

the digital edge

To Tweet or Not to Tweet? The Best and Worst Social Networking Sites for Lawyers

By Larry Bodine

You could hear the collective groan when Twitter made the cover of *TIME Magazine* and lawyers realized that they had to become familiar with yet another social networking site. There's already Facebook, MySpace, Naymz, Spoke, Plaxo, LinkedIn, Martindale Connected, Legal OnRamp, and JD Supra—to name just a few. Deciding where to focus your online business development efforts can be overwhelming and time consuming.

The good news is you can ignore most of them, concentrate on a single online network, and turn your efforts into new clients, new files, and new billable work.

Eliminate the time-wasters.

Twitter is the primary example of a social networking site that you don't need. Consider that:

- Only 6 percent of lawyers in private practice and 4 percent of in-house lawyers use Twitter, according to a 2009 survey by Leader Networks
- 10 percent of Twitter users account for over 90 percent of tweets, according to a June Harvard Business School report.
- 60 percent of people with a Twitter account drop out after one month and never come back, according to Nielsen Wire.
- About 55 percent of Twitter users have never tweeted, according to HubSpot.com.

Twitter can be useful as a supplemental marketing tool though. If you write a new article or post a new item to your blog, you can use the 140-character limit to send out the headline and URL. It's also useful to monitor tweets about your own name and firm name. Tweetbeep.com will do this for you for free. Otherwise, don't waste your valuable time.

You can also forget about MySpace, which has been losing users since the *New York Times* reported that 90,000 registered sex offenders had MySpace profiles. As for Naymz, Spoke, and Plaxo, none of them receive enough online traffic to be worth your time.

Facebook is the 800-pound gorilla with 300 million users, as of November. Facebook is for staying in touch with people you *used to know*. If you have a personal Facebook account, don't put anything online that you don't want clients to see. Monitor posts to your wall, and adjust your security settings to control what others can see.

Focus on LinkedIn.

Some 840,000 lawyers have profiles on the business-oriented social networking site LinkedIn, according to a June Stemlegal.com report. With more than 50 million users as of October, LinkedIn is the *de facto* online directory for finding professionals of all kinds. Unlike Facebook, LinkedIn is for connecting with *new people* you'd like to meet and keep in touch with—clients and referral sources. But, it only works as a marketing tool if you *use* it. Don't just create a LinkedIn profile and think clients will come to you. Instead:

1. **Create a complete profile.** Make sure that your profile includes a professional photo of yourself and that all of your information (e.g., work experience, professional affiliations, and volunteer work) is updated and accurate.
2. **Seek recommendations.** When your clients are delighted with the outcome of a case or completion of a deal, at that moment, ask them to visit your profile and make a recommendation. This is a testimonial, which is very powerful marketing.
3. **Join a group.** This is where the action happens on LinkedIn. You can find a group for your practice area, an association to which you belong, or an industry where you would like more clients.
4. **Start a discussion.** Every group has online discussions, which gives you a chance to demonstrate your expertise. Pick a hot topic of the day and ask for opinions. By starting a discussion, you are positioning yourself as a leader.
5. **Make a comment.** LinkedIn will e-mail you a current list of discussions underway. This is your chance to chime in an

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offer a comment.

6. **Ask a question.** Go to the “Answers” section and you’ll see a box where you can ask a question or make a statement. You can select among your contacts as to whom you want to send a message.
7. **Build up your connections.** Whenever you speak with clients, referral sources, prospects, or new people, ask for their e-mail addresses and invite them to connect to you on LinkedIn.
8. **Do not violate ethics rules!** As with any social networking site, do not give a legal opinion or you’ll attract unintended client relationships. Do not express a legal opinion that may conflict with a position your firm is taking in a brief for a client. Also, avoid personal attacks that could be viewed as defamatory falsehoods. Simply stick to facts—news, new opinions, new regulations, and new accomplishments—and you should be safe from ethics violations.

As rainmakers know, new business comes from relationships. Potential clients are everywhere online, and you have the opportunity to make them your clients. Use LinkedIn as a business development tool, and you will garner the clientele you want to grow your practice.

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