Horman Darling admits to being somewhat skeptical when he was first presented with the idea.

He didn’t know much about blogging, and what he did know had him rather concerned about just how big an investment in time he would need to make — and also about whether he’d see a return on that investment. And there was a different kind of concern: “I was a little afraid of sharing information with the world, putting myself out there, and possibly being wrong.”

More than three years later, Darling no longer has any real doubts. He told BusinessWest that, while his role as primary contributor to Bacon Wilson’s estate-planning blog does indeed absorb some of his precious time, the work is generating much-needed visibility for himself and the Springfield-based law firm — and some business in the form of a few new clients each month or so.

Meanwhile, the blog — called ‘Estate Planning Bits’ (you can peruse it at bwlawblogs.com/estate_planning_bits), is garnering something else: No. 1 status on Google when one searches ‘estate planning blogs.’ Actually, it’s been first or second (flip-flopping with another California-based law firm) over the past several months, said Christine Pilch, the firm’s marketing director, noting quickly that it has been at the top for the past several weeks.

She attributes this ranking to consistently fresh content — there are new postings almost every week — and pieces that inform, educate, and, in some cases, inspire people to take action on issues such as a will, power of attorney, and others.

“What’s solidified our standing is that, over the past 26 months, we’ve been posting once a week, and the posts are good — this is relevant, strong content,” she said, adding that no one really knows precisely what goes into generating a No. 1 ranking on Google. “What I do know is that people are spending a lot of time on this blog, and what that tells Google is that there is good content, worthy of being No. 1.”

Darling, chair of Bacon Wilson’s Estate Planning Department, said his submissions, which take the form of general information and not legal advice, have drawn responses from people across the region, across the country, and even beyond. Indeed, there was a question from a gentleman in Turkey whose mother is living in Massachusetts.

Some “regulars” have emerged, he said, referring to what he called frequent responders, adding that inquiries arrive regarding posted content — but also some totally unrelated matters. “I got a question about immigration law, which I don’t know much about,” said Darling, adding that he does his best to refer those with questions to others who can help them.

Recent postings on ‘Estate Planning Bits’ include “HIPAA language and authorizations — its effects upon long-term care,” by Todd Ratner, another of the firm’s estate planning specialists; “Ethical wills — bequeath your values along with your valuables,” by Gina Barry; “Caring abilities,” by Darling; and “Taking mandates, and she didn’t proceed until she had it from Darling and several of the firm’s other lawyers.

The firm started with blogs on estate planning and employment, and later added ones on bankruptcy and family law, said Pilch, noting that the ‘Estate Planning Bits’ has enjoyed the most visits — roughly 35 a day, and growing by a hit per day each month, by her estimates — and that aforementioned highest ranking on Google.

Again, she attributes this to fresh content and the general subject matter, which is important to a wide audience, especially Baby Boomers who have elderly parents — and are themselves
approaching retirement age. “These are topics that are relevant for large numbers of people.”

Darling agreed, noting that many of the responses to his postings come in the form of questions about assets and how to protect them from taxes or going toward paying for nursing-home care.

“Wills and long-term care planning — those seem to be the most popular items,” he said. “People want to know asset-protection planning will prevent money from being spent on a nursing home or long-term care facility. I would have thought that some of my postings on taxes would attract more attention, but I don’t get too many questions on them from the public; instead, I get them from accountants.”

While ‘Estate Planning Bits’ was designed to disseminate information, Darling will sometimes offer some personal advice — and his opinions — to those who write back with questions. In fact, he has a common refrain for those with questions about how to protect assets so they can leave them for the next generation.

“I tell them that it’s OK to spend some of their money — they worked for it, and they don’t have to leave it all to their children,” he told BusinessWest, adding that being able to offer such commentary is one of the more enjoyable aspects of having a blog. “They earned their money, and it’s OK to spend it.”

—George O’Brien