

## Tried in the Court of Public Opinion

**O**VER THE PAST FEW months, the power of social media has become more and more apparent, with recent articles explaining how social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been used in unusual ways: aiding authorities in tracking down suspected thieves (who posted selfies taken at the location of the crime), raising public awareness of diseases such as ALS, and unfortunately, to sway public opinion.

Prior to the advent of social media, people tended to get their news from sources such as local and national news channels and newspapers, often remaining skeptical of internet news sources. But as we become more conditioned to sharing our lives in JPEGs and 140 characters, it becomes possible that we become less wary of the sources of information we receive and more easily swayed by what we read online.

Some examples of this are the recent events in Ferguson, MO and the Martin/Zimmerman case in Florida last year. Has society stopped waiting until all the facts are in, or an official investigation is completed? Are we so accustomed to the instant gratification that social media offers that we have stopped waiting for the justice system to work as it was designed?

As I write this, tensions are still high in Ferguson, MO. So far, there has been little in the way of an official statement about what happened, yet it seems that lines have been drawn and the parties involved appear to

have already been tried and convicted by the public. But while I have seen many blurbs across my Twitter and Facebook feeds, snippets of articles and blogs, with arguments on both sides, any official word is sparse. This makes me question what people (including various news outlets) are basing their opinions on.

In the Martin/Zimmerman case, it seemed as if many were speaking out about the parties' guilt or innocence before anyone really knew what had happened. The question remains whether much of the country would

**AMY M. COHEN**  
SCVBA President



[amy@cohenlawplc.com](mailto:amy@cohenlawplc.com)

have known of either of these cases without the instant push of information through social media, where these and similar stories play out.

In some of these situations, before there is even a judge or jury, a person's guilt is a done deal in the court of public opinion. Has "innocent until proven guilty" been completely forgotten? Unfortunately, because of the way these matters play out in social media, regardless of how the situations actually resolve themselves, people's lives will never be the same again.

## WITNESS RESULTS.



More than **90,000 business owners and consumers** of legal services from Calabasas to Toluca Lake read each issue of *Ventura Blvd*, published eight times annually.

This September, we present 'Trusted Advisors' a **special section featuring elite lawyers** our readers look to for top-notch legal representation.

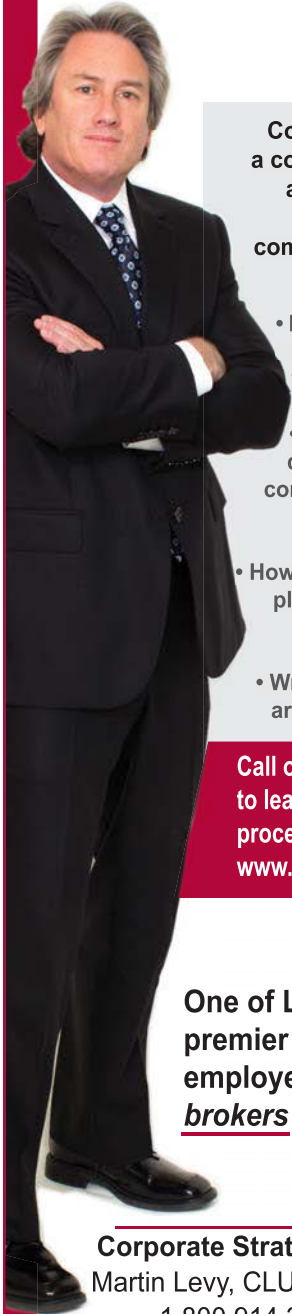
SFVBA members are eligible for special, negotiated pricing. **Join the collection today.**

For more information, contact Adam Schaffer, Publisher at 818-916-4577 or [adam@moontidemediamag.com](mailto:adam@moontidemediamag.com).

**VENTURA BLVD**  
MAGAZINE

## HEALTH CARE REFORM HAS CHANGED THE WAY YOU BUY AND DELIVER BENEFITS

### IS YOUR PRESENT BROKER BRINGING YOU THE BEST POSSIBLE SOLUTION?



Contact us for  
a comprehensive  
analysis of  
NEW ACA  
compliant plans:

- How to exploit the ACA for your benefit
- Why plan design and communication are vital
- How the exchanges play into your programs
- Wrapping plans around Kaiser

Call or Email us  
to learn about our  
process, or visit  
[www.CorpStrat.com](http://www.CorpStrat.com)

One of Los Angeles  
premier and largest  
employee benefit  
brokers

**Corporate Strategies Inc**  
Martin Levy, CLU, Principal  
1 800 914 3564  
[www.Corpstrat.com](http://www.Corpstrat.com)  
Ca. Lic 0C24367



I recently became aware of a similar situation in my own hometown in Ohio. It is a very small “everyone-knows-your-business” type of town and it is not uncommon for people to graduate from high school, go to college, move back home and take jobs locally, living and working the rest of their lives there. For some families, many generations have lived and worked in that town and know other families who have done the same. News travels fast, both good and bad, and reaches far afield to those who moved away (like me.) An email, text message, or Facebook post from someone local might begin with “did you hear what happened to...”

Such an email came a few weeks ago from my sister. Someone who grew up there and volunteered at the local high school with several sports teams was arrested for allegedly inappropriate behavior. Knowing the person from when I was in high school, I would like to believe that the situation is simply a misunderstanding and I want to believe in that person’s innocence. I want to wait for all of the facts to be in before I cast judgment on this person. But in reading some of the comments to the various articles about the arrest online, many are not waiting for such a finding of facts.

Many comments are sure of the person’s guilt and calling for authorities to lock this person up and “throw away the key.” More aggressive comments are requesting that the person be “fried” for the alleged crimes. A trial date has not even been set, and yet society seems to be stepping in and demanding “justice” without even knowing if such justice is warranted.

How is it that we, as a society, seem to have stopped waiting for authorities to investigate claims of alleged crimes and wrongdoing? Is it simply easier to believe everything we

read online? How do we choose who to believe? Given the serious nature of some of these acts, shouldn’t we be more careful?

There is so much to these stories that we may never know or could never understand, things that cannot be covered in two-minute sound bites or 140-character tweets. Even articles posted to newspaper websites could be slanted according to the particular author’s leanings. We have to temper our desire for an “Old West” type of vigilante justice (the call for which seems more prevalent now that news is more readily available) and allow the system to work.

Instant gratification can be good, in situations where you really need or want something easy to obtain, such as an ice cream sundae or a new pair of shoes. At the same time, it can be a double-edged sword where the thing you want (news or information) may come with its own host of problems simply because of where it comes from or that it is being pushed out to the masses in record time. Be wary of what you read or hear. Wait for all of the facts to be in. Wait for a case to be made. And wait for the jury to decide. You never know who might be tried in the court of public opinion next.

October is a busy month for the Santa Clarita Valley Bar Association. Members will be receiving ballots for the upcoming Board of Trustee Election and voting will take place in October. This month we are also featuring our popular CLE Luncheon presentation by Brian Koegle of Poole & Shaffery regarding updates in Employment Law at TPC-Valencia.

For information or tickets to Brian’s presentation, please email [info@scvbar.org](mailto:info@scvbar.org). Looking to November, we will be installing our newly elected Board on November 14 at TPC and celebrating the Association’s 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We hope to see you there! 