


Lawyers and Social Media

Is Your Next Client Just a Click Away?

BY JULIE MEYER
AND STACY WEST CLARK



Increasingly, the majority of lawyers reaching partnership have never known professional life without BlackBerrys, online research and professional networking Web sites. LinkedIn (linkedin.com), Facebook (facebook.com) and MySpace (myspace.com) allow users — lawyers and non-lawyers alike — to post personal and professional information and share this information with other users. They also let users link individual profiles into larger networks — called contacts or friends — by invitation or request. While today's associates and newest partners generally are significantly more facile with technology than their mentors, they have not been any more successful in carving out time for business development. Could the speed, ease and popularity of these networking sites be a panacea?

LinkedIn insists it is. Reporting more than 17 million experienced professionals participating from around the world, representing 150 industries, LinkedIn's "Company Info" informs visitors that "[t]his isn't networking — it's what networking should be. Forget exchanging business cards with acquaintances that don't know your work, or trying to renew professional ties when you need a favor."

And Kevin O'Keefe, a blog consultant and former lawyer, contends that with more than 1 million weekly registrants — 500,000 per week outside of college — lawyers can't ignore Facebook for networking (www.kevinokeefe.typepad.com). In June 2007, Goodwin Procter real estate attorney and law firm knowledge management blogger Doug Cornelius reported on O'Keefe's other blog, www.kevin.lexblog.com, the membership tallies for the top 10 Amlaw 100 firms. The average increase in membership on Facebook in a six-month period was 23 percent between June 2007 and January 2008 (see sidebar, p. 21).

SO HOW'S A COUNSELOR TO CHOOSE?

Each of the networking sites has its own advantages and drawbacks. Fortune Senior Editor David Kirkpatrick made this very practical assessment in his Dec. 14, 2007, report for the magazine: Facebook "is not likely any time soon to help you find a job, hire a contractor or consultant, or figure out who you should hire for a position ... because ... Facebook is fundamentally based on the notion of privacy. You cannot find out much about someone unless they have willingly elected to be your 'friend,' or if they are in a partially-open network you also belong to ... LinkedIn, by contrast, is a sort of high-end consensual database of colleagues ... [with] ... member data essentially open for all to see."

Wolf Block associate Morgan Nickerson opted for LinkedIn because he prefers the formality of the site over the more casual styles of Facebook and MySpace. He liked that it was more about professional contacts and less about social networking. While networking sites can't replace one-on-one client contact, Nickerson contends, "LinkedIn is a great tool for getting you that initial face-to-face meeting with a potential client."

Business users appear to be attracted to LinkedIn's emphasis on professionalism and Facebook's dedication to privacy. A Facebook profile is not accessible until

the owner says it is by accepting a request to be "friends." Alternatively at MySpace, public information is the default and users must take extra steps to limit access to their information. LinkedIn and Facebook are more analogous to traditional follow-up to recent acquaintances, whereas MySpace tends to be more like cold-calling.

PHILADELPHIA FIRMS ARE IN!

A recent search of LinkedIn revealed that twenty-four out of the twenty-five law firms found on the Philadelphia Business Journal's Book of Lists 2008 had at least one lawyer listed on the site. Blank Rome partner Craig Hymowitz is one enthusiastic user. "LinkedIn is a uniquely effective tool for keeping in touch with friends from college and law school as their careers progress. With the increased frequency with which lawyers switch firms or go in-house, LinkedIn keeps me updated on my contacts' latest ventures and any new opportunities they may present. LinkedIn is like

EACH OF THE MAJOR NETWORKING SITES HAS ITS OWN ADVANTAGES AND DRAWBACKS.

an intelligent rolodex that proactively helps you build your network and promote your practice."

Other attorneys find LinkedIn to be a great way to stay current with people despite infrequent direct contact. It provides a centralized location for updated professional information, keeping names and information current among the user's network. It can be particularly useful in finding common contacts with potential clients — electronic "word of mouth" in action — and being able to do so from anywhere. Even if a case takes a lawyer on the road for days or weeks, these sites run 24/7 and make staying in touch more convenient than traditional networking efforts that are concentrated around a specific workday or event timeline.

Gregg Wolff, a real estate partner at Dilworth Paxson, agrees and adds, "I like

LinkedIn, but it hasn't brought me any new clients yet. I look at it as a long-term investment. Through the site, I have renewed some very old contacts and have learned about the professional lives of some of my social acquaintances. It has also afforded me an opportunity to let them know what I do. I can only hope that it pays off in the long run. I have made a referral on it, however."

LinkedIn is popular with small firms and solos as well. According to local business and franchise lawyer Nancy Lanard, a former in-house attorney to several large corporations, LinkedIn has helped her to stay in touch with and reconnect with former colleagues, leading to a broader referral network through them as well as other attorneys.

Online networking can also play a critical role in broader marketing efforts. In addition to referral sources and gaining entrée through mutual contacts, monitoring contacts for professional changes creates opportunities for personal follow up, such as congratulatory notes.

On the recommendation of business contacts, Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young IP lawyer Kim Jessum opened a LinkedIn profile two years ago that she primarily uses to stay in touch with former colleagues and classmates. Jessum, an editorial board member of *The Philadelphia Lawyer*, also uses the site to research clients and potential clients before important meetings.

"I remember one instance where I found background information about a non-attorney whom I was meeting and realized that we had a lot in common," Jessum said. "Knowing that information before meeting her gave me a lot more to talk about. I also discovered that I knew a co-worker of hers, who was a previous colleague of mine, when I searched her company on LinkedIn. As a result, I was able to mention that I knew others at her company."

ETHICS CONCERNS

Law.com recently reported that "the use of social networking sites can be subject to state ethics rules and regulations. The best advice is to proceed with caution and to hew as closely as possible to your state's guidelines governing communications, solicitations and advertising."

SO, DOES IT WORK?

Criteria for success vary as widely as marketing initiatives themselves. The direct-mail industry defines a successful campaign as one in which responses are 2 to

4 percent of total addressees. On the other hand, it is highly unlikely that professionals would make business presentations or respond to RFPs if they found they had to respond to thirty-five to fifty to accomplish one success.

Scott Allen of Linkedintelligence.com reports that serendipity drives success at LinkedIn. According to Allen, serendipity provides for “bumping into people virtually during the course of doing something useful for your business. ... This is why it helps actually build relationships, rather than just being something mechanical and impersonal.”

Allen recommends taking advantage of these opportunities to see what new information is posted about the contact and reaching out more formally based on the updates, or just to say hello. “It’s a great way to strengthen the relationships you already have without a lot of effort.”

Establishing marketing goals related to

online networking efforts will set you up for effective evaluation of their success. As with all other more traditional marketing initiatives, your objectives for online marketing are probably a combination of maintaining visibility and attracting additional or new business. One accomplishes this by progressing from online contact to face-to-face meetings. While these activities may not seem to lead directly to billable hours for your firm, the convenience of online networking provides opportunities for additional indirect contact that can put you in the right place at the right time for a future client.

Buchanan Ingersoll Counsel Ellen Freeman’s experience corroborates this perspective. “In the past six to eight months, I was able to reconnect with a large number of former clients and human resources professionals whom I serve as an employment-based immigration attorney. I was able to help people looking for new employ-

ment, internships and business contacts. It has not resulted in much actual work but I am sure it will eventually.”

Other parameters can be applied by those looking for something more substantial than serendipity. Client response is always a reliable indicator. Will clients be aware if you’re not LinkedIn or periodically leaving a message on their Facebook wall? Given the ubiquitous use of these sites by many in the business community, there are bound to be a few potential contacts who take notice.

DOS AND DON'TS

But use the site effectively. Each site offers its own set of special features, and using all of them will maximize your investment in the profile. For example, the “Summary” option on LinkedIn allows users to state in their own words how they are unique. Also, the recommendations feature on LinkedIn provides an avenue for strong references when pursuing a cli-

FACEBOOK MEMBERSHIPS IN TOP 10 AMLAW 100 FIRMS

	<i>June 2007</i>	<i>January 2008</i>
1. Skadden Arps	379 Members	526 Members
2. Baker & McKenzie	728 Members	1178 Members
3. Jones Day	286 Members	414 Members
4. Latham & Watkins	291 Members	537 Members
5. Sidley Austin	199 Members	231 Members
6. Mayer Brown	No Network	No Network
7. White & Case	370 Members	637 Members
8. Weil, Gotshal	No Network	No Network
9. Shearman & Sterling	225 Members	242 Members
10. Kirkland & Ellis	192 Members	269 Members

— <http://kmspace.blogspot.com/2007/06/facebook-at-law-firms-cannot-be-banned.html>

ent or job. Each additional component you fill out increases the number of Internet search engine hits that your listing will generate.

Ballard Spahr's Marc Weinstein has used the recommendations feature with great success. "Peer evaluations may be somewhat slanted, but they are not something that a prospective client is ever going to read on the firm's Web site, and they often help to personalize the individual."

Don't invite everyone to be LinkedIn to you. Only inviting or accepting invites from colleagues you personally know and can personally vouch for their professionalism, integrity and competence increases your credibility with your network contacts.

Another tip — characterize yourself as more than "associate" or "attorney" in your listing. Paul Denis' profile on LinkedIn says: "Antitrust Attorney with Practical Problem Solving Skills-Dechert" — which is certainly more inviting, descriptive and

interesting than a generic listing.

And of course, never post any message or put anything on your profile that either runs afoul of ethics rules or that you would not want to see on the front page of the newspaper. As with any online venture, maintaining a sharp line between personal and professional information should be straightforward. Even on more socially oriented sites like MySpace, keep it very professional. Sharing personal problems, stories about wild nights out and personal blogging are likely to be turnoffs to potential clients and diminish the listing's professional value.

JUMPING IN

Much like in the days of candlelight and fountain pens, lawyers looked up lawyers in those well-worn Martindale-Hubbell volumes. And, from there, they reached out for a meeting. Online networkers should track the ratio of time online to actual meetings and, ultimately, business out-

comes to determine whether the return on the investment justifies their time or suggests moving on to an alternative marketing initiative. While online networking provides an additional avenue to maintaining professional contacts, it is unlikely to succeed in a vacuum. But as a component of a comprehensive business development program, networking — whether online or at a cocktail party — will always offer the advantage of personal contact. ■

Julie Meyer is a Philadelphia-based legal marketing professional and a member of the Delaware Valley Legal Marketing Group Steering Committee. Her e-mail address is ryries@msn.com. Stacy West Clark is a former attorney with Morgan Lewis & Bockius and was its first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC, a law firm business development and client relations marketing firm and her e-mail address is stacy@stacyclarkmarketing.com.

GET CONNECTED WITH PHILADELPHIA BAR BLOGS

Not only are attorneys marketing themselves using social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, they are also using blogs to promote their business. The Bar Association has created several blogs for its members. While these blogs are not for marketing purposes, they are intended to help members connect to other members, share practice knowledge and discuss topics relevant to their practice of law.

The three current Association blogs include a Criminal Justice Section blog, a Women in the Profession Committee blog and a Young Lawyers Division blog, which launched last year.

Currently, the Bar Association hosts its blogs at wordpress.com, a popular blog platform. Members can find direct links to each blog on the Association's Web site homepage, as well as on each of the main pages for the Criminal Justice Section, Women in the Profession Committee and Young Lawyers Division. The blogs are written by committee, division and section leaders and are open for comments.

"As the new chairperson of the Criminal Justice Section, I wanted to be able to come up with some fresh ideas that would be of service to our established members and that would act as an incentive for prospective members to join our section," says Troy Wilson, Criminal Justice Section Chair.

"The legal blog is primarily designed as a tool to assist our members in staying current with the law by being able to view up-to-the-minute case law developments at both the federal and state court levels. In the future, the blog will be used to assist criminal attorneys who require sample forms and motions," says Wilson.

"Essentially we want to use the blog as a way to help our

members work smarter, not harder, in their busy everyday practices. This is the first of what we hope are many additional benefits our section plans to offer to all of our members and prospective members in the coming year," he adds. Go to criminaljusticesection.wordpress.com to see the latest Criminal Justice Section blog posts.

Maria Feeley, co-Chair of the Women in the Profession Committee, helped get her committee's blog started in November 2007. As a regular contributor to the blog, Feeley has authored posts on work-life balance for attorneys at large firms and on the pay gap between male and female attorneys.

Feeley says participation on the blog is easy. "I had never blogged before and was pleasantly surprised that our blog is so user-friendly. If you have mastered the art of shopping online, you will find posting a comment on our blog to be a piece of cake." Go to womenintheprofession.wordpress.com to see the latest Women in the Profession blog posts.

Blogger Abbie DuFrayne, a member of the Young Lawyers Division Executive Committee, says she enjoys the back-and-forth dialogue the blog provides.

"It's fun to listen to what concerns and interests our membership and then write about it so other lawyers in the community can also express their opinions."

Go to philawdelphia.wordpress.com to see the latest Young Lawyers Division blog posts.

Members who have questions about accessing the blogs, adding a comment to a blog or creating a blog for their committee, section or division can contact Web Editor Brett Schaeffer at bschaeffer@philabar.org.

— Brett Schaeffer