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# Blawgging here to stay

*A rise in 'blawgging' (legal blogging) allows lawyers to share their experiences – both good and bad.*

The practice of blogging has boomed in recent years.

MySpace has become the dinosaur of self-expression as the tech-savvy world moves towards blogging as the ultimate mark of geek-chic.

Twitter, for instance, is no longer solely the domain of teens and Ashton Kutcher, with many firms filling the blogosphere with regular tweets about their latest news.

The blogging phenomenon has trickled down to the legal industry and has been embraced by many of its sectors, albeit in different ways.

One point of difference is that many legal bloggers prefer to use the terms 'blawg' and 'blawgging' rather than the more mainstream terms 'blog' and 'blogging'.

For Peter Faris QC, who until recently had a constant online presence, blogging is an important medium.

"I see blogs as most people see them; a direct means of self-publishing to the world. In other words, you don't need to write a book or a newspaper article – all of which are difficult to do. Blogging is a way to circumvent that."

Much of this resonates with Kate Gibbs – the editor of *The New Lawyer*<sup>1</sup> – who notes that "Australia, in particular, has not had a lot of variety in terms of newspapers" and blogs enable the public to "access information from a wider variety of sources".

From individuals to top-tier conglomerates, cyber-space is filled with the tap-tap-tapping of legal opinion and information.

*Justinian*,<sup>2</sup> has become widely accepted as a favourite.

Peter Faris' blog was deemed influential enough to receive exposure in mainstream media in October 2007 and every top-tier firm worth their salt now maintains an online blawg.

*The New Lawyer* – a “news” style blog that reports on all facets of the legal profession – has capitalised on this boom, with its readership at 15,000 and growing.

Both Peter and Kate agree that there has been a noticeable rise in blawgging compared with three years ago.

Kate, however, notes that the legal industry is still lagging behind other industries, such as fashion, media and marketing, when it comes to blogging.

Australian lawyers also tend to be more conservative in the blogosphere than their American counterparts.

The rise in blawgging has meant an increase in lawyers writing about their experience, not only technical but also personal.

Depression, intra-firm politics, disillusionment with the profession and the quality of firm-provided biscuits have all been the subject of anonymous blawgs, which have mushroomed around cyberspace over the past two years.

The phenomenon arguably began with the *Anonymous Lawyer*<sup>3</sup> – now a household name among the Gen-Y ranks of the legal profession.

The trend has taken off in Australia, with a steady rise in locally-based anonymous blawgs ever since.

While it’s difficult to capture the hallmarks of anonymous blawggers, they are often united in their circumstances – junior lawyers, ranging from their early to late 20s, working at top-tier firms.

The *Junior Lawyers’ Union*<sup>4</sup> is aimed at mobilising the junior ranks to mutiny against unrealistic working expectations.

*Fully Articles*<sup>5</sup> – a blawg which was started in 2008 – was penned as a warning to all those at risk of being lured by the glamorous top-tier firm promises that “seduced” its author.

The blawg, which oscillates between the discouragingly bleak (“the blue flash of the photocopier is the only colour I saw today”) and tongue-in-cheek advice about making the most of a bitter fight for partnership between two ambitious senior associates, has received overwhelming support from its readers.

The ultimate motivation for the blawg? Lifting the cloak of silence that surrounds juniors’ experience at a top-tier firm: “I thought ‘long hours’ meant you were working on exciting deals, when really ‘long hours’ is because you can’t get an affidavit signed”, explains the author. “That’s what I wanted to write about, because I did not feel like anyone else was”.

This trend has surprised Peter Faris and challenged his view of the top-tier juniors as “six-minute robots”. However, the seasoned blogger does have some words of caution for the anonymous authors: “it’s good that they are showing some spirit, but I fear for their [job] safety”.

“It may not be as anonymous as you think.”

Another blawgging trend is reporting on firms’ response to the recent economic contraction.

The legal sector has had to deal with some tough hurdles since the end of 2008.

Some industry players have managed the downturn better than others, with stories of mass redundancies routinely appearing in the news since the beginning of this year.

The blawgging community has attempted to offer guidance to lawyers in these uncertain times. The result? A rise in blawgs focusing on pay-freezes and redundancies, both confirmed and rumoured, within the legal industry.

The readership of *Fully Articles* went up tenfold when its author started talking about redundancies.

*Lawyers Weekly*,<sup>6</sup> a self-proclaimed “Australia’s leading information resource for the embittered and tired legal professional”, maintains a “Firing Tally”, which documents all confirmed recession-related redundancies by the big players in the legal industry.

Blogs like *Firm Spy*<sup>7</sup> rely largely on anonymous “spies” [employees of the big firms], who pass on redundancy and pay-freeze rumours before they reach mainstream media.

It seems that the blogging medium is particularly suitable to these troubled times. The readers want up-to-the minute information about employment trends in the industry, without having to wait for an official firm press-release to reach the printed media.

They are also more interested in reading rumours, on which the printed press has relatively stricter standards.

Kate, however, has reservations about such blogs.

“It’s nice to have things like that out there”, she agrees, “but we don’t always have endless time to traipse [rumour sites] . . . and I would much rather go to ones that are reliable and newsworthy.”

Many have speculated about the future of blawgging.



## The Young Lawyers’ Section

The LIV Young Lawyers’ Section (YLS) is a dynamic group of about 6000 members which works to enhance the legal skills, knowledge and professional networks of members in the early stages of career development.

The YLS is your first point of call for the information and support you’ll need in your first few years of practice.

As part of the LIV’s commitment to support members throughout their professional career, the YLS invites its member to get involved in the activities and programs of the section committees. Belonging to a committee is an ideal opportunity to network and meet other like minded young lawyers. For more information, see the YLS website at [www.liv.asn.au/younglawyers](http://www.liv.asn.au/younglawyers).

Is it just another seasonal trend or does it really have something substantial to offer to the legal profession?

For Kate, blawgging represents an opportunity for lawyers to “bolster a conversation about what is happening to them”.

She notes that there has been an abundance of information coming to the legal profession, “but not always much dialogue within the profession among lawyers”.

Blawgging is set to change that and enable lawyers to move away from their role as just “passive receivers of information”.

Peter is also adamant that there is a place for blawgging in the future of the legal profession. Whether it is a blawg on an obscure area of property law or the trials and tribulations of a junior solicitor, “I think it’s incredibly important and it won’t ever go away”. ♦

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1. See [www.thenewlawyer.com.au](http://www.thenewlawyer.com.au)

2. See <http://justinian.com.au>

3. See <http://anonymouslawyer.blogspot.com>

4. See <http://juniorlawyersunion.blogspot.com>

5. See <http://fullyarticles.wordpress.com>

6. See <http://lawyersweekly.wordpress.com>

7. See <http://firmspy.com>