruptcy. When I explain that I am "not that kind of bankruptcy lawyer," callers are understandably confused.

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In my experience, an established business is much more likely to find a lawyer to represent it in any commercial matter by referral than by a blind search of the Internet. The search will often be conducted by in-house counsel or general counsel. That lawyer may contact a colleague in San Diego for a recommendation, or may know enough to search via the [Board of Legal Specialization of the State Bar of California](#), or the [American Board of Certification](#), the [American Bankruptcy Institute](#) or the [Commercial Law League of America](#). The point is, prospective clients in my field are more likely to get

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my name and then go to our Web site. For my firm, the blawg as a brochure is therefore more important than the blawg as a billboard.

As a brochure, a blawg is no substitute for a good Web site. Nevertheless, a blawg enjoys many advantages over a Web site. At Bankruptcy Beach, posts cover a wide variety of topics, all of which are listed right under my name and short bio. One of these may be the precise issue affecting a potential client or a fellow lawyer (and referral source). A good topical blawg is one that says “come into my kitchen.” A client who reads a few posts on Bankruptcy Beach should begin to feel that he knows something about me personally and professionally that a Web site bio can’t tell him.

#### GETTING STARTED WITH A BLOG PROVIDER

A law firm can create a blog on its own Web server, or install one on its Web host’s server, using different blog software packages like [Wordpress](#) or [Moveable Type](#).

For the smaller firm, these solutions are more costly than going with a package deal — aka remotely hosted blogging software. Many blawgs are “powered by” [Typepad](#) (See, e.g., [TaxProf Blog](#) by University of Cincinnati law professor Paul L. Carron, part of the excellent [Law Professor Blogs network](#)).

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For Bankruptcy Beach, I selected [Blogger](#), owned by Google. Note that blogs “powered by” the same provider can look completely different. For example, compare Bankruptcy Beach with [Wiseacre Blog](#) or with [Sportzbiz](#). All three of them use Blogger.

Another substantial reason to go with a blog provider is user-friendliness. Blogger (Google) is in the business of attracting the masses to blogging. They have to keep it simple. Posting to Bankruptcy

Beach requires me to sign into my Google account, click once (on “New Post”), paste my text into the box, type in a title and some topic names (like “Bankruptcy Statistics” or “Automatic Stay”), and then click “post.” It instantly appears on the blog. If the material is already written, posting literally takes about ten seconds.

#### TOOLS I USE ON BANKRUPTCY BEACH

The following are all features I use on Bankruptcy Beach:

##### Moderated Comments

Allowing other people to comment on your blawg posts is a good way to encourage people to keep reading. However, you MUST have the ability to moderate comments — in other words, deciding whether a comment will be published before it appears on your blog. Besides the obvious issues of keeping defamatory or inappropriate material off of your page, your blog will begin to attract “spam comments.” These have nothing to do with your posts. They sometimes contain links to other Web sites designed to build their Google page scores.

##### Link to Post (Permalink)

This facility enables visitors, and you, to create URL addresses for a specific post on your blawg, so that this particular post can be linked to.

##### Statistics

Analytical reports are invaluable in assessing the impact of your blawg. The reports generated go way beyond the data generated by a simple “hit counter.” Several third parties provide these kinds of reports. I use [Google Analytics](#), which is free.

##### RSS FEED

You can keep up to date with any blog by visiting it on the Internet each day and reading through the most recent posts. RSS provides a more efficient method for monitoring blog posts. RSS stands for “Really Simple Syndication.” It is a way to distribute the information which appears on a blog more easily for the user and therefore more widely. A blog with an RSS feed enables other Internet users to

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automatically retrieve content from a blog without visiting.

You can tell whether a blog offers an RSS feed by looking for the square orange symbol seen [here](#). In Internet Explorer 7, this square appears in the tool bar and turns orange (with a little yellow sparkle) when you visit a page with an RSS feed that you don't subscribe to. If you then click on the yellow star at the left of the browser window (signifying "Favorites"), you can subscribe to the feed so that in the future, all unread posts will be displayed with a single click.

Firefox shows the symbol in the address box. You can subscribe to the feed by clicking on the orange box. [RSS Ticker](#) is a cool Firefox extension that scrolls the titles of unread blog posts along the bottom of your browser screen.

You can also use a news aggregator like [Newsgator Inbox](#) to deliver posts to folders in Microsoft Outlook without interrupting your work or giving you more email to read. Other options include online newsreaders like [Google Reader](#) and software newsreaders like [FeedDemon](#).

### **BLAWG AND WEB SITE WORKING TOGETHER**

RSS provides a way to use the content on Bankruptcy Beach to keep our Web site content fresh. In the past, lawyers at my firm would be pestered to write articles to appear on the Web site. These were the subject of endless procrastination. Once they went up on the Web site, they would stay there for too long. This was not only because the articles took a lot of effort to write, but also because the Web site itself had to be changed to refer to and link to new articles.

Blawg posts are different. The posts in Bankruptcy Beach are relatively short, and hopefully punchy and even humorous. A busy lawyer can find time to knock out four paragraphs about a current topic, when getting that lawyer to write an article might be hopeless. Now [my bio page](#) at kirbymac.com and the practice area page for "[Commercial Bankruptcy](#)" include a box where new posts constantly scroll past the viewer.

### **GETTING FAMOUS**

I'll bet that all blawggers ask themselves fairly quickly, "Is anyone reading this stuff?" The presence or absence of comments left by third parties, and the use of Google Analytics, will help answer the question. In the beginning, the answer will be "nope." As I told my daughter when she declared her major in English, "Many more people write poetry than read it."

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There are many things that I have done, and plan to do, to help increase my readership. The greater the readership, the more a blawg can function as a beacon as well as a brochure. A lawyer who regularly reads your blawg is a referral source. A blawg that is widely read and linked to has a much higher Google page score, and this can be used to funnel readers to your Web site. Here are some tips for increasing readership:

#### **Link to Other Blawgs**

Subscribe via RSS to other blawgs. If you find an interesting post, link to it in a post of your own, and let the other blogger know that you did. That blogger may in turn start reading, and linking to, your posts. I have gotten a few plugs on other blawgs this way.

#### **Include Your Blawg in Omnibus Sites and Services**

I have registered Bankruptcy Beach on Technorati and on Blawg.com, two widely used search engines for blogs and blawgs respectively. I have long been a member of the American Bankruptcy Institute. Recently ABI added a [Bankruptcy Blog Exchange](#) to its widely read Web site. The Exchange collects posts from many bankruptcy blawgs around the country and my posts regularly

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appear there. I sent my URL to the [Daily Bankruptcy News](#), an email subscription service that gets much of its information from blawgs, and my posts have appeared there.

### **Shameless Self Promotion**

My email signature now reads, above my contact info, "NOW BLOGGING AT WWW.BANKRUPTCY-BEACH.COM." My business cards ditto.

### **Above All, Content**

When I post, I remind myself constantly that my readers are less interested in my opinions and more concerned with obtaining information that they haven't heard before. I created a [daily WestClips search on Westlaw](#) that pulls up new opinions at the Bankruptcy Court and US District Court level, including unpublished opinions not widely known. I make every effort to get this content out first on Bankruptcy Beach.

### **CONCLUSION**

My blogging has made me a better-informed and more thoughtful lawyer. It keeps our Web site fresh, and enhances the impression created by Kirby & McGuinn on the Web. I plan to keep at it for a very long time.

*[Bankruptcy Beach and the Kirby & McGuinn Web site were developed by our friends at [Savvy Sites](#). Art Burkhardt contributed ideas to the article. Savvy Sites has offices in San Diego and customers nationwide.]*

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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