An extra lift



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Mitch Young demonstrates how to use social media to generate publicity for your tax work and get new clients

Key Points

What is the issue?

Careful use and planning of social media can help you grow your practice.

What does it mean to me?

Social media has played a big part in the development of my client base, reputation within the industry and my overall career progression to date

What can I take away?

Set a target for new business, and implement social media into your daily new business development routine to generate quality referrals and business.

Having been appointed a partner at the age of 29 I owe a lot of my success to the work I carried out on social media. I spent years building an online profile and presence which resulted in several media opportunities, client engagements, awards and significant brand awareness for the firm I was with at the time. Four years on, social media has evolved and I now have a tax consultancy business that not only advises on tax matters but also helps professionals with their social media strategy and in this article, I will share with you some tips to help you generate publicity and ultimately obtain new clients.

Be yourself

Probably the biggest tip for any professional for me is to grow your own profile alongside the firm's. My rule of thumb is that you should spend (if possible) double the time on marketing yourself via social media than you do the firm. I knew that none of my close connections or wider audience would particularly care about the name of the small firm I was with but they would buy into me and my personality. Given that tax is a fairly dry subject to the wider audience, the challenge is how you make it exciting or engaging – and I believe you do this by adding your personality. If your firm has a Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn page and you are looking to grow your own profile online then it is vital you create your own pages. I even went to the extent of creating a cartoon character called 'Mitch The Tax Man' to be better remembered and engage with the public. From this point, it is all about the consistency, the message and how engaging you can be. Each different social media channel has its own style and for some you will need to include pictures, but for this article I will be generic and if you can give out useful snippets of tax information on a consistent basis you will start to build a loyal following and people will like, share and re-post your updates/messages. You will start to receive messages/comments with people asking for your assistance because you are perceived as an expert in

your field.

Thought leader

It takes some of us years to obtain a tax qualification – and that is probably the easy bit! The hard part is staying up to date with all the changes to legislation and recent case law. You are an expert in your own right and you should be proud to let people know about it. You can achieve this via your own social media.

Start writing a blog

This can be saved on your practice website or indeed create your own individual blog site. I created my ‘Mitch The Tax Man’ blog which my friends and colleagues shared, and it grew to have more than 10,000 subscribers. All work and enquiries that came from the blog were dealt with by me using my firm’s engagement letter and it was used as a business development tool. I started with monthly tax tips and progressed to budget briefings, and in depth analysis of legislation. If you have a niche area, i.e. VAT or property tax then play on this fact. The blog can be used in your firm’s marketing, monthly newsletters and own social media.

Build a network

I spent and still do spend significant time on LinkedIn building my network. This is likely to be for a long time the most important social media tool (yes, it is social media!) for any tax adviser. In a world where potential clients are spoilt for choice, you want to be doing everything you can to ensure they choose you. It is therefore very important to have an up-to-date LinkedIn profile, it does not have to be at ‘All-Star’ status but at least include a decent picture, details of the firm you work for and a summary page. I believe it is important to have client recommendations on LinkedIn, as if a potential client sees you have excellent recommendations they will have instant peace of mind – and it is very easy for a client to recommend you. I have more than 4,000 international connections on LinkedIn as I do a lot of international tax work and my tactic has always been to build up a large quality database of professional intermediaries because aside from existing clients, family and friends how else do you get referred? We get referred work by financial advisors, solicitors, bankers, insurance brokers, business advisors, and other

accountants. I would connect with these people on LinkedIn and arrange meetings with specific contacts. Even if I did not meet with some of my connections I would ensure every day I wrote status on LinkedIn stating how I helped a client or what work I was doing. The result of doing this is that all these professional intermediaries would see what tax work I was doing, and so if they had a client that needed that type of work, they would think of me and slowly (as the connections grew) I would get random messages from other professional advisers requesting my help with their clients. They had confidence in me because I had more than 100 client recommendations, several awards, and all my professional qualifications posted on my LinkedIn profile.

Once you have built your connections via social media it will be important to build a separate database or add the contact details to your existing relationship management software. You can then send your new connections a monthly/quarterly email to update them with news from your practice or just to catch up.

Video

Video is very much the most engaging activity you can do on social media. It takes some time to get used to speaking in front of the camera but I would practice and then when you are ready, start posting! It is very easy to record and upload with smartphones. I would suggest begin with a monthly tax update video and put this on Facebook. I have started a live show via Facebook Live where I invite guests and discuss topical issues. I encourage questions to be asked and we give a prize for the best question asked and give prizes for liking and sharing the video. This has resulted in a significant increase in engagement and client introductions. Video is now and will remain to be important for the next few years. You should force yourself out of your comfort zone when it comes to all the above but once you have done so you will reap the rewards.

My final piece of advice is to set yourself a strategy and targets for the year ahead when it comes to social media. Furthermore there are a whole list of online tools to make your experience more productive and to enable you to be smart with your time. You can schedule your social media days, weeks, months in advance by loading them into a piece of software such as hootsuite. It can be very daunting, (particularly if you are a sole practitioner) but slowly and steadily you need to factor it into your daily routine and eventually have two screens in your office, one

dedicated to tax and one for your social media!