

the **digitaledge**—How I Use Social Media to Enhance My Practice

By Brian Flock

I'm biased. I use social media every day. My firm represents social media clients, and I advise clients routinely on social media issues. I'm a young, iPhone[®]-toting, upstart associate with a passion for technology who is eyed suspiciously by those who view social media as a flash-in-the-pan.

To be honest, a few years ago, I agreed with them. But when my friends, family, and clients started using social media, I quickly concluded that ignoring these outlets was not an option. Instead, I embraced it. For me social media is a powerful tool with a dual purpose—it helps me stay connected in my personal life despite the demands of my profession, while also enhancing my legal practice.

You should not discount the benefits that social media can have for your law practice.

How can I use social media?

To start, there are many Internet social media providers to choose from, such as Facebook and Twitter. A list maintained on Wikipedia catalogs more than 150 active social media Web sites (which is surely an underestimate). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites (last visited Dec. 17, 2009). You might be thinking: "I don't know anyone on these Web sites." That might be true. However, the number of Facebook users grows each day and as of December 1, 2009, Facebook reported having more than 350 million users worldwide. <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=190423927130> (last visited Dec. 17, 2009). If you do become a Facebook member, you might be surprised at who you can find on the site.

You also can use sites like Facebook and Twitter to connect with people you want to meet or who share your interests. Twitter, for instance, allows millions of users to read what you have to say. People will take notice and "follow" you on Twitter if you "tweet" something interesting or show you care about topics that they also care about, regardless of whether they know you personally. I know only a handful of my growing rank of "followers" on Twitter.

Can using social media help me build business?

Many of your clients *and your competitors* have likely already figured out how social media can help them and are likely using social media right now to build brands, connect with new customers, and enhance their current customers' experiences. In a recent survey, 55 percent of CEOs responded that they "are using or plan to use social media to market and/or publicize their business." www.vistage.com (last visited Dec. 17, 2009). There's no reason that lawyers cannot do the same ethically. On my Facebook and Twitter pages, I routinely post URLs to legal articles that interest me. Some of these posts have become conversation starters both online and offline, and some have led to meeting new friends. In turn, I also actively monitor the posts of those whom I follow on these sites, including my clients. Commenting on others' posts is just another way to stay connected.

Social media should not replace in-person networking.

Should social media replace "face time?" Absolutely not. But it's impossible to have lunch, dinner, or drinks with everyone you know on a regular basis. Social media provides an easy way to stay in touch and interact with your network, even when you're busy. It also can help you prioritize "face time" with those whom are most in need of direct contact, while allowing you to stay in touch with others.

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Social media is not for everyone. To make it worthwhile, you must actively participate. Social media is like a cocktail party: hanging out in the back of the room won't be nearly as rewarding as diving into a conversation near the bar. You may choose not to participate in social media, and that's OK. The important thing is to make an informed decision because, for many, social media can enhance a practice—not bog it down.

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