“Storytelling” may seem an odd word choice for a profession like law, which focuses on very academic-oriented activities like drafting contracts, legislative provisions, proposing a regulation, writing a will, researching case laws, etc. However, the increasing competition faced at home and abroad demands that lawyers make efforts to guide their teams to surpass expectations and discover new approaches, in order to stand out from the crowd.

Lawyers may think of themselves as legal scholars, as professionals, as persons having a gravitas of sorts; hence, they may prefer presenting facts and figures as opposed to telling stories. However, “thought leadership” is a unique differentiator. Lawyers need to create compelling content to engage their stakeholders. Storytelling is an excellent way to achieve this.

Of course, a story is not merely made up of character, nor is it a recitation of facts: there has to be a storyline. Facts and figures are more amenable to being absorbed and recorded by computers. People hardly remember them unless they are effectively emotionalized and embedded in a story.

Decision-making involves persuasion, and persuasion requires emotions. Emotions require less effort than logic… hence decisions based on emotion are made more quickly than those based on logic. In court rooms, lawyers often build narratives naturally, weaving the chronology of events and acts in the form of a story to generate emotional responses and create a ground for empathy. This is true even in corporate practices. Clients are more interested to know how our solutions have impacted other clients than how we did it. The impact is very emotional, and can be best described in the form of a story.

Storytelling is an important strategy for growth. Through the use of storytelling, lawyers can foster the emotional connections that create a sense of meaning for the contributions made by them and their stakeholders.

**Lawyers Have Stories to Tell**

Newsletters are an important tool for client engagement and expressing thought leadership. Generally most newsletters sent out by lawyers and firms share articles on a topical issue, and report developments at the firm level. To capitalize on the strength of storytelling, they may also share case studies that relate how legal issues were impacting clients, how the problems were
resolved, and how the solutions improved the client’s situation.

While creating client collaterals, marketing content or blogs, lawyers can focus on the issue while also making their points more relevant, easier to understand and more interesting by creating dialogues, scenes, and characters as are found in movies / ads. This way audience re-call value becomes much higher.

Firms /lawyers can also talk about their pro-bono/CSR initiatives using success stories of real social heroes… and how it moved them to be part of these initiatives. Even failure stories generate emotions for the firm and enhance the image of the firm as a socially responsible entity.

In today’s age of “word-of-mouth” marketing, client testimonials are also stories and, when effectively weaved and shared, can be of great value to firms and lawyers.

Creating the Story

For a story to be liked it has to be real and people should somehow relate to the values the story imparts.

Organisations – such as law firms – can also use stories to help their employees and clients understand the vision and purpose they want to create for themselves. Today, clients are more inclined to want to know what an organization does and why it matters, and how this will make a difference. The best way to communicate this message is not through flow charts or diagrams, but through the use of stories that evoke imagery of where the organisations have been, and where they want to go next.

There are numerous examples of how organisations have benefited by sharing stories about their contributions and how they have impacted not only the economy but society at large. In this way, they have been perceived as trusted and responsible organisations and have thereby been able to attract more commitment and respect from their stakeholders.

What Makes a Good Story?

The best structure, elements, techniques and characters completely depends on your audience. The same story can be presented in different ways to persuade different people to do a particular thing, or not do something, or to make a certain decision.

In order to be a good storyteller, one needs to listen to stories. There are many stories out there. Every individual has a story and, therefore, lawyers must ask for their stories – of course, within the limitations of professional conduct and related to issues they are facing. For instance, instead of asking “What happened?” one can ask why it went wrong, how matters got to this point.

As a strategy this could be the biggest differentiator, as every story can have a unique perspective and therefore can relay messages in a desired manner to the target audience. A strategically aligned story can not only help stakeholders visualize the change the lawyer, firm or organization intends to bring, but also can also solidify support and can make stakeholders comfortable about future outcomes and results.

To conclude, storytelling is a powerful tool, and a story with a well-crafted narrative does amplify whatever one wants to communicate.

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