

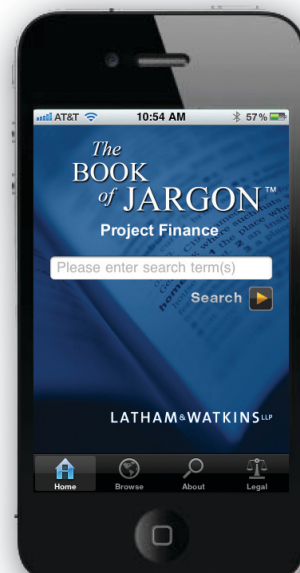
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Law firms use apps to creatively reach clients

By Amanda Robert

Shortly after Apple released its iPad in April 2010, Valorem Law Group purchased the touch-screen tablet computers for everyone in the firm.

Founding member Nicole Auerbach said the firm had no idea what to expect from the innovative tool, but soon saw how easy-access applications like Documents to Go, which allows users to create and edit documents on the move, could significantly benefit the firm's business.

"We started to believe that as time went on, it would be one of the pieces of equipment of choice for our clients like in-house counsel, CEOs and business people who may have some litigation," Auerbach said. "We realized that this is a very good platform to have people think of us on a regular basis by creating something of value to them that also reflects the firm."

Auerbach toyed with the idea of creating a Valorem Law Group app and when she heard

that San Francisco-based Morrison & Foerster launched MoFo2Go, one of the first apps developed by a law firm, she contacted and hired that firm's developer.

She worked with Rubenstein Technology Group to design an app that offers a "tip of the day" to in-house attorneys who handle litigation. The app includes firm information, attorney blogs and legal news as well as a feature called "beat the clock" that lets users click the screen to smash the billable hour.

"Our firm handles only litigation on an alternative fee basis and our persona out in the public is a little atypical to most law firms," Auerbach said. "We wanted that style. We used a lot of humor and we just wanted our personalities to shine through."

Valorem wanted to continue to provide value to clients on a constant basis and in a medium that works with their everyday lives, Auerbach said. The firm launched its free app in February, and since then, more than 275 users have downloaded it from the Apple App Store.

"We're pretty good about figuring out what we think is going to be the next big trend," she said. "We were on the cutting edge of being an alternative-fee firm, before everyone else jumped on board. Now we think iPads and these types of apps will be the wave of the future."

Like Valorem, many law firms across the country realize the prominent role that mobile devices and tablet computers play in the way they do business.

More of their attorneys reach for iPads as apps make it easier to connect with their clients and do their jobs. More of their clients also embrace modern technology and want apps that provide them with up-to-date information on how to handle their business and legal matters.

As law firms take the next step and create their own apps, they must consider what concept to deliver to their attorneys and clients. While some firms offer easier-to-read versions of their websites or blogs, others devise new programs that assist with day-to-day business and legal operations.

Chicago law firms like Valorem, Banner & Witcoff and Winston & Strawn launched their first apps in 2010, proving themselves to be innovators and leaders in the city's legal community. These firms chose not to stop there, but instead, they continue to experiment with the latest technology to create apps that reach audiences in different ways.

Upwardly mobile

Larry Bodine, a business development adviser in the Chicago area, spends a lot of time encouraging law firms to use new tools like apps to amplify their appeal to clients.

"More cell phones are being sold than computers," Bodine said. "Everywhere I go people are texting or going online and looking at their

smartphones. Once you have one of these smartphones, what makes it fun to use are all the apps. What that means is that everyone has to adjust their marketing from a 20-inch screen monitor to a 2-inch screen."

In early 2010, Bodine began working with Ghoultson & Storrs as the Boston-based law firm developed an app to share its news releases, alerts and articles with clients. By creating its own app, the firm showed that its "technology savvy" lawyers could provide information in a way that was unmatched by their peers in the legal community, he said.

"Our research shows that 100 million people access information through their mobile devices, or that there will be that many in 2011," said Theresa Bomba, associate director of marketing for the firm. "Applications are really mainstream now and they are used for a variety of business purposes. With that trend in mind, we launched the app to provide our clients with an easy way to gather legal information affecting their business."

Ghoultson & Storrs spent several months working with Bodine and other developers and between \$5,000 and \$7,000 during the process. In June 2010, the law firm became one of the first in New England to launch its own app, which has since been downloaded for free by hundreds of users.

"I think it's also becoming a business imperative," Bomba said. "I really do think that the way people are accessing their information is so dynamic now that we all have to be more mindful about how the world of technology is evolving and impacting our clients and our prospects."

Paul Lippe, founder and chief executive officer of Legal OnRamp, an online social network of in-house counsel and outside attorneys, agreed that in the next few years, more clients will demand apps that deliver real services. In addition to using these apps to search through a network of lawyers, they want to be able to create their own documents like sales contracts and employment agreements, he said.

"The most logical app is one that allows clients to identify expertise within a law firm," Lippe said. "If I'm looking for a document or answer or help in a particular area, and I can find that in your firm versus someone else's firm, I'm more likely to do business with you."

As the legal market changes from "lawyer-

centric" to "value-centric," lawyers need to spend more time working with new models of providing value, like the app model, Lippe said.

"If you imagine the market won't change, you can operate the way you did in 1960 and it makes sense not to do anything," he said. "But if you imagine that things change, the only way you can learn about what's going to matter is to engage in it in some way."

Randy Shaheen, an attorney who practices in consumer protection and advertising at Arnold & Porter in Washington, D.C., heard about a successful blog on food and drug law in early 2008 and decided to create a similar forum for people interested in his area of the law.

While most law firms send multipage client advisories that take too long to read and write, blogs provide pertinent information that promise immediate impact to readers, Shaheen said. As more of his clients used blogs, he wanted to reach them in the same way they reach their customers.

He soon realized that he could attract even more clients with an app that provided a new route to the consumer advertising law blog. In December 2009, the firm became one of the first in the AmLaw 100 to launch its own app, which allows users to search, bookmark and read the content of its blog.

"We thought about our clients and people who look at the blog," Shaheen said. "They're all in marketing and advertising and they're all thinking about how they take their products and make their product websites more accessible to people."

"They were doing the same thing in terms of developing apps, Twitter and all the different sorts of social media," he said. "We looked and, at the time, law firms really hadn't started doing that in the same way as consumer products companies."

Neil Rosenbaum, new business opportunities manager for Arnold & Porter, who worked with Shaheen to develop the app, said the firm's main goal was to make sure the content of the blog could be read by iPhone users. More than 500 people downloaded the free app, which is also featured on as many as 15 directories that identify useful apps.

"They talk about the mobile phone as being the third screen," Rosenbaum said. "If you try to look at our full blog website on your mobile

Innovation > feature



device, it's clunky, it's difficult to read and you have to deal with the graphics.

"This is a way of getting our content more easily read," he said. "If someone wants to read it on the go, they can access it."

Bodine agreed that people have become intolerant of websites that are not "smartphone friendly." They no longer want to wait two or three minutes for pictures and videos to load, he said.

"What you do is strip away all of the graphics and the Flash and the design," Bodine said. "It's just stripped down to a headline and a little two- or three-line synopsis."

"That's what people want to read," he said. "If the text goes on and on, nobody is going to read it on a handheld."

One step ahead

Law firms like Latham & Watkins took a different approach to creating their own apps, forgoing increased access to their websites or blogs for functional tools that help clients and even their own attorneys do their jobs.

In mid-2010, Latham & Watkins decided to convert its project finance book of jargon — a 102-page, paper-bound glossary of legal, business and financial terms — into an app that gives lawyers and bankers quick access to those terms during meetings or in the courtroom.

For example, Jonathan Rod, the global chairman of the project development and finance practice group at the firm, explained that if he was working on a wind project and someone mentioned an "energy tax credit," he could use his iPad to search the app and locate the term. He could then see that it's a government program that grants a 30 percent tax credit to qualifying renewable energy facilities.

"For folks in the industry, it's part of what they do," Rod said. "But the younger bankers have the same issues as our younger lawyers. They're just immersing themselves in a particular area. Any crib sheets that can be helpful are helpful."

Ken Heaps, the chief information officer for Latham & Watkins, helped handle the logistics of building the app.

The firm used Apple's guidelines to find the software it needed and

called on the expertise of an internal development group rather than on outside developers.

"It saved some money, because we were using internal resources that we already had on the ground," Heaps said. "The second thing that it did was give us a tremendous amount of control over how the application was actually built."

"There is a certain amount of going back and forth as you refine an application, but if you have internal resources, it takes off a lot of time and provides you with the opportunity to create a better product," he said.

The firm applied to become a licensed Apple apps developer and once approved, it submitted its app to the Apple app review unit, Heaps said. It took a few months to receive final approval from the company.

The firm's free project finance book of jargon app launched in December 2010, and since then, more than 12,000 users have downloaded it.

Rod pointed out that while Latham & Watkins still offers the paper-bound book to clients and attorneys, it's easier for them to "go to the app store, hit the button twice and 30 seconds later, it winds up on their iPhone or iPad."

Timothy Meece, a partner at Banner & Witcoff, said he wondered if he could create an app to help him do what he needed to do as a patent trial attorney. Like most in his firm, he traveled frequently and wanted an easy way to search for patents and trademarks and for local and federal rules.

"Sometimes in the middle of a deposition, if all of the sudden there is a new patent identified ... you have the ability right then and there to look on your phone and get the answer you need," Meece said. "There is almost an infinite number of other scenarios in which it would be helpful in a courtroom, in a deposition, during traveling or in your office."

In early 2010, Meece began to investigate how to create an app for the firm. He sat down with his colleague, Ross Dannenberg, and the pair made a "wish list" of features they wanted in their ideal app.

They also talked to other attorneys, asking what problems they encountered in the past and how they could solve those problems with

the new app.

In addition to a full-search access to U.S. patents by keyword, patent number and assignee, they enabled users to download patent text and images directly to their smartphones. They also included the search of trademarks and built a complete library of patent local rules for U.S. district courts.

As they researched the cost of creating the app, they looked for outside developers who offered specific experience in writing apps for the iPhone platform.

They chose to work with ZWorkbench, but Meece declined to disclose the cost of their contract.

"Based on our technical background — I'm an electrical and computer engineer and Ross is an electrical engineer — and our IT people who had quite a bit of computer experience, we were able to work together with the company to produce the application in an economically efficient manner," he said.

The developer agreed to create the firm's app for a flat fee, while most others push for an hourly fee and refuse to adhere to a cost estimate, Meece said.

"The problem with that is that it could potentially be open-ended," he said. "You'll find that there is quite a bit of disparity between the amount of experience that they have and how much they are going to charge."

Since the Banner & Witcoff's IP Lawyer launched in July 2010, it has been downloaded more than 1,000 times. On average, 30 to 40 more users download the app each week.

"I think making people aware of the app and its capabilities, as well as offering it for free, encouraged people to try the app," Meece said. "Once they try it, they like it."

Secrets to success

When Shaheen announced the new consumer advertising law blog app to subscribers and other clients, he received a number of notes from people who were excited about the firm's use of new technology.

At the time many law firms were unfamiliar with blogs and even more were unfamiliar with apps, but now, more firms consider using

the tools as social media becomes more prominent in marketing and business development, he said.

But, Rosenbaum said, they still haven't seen an "avalanche" of acceptance from the majority of law firms.

"I think it's a trickle," he said. "But just like with law firms and websites, it probably didn't start off very quickly, but eventually, everybody was there."

Lippe agreed that as recently as 15 years ago, law firms avoided using e-mail, and as recently as 12 years ago, they avoided creating their own websites. But just as they saw a gradual shift to those tools, they now see a greater shift to mobile and web-based systems, he said.

"People are checking their devices in meetings, on the plane, and they're not always at a PC," Lippe said. "The typical thing is to find ways to provide value to mobile consumers of information and the app store is one of the best models for doing that. Why not look for ways to be present where clients or potential clients are going to be looking for something?"

Bodine still views apps as a novel initiative and suggests that law firms pounce on the trend before public interest disappears. In the past two years, Android apps have emerged to rival Apple apps and offer firms the chance to reach even wider audiences, he said.

"Google is a much bigger operation than Apple," Bodine said. "They are much friendlier to their customers and friendlier to developers. Google is a company that is always experimenting."

"When you get a Droid, one of the key things you get is Google software," he said. "It's designed to work with Google Maps, Google Search and Google everything."

In Meece's experience, attorneys who are considering their own app should spend a lot of time thinking through the features they want to offer to their colleagues or clients.

"It's much easier to develop the application if you start off with a complete feature list than trying to modify the scope of work later on when dealing with programmers," he said. "That can result in a less-than-ideal end result

and will definitely cost substantially more."

He called the Banner & Witcoff app a success, since it accomplished its goal of providing mobile attorneys at firms and corporations with quick access to intellectual property resources and federal court rules.

He said the app still provides "unique functionality," since it stands apart from those that offer an extension of their firm website.

"Signing up for that application is basically equivalent to getting spam from the firm every time they want to send out a press release," Meece said.

"Ours is completely opposite. Ours is functional. There is no spam."

Meece recently began working with his colleagues on new apps for the iPhone 4 and iPad 2.

Their new iPhone version will offer a higher-resolution interface, while their new iPad version will take advantage of extra layout space on the screen, he said.

Rod and Heaps also achieved success with the Latham & Watkins project finance book of jargon app and, in January 2011, they released the corporate and bank finance book of jargon and the European capital markets and bank finance book of jargon in the iTunes store.

These two new apps also target clients and attorneys in the financial services industry.

They said they hope to launch several more apps, including one involving antitrust issues and another involving trial preparation, Heaps said.

"We see the iPhone and iPad, and especially the iPad, as an intermediate piece of technology that has a strategic position in the world of user technology," Heaps said. "It's the crossover between a handheld PDA and a notebook."

"It will become a part of the technology arsenal for all businesses," he said.

"We've embraced it, and as it's being embraced, it goes back to the innovation of our lawyers at the firm who recognize an important tool and component in providing services." ■

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