

You've Never Seen Anyone Like **ALLISON MARGOLIN** Could YouTube Be for You, Too?

BY PETER DARLING

When we think of lawyers in the movies, a few standouts automatically pop to mind. There's Gregory Peck as Atticus

Finch, the crusading lawyer of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Tracy and Hepburn in *Adam's Rib*, of course. And Tom Cruise did it twice, in *A Few Good Men* and *The Firm*.

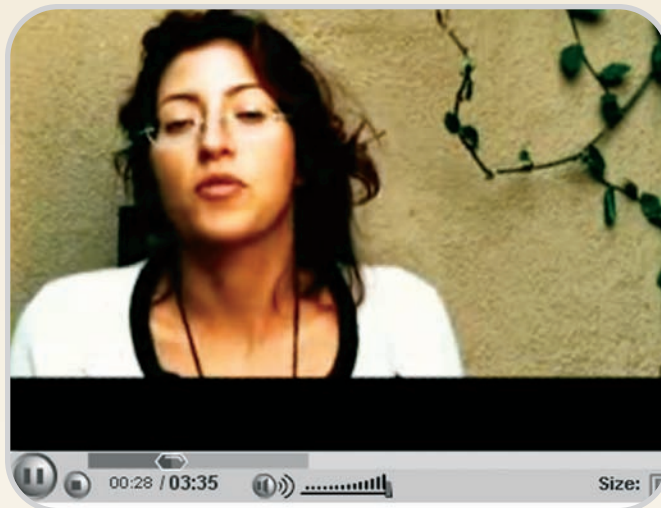
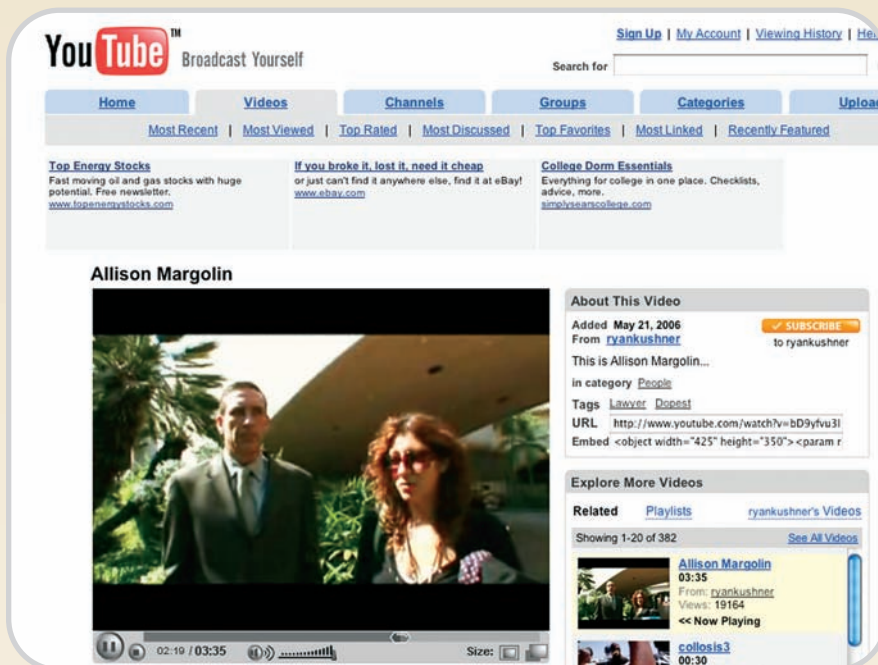
But the latest Beverly Hills film about a lawyer takes a decidedly different twist—it stars a real lawyer, it's self-produced, it's online, and it's free. Is it just another Hollywood story or the future of legal marketing?

The Heroine's Plot Line The real lawyer in question is Allison Margolin, who is treading new ground in practice business development through a technology called viral marketing.

Margolin is not your typical lawyer. First, she's a real, dyed-in-the wool Beverly Hills brat, with the kind of pedigree that doesn't usually produce criminal defense lawyers. Born and raised in zip code 90210 and a graduate of Beverly Hills High School (yes, *that* one), Margolin has had publicity and the media in her blood since she was a little girl. In college, she was the editorial page editor of the *Spectator*, at Columbia University in New York. At Harvard Law School, she wrote a column for the school's newspaper, the *Record*. And today, she has ambitions to be a legal commentator opposite Nancy Grace, with a show she'd like to call *The Other Side*. She has also signed a life-rights agreement for a possible film about her law practice. Not bad for a 28-year-old.

Margolin launched her practice doing general criminal defense. Over time, she gradually developed a specialization in defending narcotics cases, particularly those involving marijuana. A large percentage of her clients are Californians who have been using marijuana for medical purposes. Interestingly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, her father, Bruce Margolin, is head of the Los Angeles chapter of NORML—the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws—and a well-known activist.

Given all this, making a film about herself and her law practice seemed like a natural next step. So, in June 2006, Margolin uploaded a groundbreaking video introducing herself and her practice onto YouTube.com. It's available at



www.youtube.com/watch?v=bD9yfvu3lB8. As of this writing, the video has been viewed nearly 19,000 times.

The Mis-en-Scene YouTube describes itself as "a consumer media company for people to watch and share original videos worldwide through a Web experience." Founded in November 2005, the site—which has become an online phenomenon—allows

anyone to store, share and watch videos, most of them homemade. More importantly, it now reaches an audience of more than 6 million people per day—with the number of visitors, and the number of videos they view, skyrocketing every week. The site's founders, Chad Hurley and Steve Chen, are now Silicon Valley royalty.

WHO'S WATCHING?

According to recent Nielsen NetRatings, YouTube has nearly 20 million unique users per month. What's more, the site says it is currently serving 100 million videos per day, with more than 65,000 videos being uploaded daily. As many as 19,000 viewers have seen Margolin's video.

Margolin's video, which was shot and edited for around \$5,000, is half commercial and half documentary. It has no script, and there's a deliberately rough-around-the-edges-because-it's-a-documentary feel. It features Margolin discussing California's drug laws, a testimonial from one of her clients, and an interview with her father—all interspersed with footage from the 1936 anti-marijuana film *Reefer Madness*, a cult classic.

Margolin's film is a great example of viral marketing. Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>), defines viral marketing as "marketing techniques that seek to exploit pre-existing social networks to produce exponential increases in brand awareness, through 'viral' processes similar to the spread of an epidemic [hence its moniker] ... and can be very useful in reaching a large number of people rapidly." So

think about it: Margolin's film, and its star, would be of intense interest to anyone in Southern California facing criminal charges for marijuana. The viral element is that because of its content, Margolin hopes the film will be forwarded via YouTube to its target audience, which is also Margolin's target market.

In a sentence, Margolin is promoting herself through word-of-mouth, reinforced by a professionally shot video.

The Next Installment Viral marketing is not new. Neither is using video to market a law practice—in any media market, legal commercials are a staple of late-night television. What makes Margolin's project fascinating, and perhaps a harbinger of the future of legal marketing, is what it combines—and how.

It uses the Internet, and YouTube, to make a video available, instantly and at no cost, to anyone in the world. It uses the concept of viral marketing to deliver a self-targeting marketing message and information directly, it is hoped, to a very specific demographic. And in a place like Beverly Hills, capital of the world's film industry, the choice of medium wasn't even a choice.

Whether or not the video will result in new business is anyone's guess, but it certainly represents a new chapter in legal marketing thinking. Rather than picking from a fairly limited range of marketing vehicles, tactics and approaches, lawyers like Margolin are assembling unique marketing programs tailor-made for their particular needs, market and clientele, and applying the latest, most powerful technology.

So what's next in this gripping saga? Will young Allison Margolin find the wealth, fame and renown she longs for? Or will she end up bravely smiling through her tears? Stay tuned. **LP**

Peter Darling (peter@peterdarling.com) is an attorney and an independent business development consultant in Northern California. He can be reached at (650) 261-9281.

Continued from page 45

practice builder when we started the firm." But it's only been recently that the firm has promoted the program, thanks to Joerg convincing Wessels that the partnership should market it. Once he eventually he gave her the go-ahead, Joerg wrote brochure copy about the service, put it in the firm's newsletter, and sent it to clients and potential clients.

"People couldn't sign up fast enough," Joerg says. "They love it. It's such a unique program." In fact, since the marketing push moved forward, the number of people using the service has nearly doubled. In April 2004 some 689 clients subscribed, and by July 2006 that number had increased to 1,245.

This rainmaking idea is also popular with consultants and other legal profession observers, who tend to give it two thumbs up. "That's a great tool for relationship building," says Levick consultant Smith. "Labor and employment law are a very partner-intensive practice, and as a result, you find a lot of direct one-on-one relationships between partners and clients. So this service establishes a connection. Mr. Wessels should continue to let the world know his firm does this."

And, it seems, other lawyers from across the legal landscape should continue to find new ways to generate business. As the stories of lawyers and firms here demonstrate, creative tactics really do make rain. **LP**

Steven T. Taylor (stevetaylor77@comcast.net) is an award-winning freelance journalist living in Portland, OR, who writes on various subjects in the legal media.